



# **Guidebook**

## **Good Research Support Practices**

*This Guidebook on Good Research Support Practices is a practical, user-oriented manual for those supporting research activities at institutions, especially in contexts involving EU grants, budgeting, reporting, and compliance with research integrity standards.*

## 1. Introduction

Every breakthrough idea begins with a question. Every question, when explored with care and curiosity, can lead to discoveries that shape our world: from the medicines we take and the technologies we use to the policies that govern our lives. Yet behind every successful research project is a quiet, often unseen structure of support. It is in this structure – this scaffolding of expertise, systems, and guidance – that good research becomes possible.

Research support professionals occupy a unique and essential space in the research ecosystem. They do not conduct experiments, write academic papers, or appear as authors in prestigious journals. But they are the ones who ensure that research can happen at all. They are the grant officers who untangle complex application processes; the financial administrators who ensure budgets stay aligned; the ethics advisors who protect participants and maintain standards; the legal experts who craft collaboration agreements; and the data specialists who help researchers navigate the labyrinth of privacy laws, archiving rules, and open access mandates. This guidebook is dedicated to them: to the individuals and teams that enable research to flourish. It has been written not as a rigid manual, but as a practical and values-driven companion for those working in research administration and support. It brings together national and international standards, such as the *ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*<sup>1</sup>, guidelines from the *German Research Foundation (DFG)*<sup>2</sup>, and others. From these diverse yet complementary sources, a shared vision emerges: one of responsible, ethical, and sustainable research, underpinned by integrity and professionalism at every level.

The purpose of this guide is to translate that vision into daily practice. It addresses the many roles that support professionals play across the research lifecycle, including:

- Pre-award and post-award grant support, particularly for complex funding schemes such as Horizon Europe<sup>3</sup>, or the European Research Council (ERC)<sup>4</sup>;
- Financial planning, tracking, and reporting that satisfies both institutional and funder requirements;
- Ethics coordination, data governance, and compliance with legal frameworks like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR);
- Preparation of consortium and collaboration agreements for international and interdisciplinary teams;
- Handling of academic misconduct and support for a culture of trust and openness;
- Long-term data management, open science, and publication planning;
- And above all, the cultivation of an inclusive and positive research culture, where researchers and support staff collaborate with mutual respect.

We recognise that research support is as diverse as the institutions and individuals it serves. For that reason, this guide is not prescriptive. Instead, it offers adaptable frameworks, a checklist, and reflections

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<sup>1</sup> <https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3923601>

<sup>3</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en)

<sup>4</sup> <https://erc.europa.eu/homepage>

to help support teams align their work with best practices while tailoring it to their unique contexts. In an increasingly global, fast-paced, and accountable research environment, the value of good research support has never been clearer. Their work is foundational, underpinning the entire research enterprise. It is the essential engine driving the research enterprise forward, grounded in values that matter integrity, trust, competence, and care. Whether you are new to research administration or a seasoned leader of a research office, this guidebook is here to support you in supporting others.

## 2. Principles of Good Research Support

The success of any research project depends not only on researchers' brilliance but also on the structured support that enables ideas to become reality. Research administrators, project officers, finance managers, legal advisors, data stewards, and ethics coordinators all contribute to this framework. Together, they form a backbone of integrity, accountability, and collaboration. *But what, precisely, makes for good research support?*

At the heart of effective research support lies integrity. This is the commitment to act with honesty, fairness, and transparency in every interaction: whether guiding a researcher through an ethics review process, preparing financial reports for funders, or navigating intellectual property questions in a consortium agreement. The best research support professionals are trusted advisors who help ensure that the research being conducted is both compliant and ethically sound. Closely linked to this is the principle of accountability. Supporting research means managing responsibilities with care. It requires maintaining accurate records, meeting internal and external deadlines, and being answerable for the guidance provided. When a grant deadline approaches, when a budget needs justifying, or when the auditor comes knocking, the value of accountable and organized support becomes crystal clear. None of this can be achieved without competence. Research support is a professional field that demands continuous learning. Policies change often, particularly those of major funders like Horizon Europe. Legal and ethical frameworks evolve. As such, those supporting research must commit to professional development, remain informed about new regulations, and apply current best practices in every aspect of their work.

Equally vital is a strong service orientation. Great research support teams view themselves not as gatekeepers but as enablers. They anticipate questions before they are asked, simplify complexity where possible, and provide researchers with the tools and confidence to navigate the bureaucracy that surrounds modern research. Whether it's crafting a clear template for a *Data Management Plan* (DMP) or offering constructive feedback on a budget proposal, good support is always tailored to the needs of the academic community. Underpinning this is the idea of stewardship, a deep respect for the responsible use of public funds, human data, and institutional resources. Good research support involves protecting these assets through sound financial management, ethical oversight, and forward-thinking planning. A research project is not just about what happens in the lab; it is also about how well its data are stored, how transparently its finances are reported, and how rigorously it is documented.

While doing all this, support staff must remember the importance of respecting researchers' autonomy. It is not the job of administrators to dictate the direction of inquiry but rather to help scholars pursue their work within the boundaries of what is ethically, legally, and financially possible. Effective support means providing the right scaffolding: firm enough to be reliable and flexible enough to allow researchers the freedom to innovate.

Another core value is collaboration and collegiality. Research support is rarely a solo endeavour. Instead, it thrives on relationships: between departments, across disciplines, and among institutions. Whether coordinating with finance colleagues, ethics committees, or international partners, research support staff must be skilled communicators and team players. Handling sensitive data, confidential proposals, or internal disputes demands a high level of confidentiality and data responsibility. This includes compliance with data protection laws such as the GDPR, as well as institutional policies on information security. Research support professionals must know how to manage and protect data, ensuring that research is not only innovative, but also secure and respectful of participant rights. In a diverse and increasingly global research environment, a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)<sup>5</sup> is also paramount. Good research support actively identifies and works to remove barriers to participation, whether those are due to structural biases, unequal access to resources, or policies that unintentionally exclude. Inclusivity must be built into systems, not just championed in mission statements.

Finally, no system is perfect. That's why continuous improvement is a guiding principle. Feedback from researchers, audits, and even errors must be used constructively to refine processes. The most effective research offices are those that are open to change, regularly assess their performance, and seek innovative ways to better serve the academic community. In essence, good research support is about more than checklists or policies. It is about a shared commitment to advancing knowledge, grounded in professionalism, empathy, and purpose. When these principles are fully embraced, they create the conditions in which research can truly flourish.

### 3. Roles in the research cycle

Supporting research under large-scale European funding programmes like Horizon Europe demands a unique blend of foresight, precision, and adaptability. From the earliest moments of shaping a proposal to the final report submission years later, research support professionals serve as both architects and stewards of financial sustainability. Their role is integral, not just to ensure eligibility and compliance, but to allow researchers to focus on discovery while the administrative structure around them quietly ensures success.

#### 3.1. Pre-award and post-award grant support

Securing external funding is a cornerstone of successful research, and research support staff play a critical role in navigating the complex landscape of competitive grants. In the *pre-award phase*, these professionals assist researchers in interpreting funding calls, translating dense policy language into actionable guidance. They evaluate eligibility, align calls with researchers' strengths, and provide tailored templates or examples for proposal components. In programmes like Horizon Europe or the ERC, crafting a strong application means more than meeting formal requirements: it means telling a strategic, compelling story backed by sound planning and rigorous budgeting. Support staff work closely with researchers to build cost-effective, compliant budgets. They account for personnel effort, travel, equipment, and indirect costs, while integrating unique elements such as unit cost models found in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) projects.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, they help shape the financial narrative in Part B of Horizon Europe proposals, ensuring budget justifications support the broader implementation strategy. Internal reviews, institutional sign-offs, and portal submissions are managed efficiently, ensuring the process remains both compliant and competitive. Once a grant is awarded, in the *post-award phase*, the focus quickly shifts to onboarding. Research support teams coordinate the grant

<sup>5</sup> <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/what-is-edi-and-why-does-it-matter>

<sup>6</sup> <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/>

agreement process, activate internal accounts, and guide project teams through financial and reporting systems. Kick-off meetings set the tone for collaborative execution, clarify institutional expectations, and establish timelines for deliverables and financial statements. Administrative oversight continues throughout the life of the project. Support staff monitor project spending, help adjust for real-world changes, and liaise with partners when timelines or allocations shift. In this role, they ensure the research remains on track, within scope, and in line with all financial and regulatory obligations.

### 3.2. Financial planning, tracking, and reporting

Financial management in research is far more than just balancing budgets. It involves forward-looking planning, real-time monitoring, and accurate reporting to ensure that every euro, pound, or zloty is used appropriately and transparently. At project start-up, support professionals refine grant budgets in collaboration with principal investigators, confirming cost eligibility and aligning proposed expenditures with both funder and institutional policies. As the project unfolds, tools like forecasting spreadsheets, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems (e.g., SAP or Oracle), and tailored dashboards enable precise monitoring. These tools help align actual expenditures with funder-recognised categories, including personnel, travel, equipment, subcontracting, and indirect costs. Key to long-term financial health is the maintenance of audit-proof records. Timesheets, invoices, payroll records, and procurement documentation are kept meticulously. This documentation not only supports financial reports but serves as the foundation for successful audits, whether internal or from funding bodies like the European Commission.<sup>7</sup> Projects inevitably evolve. Budget deviations due to staffing changes, delays, or currency fluctuations (particularly in non-Euro institutions) are identified early. Support professionals initiate amendment requests via the EU's Participant Portal<sup>8</sup>, ensuring transparency and continuity. Their foresight helps avoid compliance issues while maintaining momentum. When it comes to reporting, precision is paramount. Templates and internal timelines are provided to streamline the preparation of interim and final financial reports. Research offices help ensure that reporting aligns with European Commission expectations, coordinating with finance offices to map internal accounting data to external categories. In multi-beneficiary projects, this means not only submitting on time but aligning with partner institutions to present a consistent, auditable account of the research's financial life. Support teams also manage EC Portal interactions, using tools like the *Continuous Reporting Tool*<sup>9</sup> to enter deliverables, milestones, and financial data. In close collaboration with lead beneficiaries, they consolidate partner inputs, flag inconsistencies, and ensure submissions meet both deadlines and quality expectations. In sum, research support professionals provide the backbone of financial stewardship in EU-funded projects. Their ability to forecast, manage, and report finances ensures that research is not only excellent, but sustainable and accountable.

### 3.3. Ethics coordination, data governance, and compliance

No research endeavour is complete without due consideration for *ethics* and *data protection*. As scientific methods evolve and data becomes increasingly central to research, the need for skilled coordination in these areas has never been greater. Support professionals guide researchers through ethical review processes, ensuring that all necessary approvals are secured before data collection begins. They assist with completing ethics applications, liaising with institutional review boards, and managing correspondence with external regulators. In fields involving human participants, animals, or sensitive material, this support is crucial. Parallel to ethics is *data governance*. The GDPR<sup>10</sup> and other privacy frameworks impose strict requirements on how personal data is collected, processed, and stored. Support

<sup>7</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/transparency-and-reporting\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/transparency-and-reporting_en)

<sup>8</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

<sup>9</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/IT/Continuous+Reporting>

<sup>10</sup> <https://gdpr-info.eu/>

staff help draft DMPs<sup>11</sup>, define roles and responsibilities under GDPR, and advise on technical and organisational safeguards. They also raise awareness of research principles, helping researchers assess risks related to international collaborations or security-sensitive topics. Research offices are also responsible for offering training and continued learning opportunities that address evolving ethical standards. This includes onboarding for new researchers, sessions on GDPR, workshops on informed consent, and regular briefings on institutional and national policy changes. Creating a culture of integrity begins with accessible, well-structured guidance and a shared understanding of ethical expectations.

### 3.4. Consortium and collaboration agreements

Collaborative research – particularly when it crosses national or disciplinary boundaries – requires clear, well-structured agreements. Research support professionals are central to this process, translating legal and funding requirements into robust operational frameworks. The *consortium agreement* is the document that binds partners together, complementing the funder-issued grant agreement. Research support staff help draft and negotiate these agreements, often using standard models such as DESCA for Horizon Europe projects.<sup>12</sup> They ensure that intellectual property rights (IPRs) are appropriately allocated, that decision-making structures are clearly defined, and that financial arrangements are fair and transparent. Once agreements are signed, support teams monitor compliance and track internal amendments or annexes. They liaise with legal, tech transfer, and finance departments to resolve any issues that arise and maintain alignment among all stakeholders. This ensures that collaboration remains smooth, productive, and conflict-free.

### 3.5. Academic misconduct and research integrity

A culture of integrity is essential to the credibility of research. While the vast majority of researchers uphold the highest standards, institutions must be prepared to identify, address, and learn from instances of misconduct. Support staff are key stewards of *research integrity*. They educate researchers on what constitutes misconduct, such as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, and help build awareness of more nuanced issues like ghost authorship, duplicate publication, and conflicts of interest. When concerns arise, they guide complainants through institutional procedures, protect confidentiality, and ensure fair and impartial investigations. Prevention is just as important as enforcement. Through training sessions, induction materials, and accessible policies, research offices embed integrity into the everyday fabric of research life. They help create environments where questions can be raised early, concerns addressed transparently, and trust fostered across the research community. Support professionals also facilitate reporting structures by ensuring there are clear contact points and well-understood procedures for confidential disclosures. They liaise with research integrity committees or ombudspersons and ensure timelines for response and investigation are reasonable and proportionate. By modelling respect and clarity, they reinforce institutional credibility and contribute to a climate of openness.

### 3.6. Data management, open science and publication planning

In today's data-driven research landscape, managing information with care, foresight, and transparency is essential. From project inception to the final publication, research support professionals guide researchers through best practices in data stewardship, open science, and responsible dissemination. This begins with the creation of robust DMPs, which outline how data will be collected, stored, curated, and eventually shared. These plans are not merely administrative requirements, they reflect a commitment to the *FAIR principles*: that data should be *Findable, Accessible, Interoperable*, and

<sup>11</sup> Horizon Europe Data Management Plan template: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/template/report/data-management-plan\\_he\\_en.docx](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/template/report/data-management-plan_he_en.docx)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.desca-agreement.eu/desca-model-consortium-agreement/>



*Reusable*.<sup>13</sup> Support staff work closely with researchers to align DMPs with institutional policies, ethical obligations, and funder expectations, helping ensure that research data remains both usable and secure. Secure data storage is equally critical. Whether handling personal, clinical, or commercially sensitive data, support teams help researchers select appropriate repositories with the necessary access controls and encryption standards. They also advise on institutional and national retention policies, ensuring compliance with GDPR and long-term preservation mandates. By encouraging the use of certified and trusted infrastructures, research offices safeguard both the integrity and accessibility of valuable datasets. Publishing practices, too, are evolving in the direction of greater openness. With mandates like *Plan S*<sup>14</sup> and Horizon Europe's *open access policy*<sup>15</sup> in place, researchers are increasingly required to make their outputs publicly available. Support staff play a key role in guiding publication strategy: selecting compliant journals, avoiding predatory publishers, and ensuring proper licensing through *Creative Commons*<sup>16</sup> or equivalent frameworks. In doing so, they help ensure that the reach and impact of research is maximized without compromising quality or integrity. Integral to responsible publication is the fair recognition of contributors. Support professionals advise on applying authorship criteria in accordance with international standards and help navigate difficult conversations around credit and order. Tools such as *Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID)*<sup>17</sup> and the *Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT)*<sup>18</sup> are promoted to ensure transparency in how individuals have shaped a given piece of work. In this way, the story of the research is not only preserved but properly attributed. Training is another cornerstone in this domain. Research offices organise workshops on topics such as *Open Research Europe* submissions<sup>19</sup>, use of *Creative Commons licensing*, and properly citing datasets. They also support early-career researchers by providing guidance on navigating journal policies, avoiding predatory publishers, and crafting preprints or data articles. Together, these practices – data stewardship, secure access management, open publishing, and fair attribution – form the backbone of ethical and effective research dissemination. They ensure that knowledge is not only created, but shared responsibly, accessed widely, and credited justly. This comprehensive support ensures that open science is practiced with both integrity and confidence.

### 3.7. Risk and crisis management

Effective research support involves proactively anticipating potential risks, preparing clear contingency plans, and responding efficiently to crises. Risk management includes systematically identifying, assessing, and mitigating threats that could disrupt projects: whether financial, operational, legal, or reputational. Support professionals help researchers create practical risk registers, identify vulnerabilities, and develop clear response strategies to minimize impact. Additionally, establishing clear protocols for crisis response, assigning roles and responsibilities, and ensuring transparent, timely communication are essential. Effective internal and external communication during crises preserves institutional credibility, protects stakeholders, and facilitates a swift return to normal operations. Regular reviews of risks, updates to contingency measures, and clearly defined crisis management protocols ensure resilience and preparedness.

### 3.8. Mental health and well-being support

Good research support emphasizes mental health, well-being, and inclusivity among researchers and

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.coalition-s.org/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/open-science\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/open-science_en)

<sup>16</sup> <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://orcid.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://credit.niso.org/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://open-research-europe.ec.europa.eu/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwqIm\\_BhDnARIsAKBYcmtUQuawA06l\\_1c9A8z4-u-TxAV89SHYqFjwDuWs18iL2jDR8DRiAZ8aAhHTEALw\\_wcB](https://open-research-europe.ec.europa.eu/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwqIm_BhDnARIsAKBYcmtUQuawA06l_1c9A8z4-u-TxAV89SHYqFjwDuWs18iL2jDR8DRiAZ8aAhHTEALw_wcB)

staff. Support professionals advocate for institutional policies fostering supportive environments, provide clear information on available resources, and facilitate mental health and stress management programs. Promoting mental health awareness and inclusivity contributes to a productive, diverse, and sustainable research culture, benefiting all participants.

### 3.9. Positive and inclusive research culture

Research support professionals do not just support projects, they help shape the culture in which research happens. This means promoting inclusivity, equity, and well-being alongside compliance and performance. In a thriving research culture, support staff work to remove barriers for underrepresented groups, ensure fair access to resources, and support equitable recognition of all contributors. They advocate for inclusive funding opportunities, balanced workloads, and career development support for early-career researchers. They also help create environments where collegiality, respect, and shared responsibility are the norm. Whether facilitating mentorship schemes, improving onboarding for new researchers, or co-developing training with academic staff, their contributions are pivotal to sustaining a culture where research is not only excellent, but also ethical, collaborative, and humane. To build this culture intentionally, research offices increasingly use frameworks for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), run surveys to understand workplace climate, and convene discussions about systemic bias and accessibility. They support actions aligned with charters like *Athena SWAN*<sup>20</sup> or the *HR Excellence in Research Award*<sup>21</sup>, making equity part of both policy and practice. In short, cultivating a positive research culture is not a peripheral concern. It is central to the mission of good research support, and one of its most enduring legacies.

### 3.10. Digital tools, technological support, and international collaboration

Modern research increasingly depends on robust digital infrastructure and international collaboration. Research support professionals ensure researchers have access to efficient digital tools for project management, secure communication, data management, and collaboration. They also support international teams by facilitating intercultural communication, resolving conflicts, and aligning diverse expectations, thus building cohesive and efficient research collaborations.

## 4. Conclusion

Good research support practices are foundational to the integrity, quality, and impact of modern research. By implementing the strategies and principles outlined in this guide, research support professionals can effectively foster an environment that promotes innovation, collaboration, and excellence. Continuous reflection, improvement, and adaptation to emerging challenges ensure that research support remains responsive, robust, and integral to the broader research ecosystem. Together, through professional dedication and collaborative efforts, we shape a sustainable future for research that benefits society, institutions, and individuals alike.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter>

<sup>21</sup> <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward>

<sup>22</sup> <https://cezamat.pw.edu.pl/projects/in-progress/hyfidress/>



## **Recommended checklist for research support staff**

This checklist summarizes key points of good practice for research support professionals across various stages of the research lifecycle. Support staff should review this checklist regularly and refer to institutional and funding guidelines when necessary.

### **PART 1: Before research commences**

*Before a research project begins, support staff must ensure foundational preparations are in place. This includes verifying compliance with institutional and funder guidelines, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and proactively addressing risks.*

1. Have you ensured that researchers clearly understand funding call criteria and eligibility requirements?
2. Have you confirmed that research budgets align with institutional policies and funder guidelines?
3. Have you conducted due diligence to identify and mitigate potential financial, operational, or ethical risks?
4. Are all necessary ethics approvals and data governance plans in place and compliant with applicable regulations (e.g., GDPR)?
5. Have you verified that consortium and collaboration agreements clearly define roles, intellectual property rights, financial arrangements, and responsibilities?
6. Have you established clear communication channels and protocols for managing international collaborations and interdisciplinary teams?
7. Have you confirmed researchers' awareness of institutional policies on research integrity, misconduct, data management, and publication practices?

### **PART 2: During the research project**

*Throughout the research project, continuous oversight and proactive management are essential. Support staff should regularly monitor compliance, facilitate communication, and ensure researchers have the resources necessary to effectively carry out their work.*

1. Are you proactively monitoring project finances and compliance with grant conditions and institutional policies?
2. Have changes to project timelines, budgets, or deliverables been properly documented, communicated, and approved?
3. Are you ensuring timely submission of required reports and deliverables, aligned with funder and institutional deadlines?
4. Are you actively supporting researchers in managing data securely, responsibly, and in compliance with agreed DMPs?
5. Have you provided necessary training, guidance, or resources to support ethical conduct, data protection, and open research practices?
6. Are roles, responsibilities, and accountability clearly communicated and consistently upheld among support teams and researchers?

### **PART 3: Upon research completion**

*As research concludes, attention should turn to comprehensive documentation, reporting, and sustainable preservation of results. Support staff play a critical role in ensuring research outputs are accessible, compliant with obligations, and effectively disseminated.*

1. Have all final reports, financial statements, and compliance documents been accurately prepared and submitted within required timeframes?
2. Are all project outcomes and impacts clearly documented, appropriately reported, and effectively communicated?
3. Have you ensured compliance with intellectual property agreements and confirmed appropriate acknowledgments of contributions?
4. Is there a clear and secure plan for the long-term storage, archiving, and accessibility of research data and outputs?
5. Have you confirmed that research outputs comply with open-access requirements, including appropriate licensing and repository submissions?
6. Have you conducted quality assurance reviews and gathered feedback to inform continuous improvement of research support processes?

This checklist aims to foster an environment of proactive, informed, and ethical research support, enabling researchers to focus effectively on their scientific endeavours.

