



American Society for
Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
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ASBMB Statement on Foreign Influences to Research Integrity in the United States

The United States is a global leader in scientific research and development. The American research enterprise has pushed innovative discoveries to new heights and continues to do so by attracting a skilled, international workforce, by funding cutting-edge research, and by sustaining a collaborative scientific environment. Unfortunately, these qualities make the U.S. an enticing target for foreign economic espionage and intellectual property theft for other countries to bolster their own research enterprises. Over the past several years, numerous federal investigations have uncovered instances of foreign influence and interference in taxpayer-funded scientific research within the U.S. A small number of scientists have committed serious violations of conflict of interest and disclosure reporting requirements at the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Defense.

ASBMB recognizes the substantial efforts undertaken by federal funding agencies, universities and research institutions to address the issue of foreign influence to research integrity. Federal agencies have primarily focused on addressing the issue of conflicts of interest with foreign talent recruitment programs. However, to prevent foreign influence in federally-funded research while maintaining openness, transparency, and international collaboration in the American research enterprise, ASBMB urges federal agencies to coordinate policy changes, offer more guidance to grant-receiving institutions, and ensure that international students, foreign nationals, and scientists everywhere are protected from being unfairly targeted. We must strike a balance between protecting research, while continuing to promote international collaboration.

The DOE, DoD, and the National Science Foundation have issued policy changes to prevent foreign interference in or espionage of their grant-funded research. Federal responses to these issues include:

- The NSF issued two new policies; first, NSF personnel and intergovernmental personnel detailed to NSF cannot participate in foreign government talent recruitment programs and second, rotators (temporary program directors) working onsite at NSF must be U.S. citizens or have applied for U.S. citizenship.¹
- The DOE prohibited any DOE personnel from participating in foreign talent recruitment programs of countries determined sensitive.²
- The DoD issued new reporting requirements for proposers to submit disclosure information for all key personnel working on any grant project.³
- The NIH reaffirmed and reminded the science community of the existing policies in place on reporting and disclosure requirements.⁴
- Lastly, the National Science Board reiterated its commitment to President Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 189 (NSDD-189) on open and collaborative basic research.⁵

We have several concerns regarding the disjointed actions federal agencies have undertaken in response. Because each agency has different sets of reporting requirements and guidance, the grant application and reporting requirement process has become increasingly difficult for scientists to navigate accurately.



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Harmonizing policies across federal agencies would aid the scientific community, by preventing scientists from being unfairly targeted and prevent unintentional incidents of research violations.

Of particular concern regarding federal agency responses is the lack of guidance and transparency from the NIH. Since instances of foreign influence have come to light in 2018, the NIH has initiated thousands of investigations on scientists who they suspect of intellectual property theft, conflicts of interest, or peer review violations.⁶ While some incidents of research violation or intellectual property have been publicized, the NIH has not been transparent with the scientific community about internal changes to their review or oversight process. In addition to the lack of transparency, there have been numerous cases of scientists being wrongfully accused of espionage or intellectual property theft.⁷ Fear within the scientific community of being targeted as a result of race or identify has proliferated.⁸ The NIH must be transparent about their actions and processes and offer guidelines to the scientific community to appease these fears.

The ASBMB urges federal agencies to harmonize their policies on protecting research integrity while allowing for important international collaboration to continue and to ensure that members of the scientific community are held to a fair and just process without fear of racial profiling. We are a willing partner and resource for federal agencies, and a conduit to the scientific community to help navigate these threats and safeguard openness and collaboration of the scientific enterprise.