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and tomorrow

# Social Security Administration

## Scientific Integrity Policy

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## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to enhance and promote a continuing culture of scientific integrity. This policy aims to ensure the integrity of all aspects of scientific activities including proposing, conducting, reviewing, managing, and communicating about science and scientific activities, and using the results of science. This policy establishes the expectations and procedures required to maintain scientific integrity at the Social Security Administration (SSA).

## Background

Scientific and technological information, data, and evidence are central to the development and iterative improvement of sound policies, and to the delivery of equitable services and programs, across every area of the government. The 2022 National Science and Technology Council's (NSTC) Report of the Scientific Integrity Fast Track Action Committee (SI-FTAC), *Protecting the Integrity of Government Science*<sup>1</sup>, found that strong scientific integrity policies and practices bolster the ability of Federal agencies to protect government science. The NSTC Report summarizes recent foundational Executive branch actions on scientific integrity, including the 2009 Presidential Memorandum<sup>2</sup>, the 2010 Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Memorandum<sup>3</sup>, and the 2021 Presidential Memorandum<sup>4</sup>. The requirements of this policy are derived from these foundational actions, the collective experience of Federal agencies, and the informed engagement of stakeholders both inside and outside of government.

## Definition of Scientific Integrity and Scientific Integrity Official

SSA shall adopt the following Federal definition of scientific integrity<sup>5</sup>:

*Scientific integrity is the adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities. Inclusivity, transparency, and protection from inappropriate influence are hallmarks of scientific integrity.*

SSA shall designate a senior career employee as the agency's lead Scientific Integrity Official to oversee implementation and iterative improvement of scientific integrity policies and processes. The Scientific Integrity Official shall be empowered with the independence necessary to gather and protect information to support the review and assessment of scientific integrity concerns; ensure implementation of corrective scientific actions; and coordinate with appropriate agency authorities to enforce corrective and administrative actions as well as actions to prevent scientific integrity concerns. The Scientific Integrity Official, in conjunction with the Chief Science Officer, shall also advocate for appropriate engagement of scientific leadership in decision-making.

## Effective Date and Policy Amendments

This policy is effective when adopted and published by SSA. SSA's Scientific Integrity Committee shall review this policy every two years. Amendments to this policy shall be overseen by the Scientific Integrity Official and communicated to the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy no later than 30 days after adoption.

## Applicability & Scope

Scientific integrity is the responsibility of the entire SSA workforce. Covered individuals who are expected to adhere to the requirements of this policy include all SSA employees and others working for the agency when they propose, conduct, or review science or communicate about science and scientific activities (defined below). This policy also applies to all levels of employees who manage or supervise scientific activities and use scientific information in decision making. Covered individuals are expected to uphold the principles of scientific integrity established by this policy. The

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<sup>1</sup> A Report by the SI-FTAC of the NSTC. [Protecting the Integrity of Government Science](#). January 11, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [Presidential Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Scientific Integrity](#). March 9, 2009. The White House.

<sup>3</sup> [Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Scientific Integrity](#). December 17, 2010. OSTP.

<sup>4</sup> [Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking](#). January 27, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See [A Framework for Federal Scientific Integrity Policy and Practice \(whitehouse.gov\)](#).  
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requirements specified in this policy will be extended to third parties involved in SSA scientific activities through individual agreements, contracts, statements of work, memoranda of understanding, or other written arrangements, as appropriate.

## Authorities

Pursuant to the 2021 [Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking](#), and consistent with the 2009 [Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity](#) and the 2010 [Memorandum from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on Scientific Integrity](#), all Federal agencies must establish a scientific integrity policy. This policy is established in accordance with the following, as amended:

1. The America COMPETES ACT, Pub. L. No. 110-69, 121 Stat. 572 (Aug. 9, 2007)
2. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (Jan. 14, 2019)
3. The Information Quality Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-554, 114 Stat. 2763 (Dec. 20, 2000)
4. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies, 67 Fed. Reg. 8452 (Feb. 22, 2002)
5. Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, 70 Fed. Reg. 2664 (Jan. 14, 2005)
6. Federal Policy on Research Misconduct, 65 Fed. Reg. 76260 (Dec. 6, 2000)
7. The Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA) of 1989, Pub. L. No. 101-12, 103 Stat. 16 (Apr. 10, 1989) and its expanded protections enacted by Pub. L. No.103-424, 108 Stat. 4361 (Oct. 29, 1994) and the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-199, 126 Stat. 1465 (Nov. 27, 2012)
8. Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, 5 C.F.R. Part 2635
9. The Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, Pub. L. No. 92-463, 86 Stat. 770 (Oct. 6, 1972)
10. Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, 5 C.F.R. Part 735
11. Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 82 Fed. Reg. 7149 (Jan. 19, 2017) (adopting the federal policy in SSA regulations at 20 C.F.R. Part 431)
12. Protecting Whistleblowers with Access to Classified Information, Presidential Policy Directive 19 (PPD-19) (Oct. 10, 2012)
13. Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices, M-20-12 (Mar. 10, 2020)
14. Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking, 86 Fed. Reg. 8845 Jan. 27, 2021) (hereafter 2021 Presidential Memorandum)
15. Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans, M-21-27 (June 30, 2021)
16. Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance, M-19-23 (July 10, 2019)
17. Agency Evidence-Building Plan, 5 U.S.C. § 312(a) and 5 U.S.C. § 312(b)
18. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, 136 Stat. 2395 (Dec. 23, 2022), 41 U.S.C. § 4712

## Exceptions

This policy shall be implemented consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives.

## Definitions

The following definitions are from [A Framework for Federal Scientific Integrity Policy and Practice](#) and [Protecting the Integrity of Government Science](#), unless otherwise noted.

**Chief Science Officer** refers to a designated senior agency employee who: serves as the principal advisor to the head of the agency on scientific issues and ensures that the agency's research programs are scientifically and technologically well-founded and conducted with integrity; and oversees the implementation and iterative improvement of policies and processes affecting the integrity of research funded, conducted, or overseen by the agency, as well as policies affecting the

Federal and non-Federal scientists who support the research activities of the agency, including scientific integrity policies consistent with the provisions of the 2021 Presidential Memorandum.

**Citizen science** refers to the voluntary participation of the public in the scientific process to address real-world problems in ways that may include formulating research questions, conducting scientific experiments, collecting, and analyzing data, interpreting results, making new discoveries, developing technologies and applications, and solving complex problems.<sup>6</sup>

**Community-engaged research** refers to research conducted collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being. Researchers engage with a community to develop research questions, design a study, and collect data.<sup>7</sup>

**Crowdsourcing** means a method to obtain needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting voluntary contributions from a group of individuals or organization, especially from an online community.<sup>8</sup>

**Decision-making/policymaking** refers to the (1) development of policies or making determinations about policy or management; (2) making determinations about expenditures of Federal agency funds; and/or (3) implementing or managing activities that involve, or rely on, scientific activities.<sup>9</sup>

**Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility** refers to terms defined in the [Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce](#).

**Diversity** means the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities.

**Equity** means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

**Inclusion** means the recognition, appreciation, and use of the talents and skills of employees of all backgrounds.

**Accessibility** means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them.

**Ethical behavior** refers to activities that follow the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch and reflect norms for acceptable conduct, such as honesty, lawfulness, equity, and professionalism.

**Equitable delivery of Federal Government programs** refers to the delivery and availability of government programs (including funding of government programs) to serve all communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs.

**Federal agency** refers to Federal departments, independent agencies, commissions, and other entities including the Executive Office of the President.

**Federal science** refers to science conducted by Federal scientists or contractors to the Federal Government.

**Federal science agency** refers to a federal agency that conducts intramural research and/or funds extramural research activities.

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<sup>6</sup> This definition is consistent with that in [Memorandum on Addressing Societal and Scientific Challenges through Citizen Science and Crowdsourcing](#)." OSTP. September 30, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> This definition is adapted from publications of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

<sup>8</sup> See 15 U.S.C. § 3724(c)(2).

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from the definition of "Decision-makers" in NOAA's scientific integrity policy; see NAO 202-735D-2: Scientific Integrity, published January 19, 2021.

**Good practice** refers to a practice the Scientific Integrity Task Force considers worthy of further review and potential adoption by Federal agencies based on expert opinion and contextual evidence from implementing agencies. A good practice is not a recommendation for all agencies to adopt but an example for agencies to consider, adapt, and adopt as appropriate to differing missions and needs.

**Inappropriate influence** refers to the attempt to shape or interfere in scientific activities or the communication about or use of scientific activities or findings against well-accepted scientific methods and theories or without scientific justification.

Examples may include 1) suppressing a decision maker's ability to offer the best judgment based on scientific information; 2) preventing the use of best available science; 3) insisting on preclearance of a scientific product for purposes other than providing advance notification or opportunity to review for technical merit; 4) suppressing, altering or delaying the release of a scientific product for any reason other than technical merit or providing advance notification; 5) removing or reassigning scientific personnel for the purposes of undermining the science; 6) using scientific products that are not representative of the current state of scientific knowledge and research (for example because of a lack of appropriate peer review, poor methodology, or flawed analyses) to inform decision making and policy formulation; or 7) misrepresenting the underlying assumptions, uncertainties, or probabilities of scientific products. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Differences of scientific opinion are not necessarily inappropriate influence.

**Interference** refers to inappropriate, scientifically unjustified intervention in the conduct, management, communication, or use of science. It includes censorship, suppression, or distortion of scientific or technological findings, data, information, or conclusions; inhibiting scientific independence during clearance and review; scientifically unjustified intervention in research and data collection; and inappropriate engagement or participation in peer review processes or on Federal advisory committees.

**Loss of Scientific Integrity** refers to the failure to comply with the Scientific Integrity Policy or to adhere to the principles of honesty, objectivity, and transparency; professional practices; and ethical behavior when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities.

**Misinformation** refers to incorrect, misleading, or misattributed information.

**Objectivity** refers to the quality of being explicit, unbiased, honest, and impartial.

**Participatory science** refers to engaging the public in advancing scientific knowledge by formulating research questions, collecting data, and interpreting results.<sup>10</sup>

**Policy** refers to laws, regulations, procedures, administrative actions, incentives, or voluntary practices of governments and other institutions.<sup>11</sup>

**Political interference** refers to interference conducted by political officials and/or motivated by political considerations.

**Professional practices** refers to conducting oneself with the qualities that are characterized by skill, competence, ethics, and courtesy.

**Research** refers to systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities that meet this definition constitute [research](#) for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered [research](#) for other purposes.

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<sup>10</sup> This definition is adapted from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Policy Guidelines and Checklist for EPA participatory Science Projects, EPA/600/X-23/181 (July 2023).

<sup>11</sup> This definition is consistent with that used by the Centers for Disease Control ([CDC](#)).



**Research integrity** refers to the use of honest and verifiable methods in proposing, performing, and evaluating research; reporting research results with particular attention to adherence to rules, regulations, and guidelines; and following commonly accepted professional codes or norms.<sup>12</sup>

**Research misconduct** refers to fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results.<sup>13</sup>

**Research security** refers to safeguarding the research enterprise against the misappropriation of research and development to the detriment of national or economic security, related violations of research integrity, and foreign government interference.

**Science** refers to the full spectrum of scientific endeavors, including basic science, applied science, evaluation science, engineering, technology, economics, social sciences, and statistics, as well as the scientific and technical information derived from these endeavors.

**Scientific activities** refer to activities that involve the application of well-accepted scientific methods and theories in a systematic manner, and include, but are not limited to, data collection, inventorying, monitoring, statistical analysis, surveying, observations, experimentation, research, economic analysis, forecasting, predictive analytics, modeling, technology development, and scientific assessment.

**Scientific enterprise** refers to the broad community of individuals and institutions that support or conduct scientific research.

**Scientific integrity** is the adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities. Inclusivity, transparency, and protection from inappropriate influence are hallmarks of scientific integrity.

**Scientific Integrity Official** refers to a senior career employee designated as an agency's lead to oversee implementation and iterative improvement of scientific integrity policies and processes consistent with the provisions of the 2021 Presidential Memorandum.

**Scientific record** refers to published information resulting from scientific activities.<sup>14</sup>

**Scientist** refers to an individual whose responsibilities include collection, generation, use, or evaluation of scientific and technical data, analyses, or products. It does not refer to individuals with scientific and technical training whose primary job functions are in non-scientific roles (e.g., policymakers, communicators).

**Transparency** refers to ensuring all relevant data and information used to inform a decision made or action taken is visible, accessible, and consumable by affected or interested parties, to the extent allowable by law.

## Core Values

SSA has established the following core values for agency research, policy analysis, and scientific activities:

**Integrity.** SSA researchers, policy analysts, and scientists will perform their work in an honest and ethical manner, with scientific integrity and professional excellence.

**Diversity and Inclusion.** SSA promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the hiring and advancement of all employees, including researchers, policy analysts, and scientists. When conducting research, SSA is dedicated to increasing diversity in study populations, using community-based participatory action research methods, oversampling

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<sup>12</sup> This definition is adapted from that used by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in "[What is Research Integrity?](#)" November 29, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> This definition is adapted from that contained in OSTP, [Federal Policy on Research Misconduct, Dec. 6, 2000](#).

<sup>14</sup> This definition is adapted from the definition in the Scientific Integrity Policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

from under-represented populations, and hiring community members for the study team. SSA is committed to preventing the marginalization of communities when conducting research.

**Equity.** SSA researchers, policy analysts, and scientists are committed to conducting research, policy analysis, and scientific activities in a fair and impartial manner.

**Accountability.** As diligent stewards of public trust and public funds, SSA researchers, policy analysts, and scientists act decisively and compassionately in service to the agency's mission. Our research, policy analysis, and science are based on sound scientific principles and address relevant topics, serve specific agency interests, and address program or policy priorities as identified in the Agency Strategic Plan, Agency Learning Agenda, Agency Annual Evaluation Plan, Annual Budget, and/or other documents.

**Respect.** Our researchers, policy analysts, and scientists respect and understand our interdependence with all people, both inside the agency and throughout the world, treating them and their contributions with dignity and valuing individual and cultural diversity.

### **Code of Scientific Conduct or Code of Ethics for Scientists**

SSA researchers, policy analysts, and scientists will follow the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

### **Policy Requirements**

SSA researchers, policy analysts, and scientists are required to follow the policies described in the agency's [Evaluation Policy](#). We will review the policy requirements on an annual basis and update the policy as necessary.

### **Promoting a Culture of Scientific Integrity**

SSA leadership at all levels shall recognize, support, and promote this policy and its underlying principles, as well as model behavior exemplary of a strong culture of scientific integrity. SSA shall promote a culture of scientific integrity. This means both creating an empowering environment that is conducive to innovation and progress, and also protecting scientists, researchers, and the processes of science and research. As stated in the December 17, 2010 Office of Science and Technology [Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Scientific Integrity](#), "Science, and public trust in science, thrives in an environment that shields scientific data and analyses and their use in policymaking from political interference or inappropriate influence; political officials should not suppress or alter scientific or technological findings." Scientific findings and products must not be suppressed, delayed, or altered for political purposes and must not be subjected to inappropriate influence.

A strong culture of scientific integrity begins with ensuring a professional environment that is safe, equitable, and inclusive. Issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are an integral component of the entire scientific process and attention to these issues can improve the representativeness and eminence of the scientific workforce, foster innovation in the conduct and use of science and research, and provide for more equitable participation in science and research by diverse communities. The responsible and ethical conduct of research and other scientific activities requires an environment that is equitable, inclusive, safe, and free from harassment and discrimination.

To instill and enhance a culture of scientific integrity, we will post this policy prominently on our website and take other measures (such as agency townhalls and written and oral communications) as possible and appropriate to keep scientific integrity visible at the agency. We will educate all covered individuals who perform scientific activities for SSA on their responsibilities related to scientific integrity. All covered individuals will be made aware of their responsibilities under this scientific integrity policy prior to starting work on scientific activities for SSA. We will also provide training for those who propose, review, conduct, manage, and use the results of and communicate about science and scientific activities annually.<sup>15</sup> SSA will track training to ensure covered individuals have received appropriate training.

SSA shall ensure that different modes of science, such as citizen science, community-engaged research, participatory science, and crowdsourcing, have the recognition, support, and resources to meet the same high standards of scientific integrity that traditional modes are expected to uphold. Further, scientific integrity practices must be applied in ways that

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<sup>15</sup> The agency may directly provide or ensure third parties working for SSA provide such training.  
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are inclusive of these modes of science. This may require expanded scientific integrity practices and expectations, such as granting communities engaged in the research with more autonomy over research questions and research design, and inclusion of multiple forms of evidence, such as Indigenous Knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

To promote scientific integrity at SSA, this policy outlines six specific areas:

1. Protecting Scientific Processes
2. Ensuring the Free Flow of Scientific Information
3. Supporting Decision Making Processes
4. Ensuring Accountability
5. Protecting Scientists
6. Professional Development for Government Scientists

## **1. Protecting Scientific Processes**

Scientific Integrity fosters “honest investigation, open discussion, refined understanding, and a firm commitment to evidence.”<sup>17</sup> It also enables consideration and documentation of differing scientific opinions and includes peer review. Science and public trust in science, thrives in an environment that shields scientific data and analyses and their use in policymaking from political interference or inappropriate influence.

It is the policy of SSA to:

- Prohibit political interference or inappropriate influence in the funding, design, proposal, conduct, review, management, evaluation, or reporting of scientific activities and the use of scientific information.
- Prohibit inappropriate restrictions on resources and capacity that limit and reduce the availability of science and scientific products outside of normal budgetary or priority-setting processes or without scientific justification.
- Require that leadership and management ensure that employees and other covered individuals engaged in scientific activities can conduct their work free from whistleblower reprisal.
- Require reasonable efforts by covered individuals to ensure the accuracy of the scientific record and to correct identified inaccuracies that pertain to their contribution to any scientific records.
- Require that all covered individuals represent their contributions to scientific work fairly and accurately and neither accept nor assume unauthorized and/or unwarranted credit for another's accomplishments. To be named as an author, contributors shall have made a substantial intellectual contribution, written, or provided editorial revisions that include critical intellectual content, and approved the final version and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.
- Ensure independent review of scientific facilities, methodologies, and other scientific activities as appropriate to ensure scientific integrity.
- Require that covered individuals comply with agency policies and procedures for planning and conducting scientific activities and show appropriate diligence toward protecting and conserving Federal research resources, such as equipment and other property, and records of data and results that are entrusted to them.
- Prohibit research misconduct and the use of improper methods or inappropriate methods or processes in conducting research and lack of adherence to practices that ensure the quality of research and other scientific activities such as quality assurance systems.
- Require that all covered individuals design, conduct, manage, evaluate, and report scientific research and other scientific activities honestly and thoroughly, and disclose any conflicts of interest to their supervisor or other appropriate agency official(s) for their determination as to whether a recusal, disclaimer, or other appropriate notification would be appropriate.
- Require that research involving the participation of human subjects and the use of non-human animals is conducted in accordance with applicable, established laws, regulations (including SSA's regulations under 20 C.F.R. Part 431), and ethical considerations.

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<sup>16</sup> [Indigenous Knowledge | OSTP | The White House.](#)

<sup>17</sup> See [Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Scientific Integrity.](#) December 17, 2010. Office of Science and Technology Policy.

- Ensure recognition and prompt action to address and prevent scientific integrity policy violations that have been shown to have a disproportional impact on underrepresented groups or weaken the equitable delivery of Federal Government programs.

## **2. Ensuring the Free Flow of Scientific Information**

Open and timely communication of SSA's scientific information plays a valuable role in building public trust and understanding of the agency's work. SSA shall facilitate the free flow of scientific and technological information and support scientific integrity in the communication of scientific and research activities, findings, and products to the extent doing so is consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives. Scientific, research, and technological information will be disseminated to the extent allowed by and consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives. It is the policy of SSA to:

- Facilitate the free flow of scientific and technological information, consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives. This includes, consistent with Open Government requirements, expanding and promoting access to publicly releasable scientific and technological information by making it available to the public in an online digital format.
- Ensure that scientific and research findings and products are not suppressed, delayed, or altered for political purposes and are not subjected to inappropriate influence.
- Permit and encourage agency scientists and researchers to participate in communications of publicly releasable information with the media regarding their scientific activities and areas of scientific expertise. In communicating with the media, scientists and researchers are strongly encouraged to seek advice from SSA's trained career communications experts and to ensure compliance with all applicable law, regulations, and directives.
- Provide scientific communication training and communications support to agency scientists and researchers to enable their ability to clearly communicate publicly releasable information regarding their findings, both to policy makers within their agencies and to the public and stakeholders more broadly.
- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to resolve disputes that arise from decisions to proceed or not to proceed with proposed interviews or other releases of public information.
- Ensure that the work and conclusions of agency scientists and researchers, and the work and conclusions of work funded/supported in whole or in part by the federal government, are accurately represented in agency communications. If documents significantly rely on a scientist's research, identify them as an author, or represent their scientific opinion, the scientist(s) shall be given the option to review the scientific content of proposed documents.
- Ensure that agency scientists and researchers may communicate publicly releasable information concerning their scientific activities objectively without political interference or inappropriate influence, while at the same time complying with agency policies and procedures for planning and conducting scientific activities, reporting scientific findings, and reviewing and releasing scientific products. Scientific products (e.g., manuscripts for scientific journals, presentations for workshops, conferences, and symposia) shall adhere to agency review procedures, including those to determine what information is publicly releasable consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives.
- Allow covered individuals to report publicly releasable information concerning their scientific findings and communicate with the media or the public in their official capacities at SSA. SSA scientists and researchers shall refrain from making or publishing statements that could be construed as being judgments of, or recommendations on, SSA or any other Federal Government policy, unless they have secured appropriate prior approval to do so. Such communications shall remain within the bounds of their scientific or technological findings, unless specifically otherwise authorized.
- Allow scientists and researchers to communicate with the media or the public in their personal capacities subject to limitations of government ethics rules and other applicable law, regulations, and directives, including the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. § 552a), the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 1306), and corresponding agency regulations (20 C.F.R. Parts 401 and 402). SSA scientists and researchers may express their personal views and opinions; however, they should not claim to officially represent the agency or its policies or use the agency or other U.S. Government seals or logos. Covered individuals shall use appropriate written or oral disclaimers for personal activities.

- Require that agency officials, including Public Affairs Officers, not alter, nor direct agency scientists, researchers, and technology experts to alter scientific, research, and technological research findings.
- Require that agency officials, including Public Affairs Officers, not direct an agency scientist or technology expert to alter a presentation of their scientific findings in a manner that would knowingly compromise the objectivity or accurate representation of those findings, nor affect a change in presentation without concurrence of the principal agency scientist or technology expert.
- In response to media requests about the scientific or technological aspects of their work, agencies will offer knowledgeable spokespersons who can, in an objective and nonpartisan fashion, describe publicly releasable information concerning these dimensions (OSTP 2010). This does not include describing the policy implications of their work, which requires a separate permission.
- Require that technical review and clearance processes include provisions for timely clearance and expressly forbid censorship, unreasonable delay, and suppression of objective communication of data and results without scientific justification.
- Ensure that scientific information is accurately represented in responses to congressional inquiries, testimony, and other requests.
- Accurately represent the publicly releasable information within the work and conclusions of agency scientists and researchers in agency social media communications and that agency scientists and researchers are appropriately guided on use of social media, which includes but is not limited to blogs, social networks, forums, and micro blogs.
  - When communicating on social media in their personal capacities, and subject to limitations of government ethics rules, agency social media policies, and laws, regulations, and directives requiring the protection of nonpublic information, the SSA scientists and researchers may express their personal views and opinions and may name their agency, in the context of biographical information, as long as their work for the agency is given no more prominence than other biographical details and it is clear in context that they are not speaking on behalf of, or as a representative of, the agency.
  - If employees disclose their employment with SSA on their personal social media account profile or in any other way indicate that they are an agency employee, and they refer to the agency's programs, services, or policies, a disclaimer in their profile is required. Covered individuals should also use a disclaimer, if possible, in each social media post where they refer to the agency's programs, services, or policies. The following is an example of language for the disclaimer: "Any views I express here are my own and do not reflect the views, policies, or position of the Social Security Administration."
  - Social media managers are responsible for correction of any errors pointed out by scientists and researchers whose work is represented in SSA's social media.

### 3. Supporting Decision Making Processes

It is the policy of SSA to:

- Ensure the quality, accuracy, and transparency of scientific information used to support policy and decision making, including:
  - Use scientific information that is subject to well-established scientific processes.
  - Ensure that scientific data and research used to support policy decisions undergo review by qualified experts, where feasible and appropriate, and are consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives.
  - Adhere to OMB Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review and relevant SSA peer-review guidelines.<sup>18</sup> When contractors conduct independent peer reviews of scientific products, a conflict-of-interest review shall be conducted for all reviewers.
  - Reflect scientific information appropriately and accurately and ensure that it is free of misinformation; and make scientific findings or conclusions considered or relied on in policy decisions publicly available online and in open formats, to the extent practicable and publicly releasable consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives.

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<sup>18</sup> [Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review](#), 70 Fed. Reg. 2664 (January 14, 2005).

- Where legally permissible and appropriate, enable scientists and researchers to directly participate in policy and management decisions for which they are the agency subject matter expert to ensure that the science and research are accurately represented and interpreted.
- Ensure the accuracy of communication of the science and research upon which a policy decision is based.
- Ensure that the Scientific Integrity Official, with input from the other scientific officials, develop a transparent mechanism for covered individuals to express differing scientific opinions. When an agency employee, who is substantively engaged in the science and/or research informing an agency policy decision, disagrees with the scientific data, interpretations or conclusions that are to be relied upon for that decision, the employee is encouraged to express that opinion complete with rationale and in writing. If differing scientific opinions are not resolved during internal deliberations, they can be part of peer review charge questions with the results publicly available to the extent that they are publicly releasable consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives. When there is no peer review, the differing opinion will be represented in the agency deliberative documents for the decision maker's consideration.

#### **4. Ensuring Accountability**

To the extent it is consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives, it is the policy of SSA to:

- Ensure correction of the scientific record for substantiated allegations of compromised scientific integrity, the implementation of recommendations to prevent such allegations in the future, and the enforcement of administrative actions when allegations of a loss of scientific integrity are substantiated.
- Encourage and facilitate early informal or formal consultation with the Scientific Integrity Officials to seek advice on preventing a situation of concern, to determine if it is a potential violation of the Scientific Integrity Policy, and to ascertain if it should be referred elsewhere in the agency for resolution.
- Provide clear guidance on how to report concerns and allegations of Scientific Integrity Policy violations formally and confidentially. Those who report concerns and allegations need not be directly involved or witness a violation.
- Ensure that the Scientific Integrity Official drafts procedures to respond to allegations of compromised scientific integrity in a timely, objective, and thorough manner. These procedures shall include the following steps: an initial assessment and review, a fact-finding process, an agency adjudication, or determination including description of remedies, and preventative measures to safeguard the science, an appeals process, follow-up to track implementation of remedies, and reporting.
- Ensure that procedures document the necessary aspects for each step of the process including burden of proof, any necessary determination of intentionality, and reporting as well as the roles of the Scientific Integrity Official and Agency staff in the process.

#### **5. Protecting Scientists and Researchers**

To assure the protection of government scientists, researchers and, as appropriate, other covered individuals from retribution, whistleblower retaliation, or reprisal, and to the extent it is consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives, it is the policy of SSA to:

- Select and retain candidates for scientific, research, and technical positions based on merit system principles.
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the scientific workforce and to create safe workspaces that are free from harassment and discrimination. Support scientists and researchers including, but not limited to, Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQI+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.
- Prevent supervisors and managers or other agency leadership from intimidating or coercing scientists or researchers to alter scientific data, findings, or professional opinions or inappropriately influencing scientific advisory boards.
- Comply with whistleblower protections, specifically:
  - By protecting employees from prohibited personnel practices (as defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)), especially those who disclose a loss of scientific integrity that they reasonably believe evidences: a violation of any law, rule, or

regulation; an abuse of authority, gross mismanagement; a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety; or a gross waste of funds.

- The requirements of the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, and its expanded protections enacted by Pub. L. No.103-424, 108 Stat. 4361 (Oct. 29, 1994) and the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-199, 126 Stat. 1465 (Nov. 27, 2012).
- The expansion of certain whistleblower protections to employees of federal government contractors, subcontractors, and grant recipients within the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, 136 Stat. 2395 (Dec. 23, 2022), 41 U.S.C. § 4712. and,
- PPD-19, which prohibits supervisors from taking, failing to take, or threatening to take or fail to take any action affecting an employee's eligibility for access to classified information in reprisal for making a protected disclosure.

## **6. Professional Development for Government Scientists and Researchers**

It is the policy of the agency to encourage agency scientists, researchers and other covered individuals involved in agency scientific and/or research activities to interact with the broader scientific and research communities in a manner that is consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives, and in a manner that is consistent with Federal rules of ethics, job responsibilities, and to the extent that is practicable given the availability of funding to support such interactions and any budgetary restraints. This includes:

- Encouraging timely publication of publicly available research such as in peer-reviewed, professional, scholarly journals, SSA technical reports and publications, or other appropriate outlets.
- Encouraging the sharing of scientific and research activities, findings, and materials through appropriate avenues including on digital repositories.
- Encouraging attendance and presentation of research at professional meetings including workshops, conferences, and symposia.
- Permitting service on editorial boards, as peer reviewers, or as editors of professional or scholarly journals, to the extent allowed by applicable law, regulations, and directives.
- Permitting participation in professional societies, committees, task forces, and other specialized bodies of professional societies, including removing barriers to serving as officers or on governing boards of such societies, to the extent allowed by applicable law, regulations, and directives.
- Permitting government scientists and researchers to receive honors and awards for contributions to scientific and research activities and discoveries to the extent allowed by law, and to accrue the professional recognition of such honors or awards; and
- Permitting scientists and researchers to perform outreach and engagement activities, such as speaking to community and student groups, as part of their official duties.

### **Scientific Integrity Committee/Other Scientific Integrity Officials**

The SSA shall establish a Scientific Integrity Committee comprised of senior agency career employees and chaired by the Scientific Integrity Official to provide oversight for the implementation of the Scientific Integrity Policy, act as liaisons for their respective agency units, assist with training and policy assessment, updates, and amendments, and to be available to address any questions or concerns regarding this policy. The Scientific Integrity Official, together with the Committee, will draft a Scientific Integrity Committee Charter outlining criteria for selection as a member, other duties of members, and the frequency of meetings.

### **Procedures**

The Scientific Integrity Official, in conjunction with other SSA career officials, shall expeditiously draft and prominently post on the agency's website the following procedures: addressing scientific integrity concerns, handling differing scientific opinions, clearance of scientific products, scientific communications, authorship and attribution, and other topics as needed. These policies shall be completed within one year of the release of this policy.



## Roles and Responsibilities

Scientific integrity is everyone's responsibility, but the following individuals and groups have specific scientific integrity roles and responsibilities:

### Commissioner

- Provides leadership for the agency on scientific integrity such as leading through example, upholding scientific integrity principles, and regularly communicating the importance of scientific integrity.
- Ensures that all agency activities associated with scientific and technological processes are conducted in accordance with the policy.
- Ensures all supervisors and managers comply with the scientific integrity policy and ensure accountability for those who do not.
- Supports the view that violations of scientific integrity policies shall be taken seriously and must come with appropriate consequences.
- Ensures that the scientific-integrity policy considers, supplements, and supports agency plans for forming evidence-based policies, including the evidence-building plans required by 5 U.S.C. § 312(a) and the annual evaluation plans required by 5 U.S.C. § 312(b).
- Provides adequate resources and funding to implement this policy including staffing, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and training.
- Supports and respects the Scientific Integrity Official's independence, recommendations, and designation of and agency compliance with corrective scientific actions when violations of this policy are substantiated.

### Scientific Integrity Official

- Is a designated, full-time equivalent, career employee who has agency appropriate scientific credentials and is appointed at a senior level, for example as an ST (scientific or professional), Senior Leader (SL), or in the Senior Executive Service (SES).
- Oversees implementation and iterative improvement of scientific integrity policies and processes providing leadership, acting to champion scientific integrity, serving as the primary agency-level contact for questions regarding scientific integrity, and ensuring scientific integrity activities and outcomes are appropriately monitored and evaluated.
- Leads training and outreach initiatives to facilitate employee awareness and understanding of this policy.
- Serves as a neutral point of contact for receiving scientific integrity questions, concerns, and allegations of compromised scientific integrity.
- Conducts an initial assessment of allegations and submitted materials, following established procedures, to determine whether the allegations pertain to compromised scientific integrity and the appropriate handling of said allegations. Provides independent oversight of agency responses to allegations of compromised scientific integrity referred for an inquiry or investigation, including:
  - Reviewing agency-submitted reports of allegations and their disposition; and
  - Maintaining a status report of responses to allegations as a means of monitoring the progress toward resolution.
- Leads efforts to update this policy and any accompanying guidance, as appropriate.
- Reports to the agency's Chief Science Officer or similarly placed individual with an appropriate background on matters involving scientific integrity.
- Coordinates with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), including OGC's Ethics Law Division, the Office of Inspector General (OIG), the Office of Human Resources Management, Office of Communications, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and other offices, as necessary.
- Reports any potentially criminal behavior related to waste, fraud, or abuse to OIG that is uncovered during responding to an allegation of compromised scientific integrity and coordinate, as appropriate, related to the referral provided to OIG.
- Keeps the Chief Research Officer and the Commissioner informed on the status of the implementation of this policy and any compliance concerns, as warranted.



- Delegates responsibilities to other scientific integrity officials exercising a purview applicable to organizational submits (e.g., offices, bureaus, directorates) of the agency, and chairs their regular meetings.
- Publishes an annual scientific integrity report as described below.
- Leads efforts for the iterative improvement of this policy and scientific integrity initiatives overall including development and implementation of an evaluation plan to regularly monitor and evaluate ongoing scientific integrity activities and outcomes.
- To the extent possible, be involved in high level discussions and strategic planning on the recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of scientists — especially scientists from underrepresented communities — to help ensure that scientific integrity is appropriately and carefully considered.

### **Scientific Integrity Committee**

- As delegated by the Scientific Integrity Official, oversee implementation and iterative improvement of scientific integrity policies and processes.
- Coordinate with the agency’s Scientific Integrity Official in implementing the agency’s scientific integrity policies and processes.
- Provide oversight for the implementation of the Scientific Integrity Policy.
- Act as liaisons for their respective agency units.
- Assist with training and policy assessment, updates, and amendments.
- Be available to address any questions or concerns regarding this policy.
- Other duties as delegated.

### **Managers and Supervisors**

- Comply with and ensure agency and employee compliance with the scientific integrity policy and to listen, advise, and report allegations of compromised scientific integrity and act as appropriate.
- Be aware of and uphold the principles contained in this policy and the agency’s Evaluation Policy. Lead through example by upholding scientific integrity principles and communicating the importance of doing so.
- Report any knowledge of potential losses of scientific integrity to the Scientific Integrity Official or other Scientific Integrity Officials.
- Refrain from committing prohibited personnel practices (as defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)) against all covered individuals including those who uncover and report allegations of compromised scientific integrity in good faith, as well as those agency employees alleged to have compromised scientific integrity.
- Consult, as appropriate depending upon the nature of the allegation, with the Scientific Integrity Official, Human Resources Officer, contracting and grant personnel, the Designated Agency Ethics Official, OIG, OGC, and the Office of Civil Rights.

### **Covered Individuals**

- Should be aware of the principles contained in this policy including the Code of Conduct and how the policy applies to their duties.
- Comply with this policy.
- Abide by the Code of Conduct and adhere to accepted professional values and practices of the relevant research/scientific communities to ensure scientific integrity.
- Are encouraged to report any knowledge of compromised scientific integrity. Employees should report directly to the Scientific Integrity Official or any Deputy Scientific Integrity Official. Non-employee covered individuals must report in accordance with the terms of their contract, agreement, or other arrangement with the agency.

### **Monitoring and Evaluating Scientific Integrity Activities and Outcomes**

SSA will develop and implement an evaluation plan to regularly measure, monitor, and evaluate ongoing scientific integrity activities and outcomes. The plan will include a roadmap of activities and expected outcomes, the steps and methods needed to assess the processes and outcomes, the methods and metrics used to evaluate the activities and

outcomes, and how we will analyze and use the data on a regular basis for ongoing improvement of scientific integrity processes, procedures, and policies. The plan shall include, at a minimum, the metrics for agencies to collect and report as identified in Chapter 2 of *A Framework for Scientific Integrity Policy and Practice*, subpart *Metrics and Measurement Methods for Scientific Integrity Activities and Outcomes* and Chapter 3: *Critical Metrics for Regular Assessment and Iterative Improvement of Agency Scientific Integrity Policy Implementation*.

The plan shall also include a timeline for implementation and frequency of data collection, analysis, review, recommendations, and implementing recommendations. Monitoring and evaluating results, recommendations, and policy/procedure changes based on results will be reported to agency leadership and will be made available to agency staff and the public, to the extent publicly releasable, in a timely manner.

## Annual Reporting

The Scientific Integrity Official, with input from the Scientific Integrity Committee, is responsible for generating and making prominently available on the agency's public facing website an annual report to SSA leadership on the status of scientific integrity within the agency, per the 2021 Presidential Memorandum. The report shall highlight scientific integrity successes, accomplishments, or progress across the agency such as any new scientific integrity hires, training, enhancements to scientific integrity policies, etc., identify areas for improvement and develop a plan to address critical weaknesses, if any, and show our progress toward achieving the critical metrics<sup>19</sup> identified in Chapters 2 and 3 of *A Framework for Scientific Integrity Policy and Practice*, including comparisons to the same metrics from prior years to show trends over time, whenever feasible. The report will also include the number of formal administrative investigations, informal requests for assistance, inquiries and appeals involving alleged or actual deviations from the scientific integrity policy, and the number of investigations and pending appeals. Annual Reporting will also include anonymized individual closed scientific integrity case summaries. These summaries may be posted in a timely manner after completion of inquiries and/or incorporated into the annual report. The identities of complainants, respondents, witnesses, and others involved in the investigations shall be protected.

## Scientific Integrity Policy Intersections with Related and Supporting Policies

Scientific Integrity Officials should have an awareness of policies and programs that intersect with the development of the culture of scientific integrity within the agency. Scientific integrity Officials, where possible, shall be involved in the development or revision of the broader set of policies and practices that affect the culture and applicability of scientific integrity within the agency.

## Related Policies that Can Intersect with Scientific Integrity

The following non-exhaustive list of related policies can intersect with scientific integrity.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in Addressing and Strengthening Scientific Integrity and the Disproportional Impact of Scientific Integrity Policy Violations on Underrepresented Groups.** Policies, practices, and agency culture to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the scientific workforce and Federal workforce at large and to create safe workspaces that are free from harassment and discrimination are foundational for achieving a culture of scientific integrity. Because of existing power structures, racism, sexism, discrimination, and other forms of bias in the workplace, scientific integrity and DEIA policies may intersect in many places. Similarly, scientific integrity entails greater transparency into research processes and policy-making outcomes. The agency will review and address potential scientific integrity policy violations that have a disproportionate impact on underrepresented groups or weaken the equitable delivery of agency programs.

**Public Access.** Policies and practices that help to ensure that publications, data, and other outputs of government-funded research are equitably and publicly available to other researchers, innovators, students, and the broader public,

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<sup>19</sup> The metrics may be collected every other year.

including underserved communities, consistent with the [2022 OSTP Memorandum on Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research](#).

**Human Subject Protections.** For the protection of human subjects of research and clinical investigations, SSA's requirements are provided in 20 C.F.R. Part 431.

**Scientific Integrity with Research Security.** Scientists and researchers are encouraged to interact with the broader scientific and research communities as well as to engage with collaborators with a commitment to a shared research environment of openness, transparency, honesty, equity, fair competition, objectivity, and democratic values to the extent doing so is consistent with applicable law, regulations, and directives. However, some foreign governments are working vigorously in contradiction with these values to acquire, through both licit and illicit means, U.S. research and technology. Research security policies, such as the [National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 \(NSPM-33\)](#) and subsequent [Guidance for Implementing NSPM-33](#), must harmonize with scientific integrity policies by both guarding against foreign abuses and protecting intellectual property rights, while ensuring the scientists and researchers maintain honesty, objectivity, transparency, and professional and ethical behaviors.

**The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act).** Scientific integrity is a foundational component of Federal policies and data infrastructure investments supporting information quality, access, protection, and evidence building and use. The Evidence Act, also anchored in scientific integrity, called on agencies to strategically plan and organize evidence building, data management, and data access functions to ensure an integrated and direct connection to data and evidence needs. Title II of the Act – the OPEN Government Data Act – requires federal agencies to make public data assets available online, using open standards, machine-readable, open formats, and without restrictions (other than intellectual property rights) that would impede use. The metadata associated with open government data assets is made available through the Federal Data Catalogue at [data.gov](#). The agency's Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans, required by the Evidence Act, are posted on our website [www.ssa.gov/data](#), and linked at [Evaluation.gov | Home](#).

**Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) of 2018 (Pub. L. No. 115-435, Title III).** CIPSEA of 2018 requires agencies to enable statistical agencies to uphold their fundamental responsibilities to provide timely, relevant, credible, and objective CIPSEA data and statistics and to maintain public trust. The agency should consult CIPSEA of 2018, OMB's implementing guidance, (including OMB M-19-23, OMB M-20-12, and OMB M-21-27, and Statistical Policy Directive 1), and any final implementing regulations promulgated to ensure that scientific integrity policies and procedures complement and reinforce related requirements of CIPSEA of 2018. [Research Data Gov](#) is the portal for discovery of restricted CIPSEA data in the Federal statistical system and includes detailed descriptions of such data assets from each recognized statistical agency or unit.

**Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act (“No FEAR Act”).** Federal agencies are required to be held accountable for violations of antidiscrimination and whistleblower protection laws. Under the No FEAR Act, agencies must reimburse the Department of Treasury Judgement Fund for payments made in connection with allegations of discriminatory or retaliatory conduct in violation of antidiscrimination and whistleblower protection laws for settlements, awards or judgments against them in whistleblower and discrimination cases out of their own budgets. Upon a finding of discrimination or violation of the Whistleblower Protection Act, the agency initiates a review to determine whether disciplinary or corrective action is warranted. At the end of each fiscal year, the Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity (OCREO) prepares an annual report setting forth the number of disciplinary or corrective actions taken. OCREO submits the annual report to Congress, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Justice, and Office of Personnel Management.

**Dual Use Research of Concern.** [The United States Policy for Oversight of Life Sciences Dual Use Research of Concern](#) stipulates that additional review is required for scientific research that could be directly misapplied to pose a significant threat with broad potential consequences to public health and safety, agricultural crops and other plants, animals, the environment, materiel, or national security.