

COHRED Colloquium 5

2018

Towards a Global Reporting Standard for Fair Research Partnerships

Hosted in collaboration with:

Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE)

12 April 2018, 10am – 4pm

Geneva, Switzerland

Venue :

THINKING ABOUT RFI GOVERNANCE

COHRED Colloquia aim to advance global health through intense, focused and multi-sector interactions of those key people and institutions who can shape research and innovation by viewing current challenges in a new light to create opportunities for new partnerships and finding new solutions

The Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) was a logical conclusion of a long road towards understanding that partnerships are at the heart of research, innovation, knowledge and progress. ‘Collaboration’ or ‘Partnerships’ are not just needed to create scale, economy, access and expertise to obtain new knowledge, they are also crucial to building sustainable research institutions and research systems – everywhere – in high income environments and in low income environments.

When ‘understanding’ came – the absence of a metrics to assess the impact of research collaborations and partnerships on institutional, national and global research capacity and systems was glaring – and the non-existence of a widely / globally agreed framework to optimize benefits and impact for all participants was painfully clear. While there is a multitude of metrics, performance evaluations, and impact assessments – and tools to apply these – for the scientific aspects of research collaboration, the situation for assessing or developing research partnerships is the opposite. Many repeated calls for ‘fairness’ and ‘equitability’, some aspirational guidelines, almost no systematic learning, enforcing or impact assessments. Certainly, no widely, let alone globally, accepted framework exists.

Following 2 years of wide consultations (2015-2016) and one year of early implementation with the support of an EU grant (CAASTNET Plus) in 2017, we are now ready for implementation. What we realise is this:

1. **The RFI is a ‘reporting system’** – creating transparency, encouraging uptake of existing guides and best practices, enabling the creation of a systematic global learning in this field (“RFI Web”). It is not an ‘index’, not a ‘public report card’, not a ‘rating system’. The RFI encourages a review of institutional policies and practices in terms of research partnerships – and insists of articulating short-term improvements that are planned. It clearly builds the infrastructure needed for SDG 17, among others.
2. **This is RFI version 1** – and, no doubt, we will be looking forward to version 2 in a relatively short period of time (2 years ?) – and more in future. The RFI is a ‘living’ system – as it is applied more widely, it will be improved.

This event will be hosted in collaboration with the Swiss KFPE:

3. **The RFI enables systematic global learning concerning what works and what does not in research collaborations** – by sharing RFI Reports, providing analyses and comparisons by science / region / stakeholder group, the RFI Global Learning Platform can become a powerful tool to shape research collaborations globally, as should have been done a long time ago. From sharing practices and policies, standards and benchmarks may be created in future.
4. **The RFI “System” (the RFI Reports, the RFI Web, and more in future) needs to be governed by those using it** – while COHRED started it and is keen to continue with the administration of the RFI – the decisions on future improvements, changes – adaptations of indicators, generation of standards and benchmarks will need to involve agreements between key stakeholders. Therefore, we insist from this early phase on, that a global governance structure needs to be put in place that is independent of the RFI ‘administration’. COHRED will want to have a seat on whatever the governance mechanism will be – but it does not want to monopolize the RFI in any way.

If we define as key stakeholders : government departments (research focused), national research agencies, research and academic institutions, research funders, research focused businesses, and other non-profit / international organisations – then these 6 groups should be represented – possibly from both ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ perspective. The question of global governance should be pragmatic, cost-effective, fair.

We have not advanced further than this ‘statement of intent’ – the Colloquium 5 provides us with a first opportunity to consult on how we should structure RFI Governance in support of its global use and implementation.

As we started the RFI development process, we looked around widely – and found great inspiration in the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) which is now celebrating its 20th anniversary, and is in ‘generation 4’ of its own reporting tool. The GRI concentrates on reducing the environmental footprint of industry worldwide, and focuses on reporting as its key tool. As its one impact measure, it is quoted that share prices of industry with GRI certification are substantially higher than those without. For logical reasons – pension funds are increasingly having members that are interested in investing their pensions in sustainable industry.

The GRI also struggled with concepts of governance – and experimented with the dissociation of those administering the GRI certification and those responsible for setting new standards and solving conflicts.

While there is a huge difference between GRI and RFI – we can continue to learn from their experiences. Please view : **Global Reporting Initiative**. Website : www.globalreporting.org . For ideas on governance and evolution of the RFI over the years see: <https://www.globalreporting.org/information/about-gri/governance-bodies/Pages/default.aspx>

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