

**RESEARCH MISCONDUCT POLICY**

As Abundance has been participating in a number of research studies, it was agreed to have a Research Misconduct Policy for the organization. This policy reflects Abundance’s interest in the accuracy and reliability of the research record and the processes involved in its development.  In order to strive for excellence, Abundance based its Research Misconduct Policy on the University of Cambridge’s policy, available here: <https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/misconduct-research>

* **Definition of Research Misconduct**

Misconduct in this context means:

Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of research and deliberate, dangerous or negligent deviations from accepted practice in carrying out research. It includes failure to follow agreed protocol if this failure results in unreasonable risk or harm to humans, other sentient beings or the environment, and facilitating of misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others. It includes any plan or conspiracy or attempt to do any of these things.

Misconduct in this context does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretation or judgement in evaluating research methods or results, or misconduct (including gross misconduct) unrelated to the research process.

* **Responsibility of all members of Abundance**

All members of Abundance, including management, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report to the Executive Director any incident of misconduct, whether this has been witnessed, or is suspected. Every member of Abundance should understand, however, that any allegation which is found to be unproven and which has been frivolously or maliciously made may result in disciplinary action being taken against the member who made the allegation.

If there is uncertainty about whether misconduct has occurred or is occurring, the individual who suspects that it is should discuss the matter with the Executive Director, who will decide whether or not the matter requires further investigation.

If the Executive Director has co-authored published material with the person against whom the allegation has been made (hereafter referred to as the respondent), or is the supervisor of a research project in which the person is the employer, or is the supervisor, or has some other professional connection with the person's research, the Board Members must be approached and he or she shall mutatis mutandis act as the Executive Director in the procedures to be followed.

**Confidentiality**

Allegations will be investigated in the strictest confidence. All those who are involved in the procedures for investigating an allegation, including witnesses, representatives and persons providing information, evidence and/or advice, have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality.

**Procedure**

The procedures set out are to be used as guidance and are not contractual. In particular, the Executive Director, may decide to vary the procedures in any particular case.

**Allegation and Executive Director’s responsibility**

When notified, whether informally or formally, of an allegation the Executive Director shall look into the matter to decide whether there are grounds for believing that there may be or has been misconduct. The Director shall decide as soon as possible after being notified of an allegation whether further steps should be taken. If it appears to the Executive Director that the allegation is unjustified or trivial, he/she may dismiss the allegation summarily or decide not to proceed further. If the judgement of the Executive Director is that the allegation is plausible or may have substance and is not trivial, he or she shall without delay

* inform the Board Members,
* take all possible steps to sequester all relevant research or other records and materials,
* institute such other investigations or inquiries that appear to him/her to be necessary,
* inform the person against whom the allegation has been made (the respondent) and provide that person with copies of the materials that have been sequestered. It should be made clear to the respondent that this action is not to be regarded as a disciplinary step but is necessary for enabling the allegation to be investigated.

In notifying any individual of an allegation made against him or her, a decision must be taken as to whether or not it would be appropriate for the respondent to be suspended or excluded from all or part of Abundance’s research project work and offices. The Executive Director in consultation with Board of Directors can suspend the individual if investigation reveals adequate grounds.

**Investigation**

If the Executive Director decides that the matter merits further investigation he or she should request the Board of Directors to inquire into the allegation. In certain circumstances, external experts may be included for the investigation and providing advice. The Executive Director himself/herself should not do the investigation. The external experts should have no conflict of interest in the case, be unbiased, and have the appropriate qualifications and experience in the relevant field to be able to evaluate the issues under investigation. The purpose of the preliminary investigation is to evaluate the facts of the allegation in order to ascertain whether there is sufficient evidence amounting to a prima facie case of misconduct.

The respondent will be informed of the decision to set up an inquiry, and of the Board Members and external experts who will be conducting the inquiry. The Executive Director would have the power to include and exclude Board members and/or external experts if the respondent is able to show reasonable grounds in writing that either or both members are not appropriate or are likely to be biased.

The Board Members and external experts will interview both the person making the allegation and the respondent, and any other persons who may be regarded as witnesses. (Any person being interviewed may be accompanied by another person).

They will prepare a report within two working weeks of the first meeting setting out the evidence which has been evaluated, accounts of interviews, and a conclusion as to whether their opinion is that there is a prima facie case of misconduct. A copy of the report will be sent to the respondent. Respondent(s) will be invited to comment in writing with 28 days.

The Executive Director shall then decide whether the matter should be dropped or whether the research partners should be informed about this.

**Action**

If the allegation is upheld from the findings of the investigation, then a letter written to the respondent terminating their work in the research study. If the investigation reveals that the gravity of offense is low, a warning may be issued.