RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Are we all metascientists now?

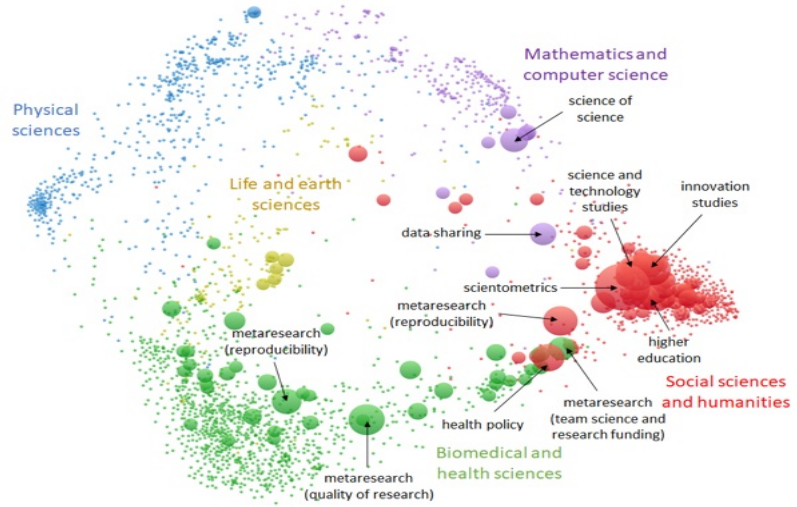
The shifting landscape for research on research

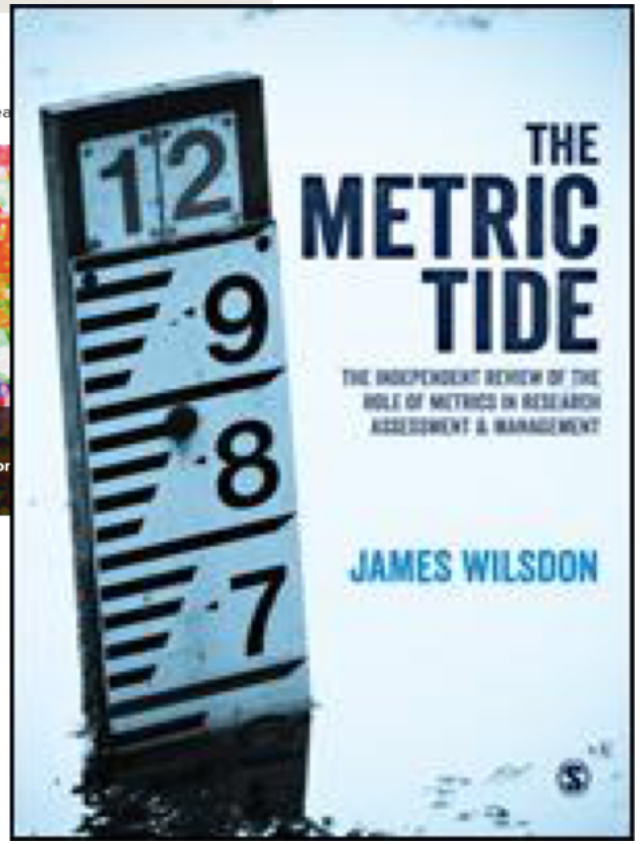
James Wilsdon, RoRI & UCL

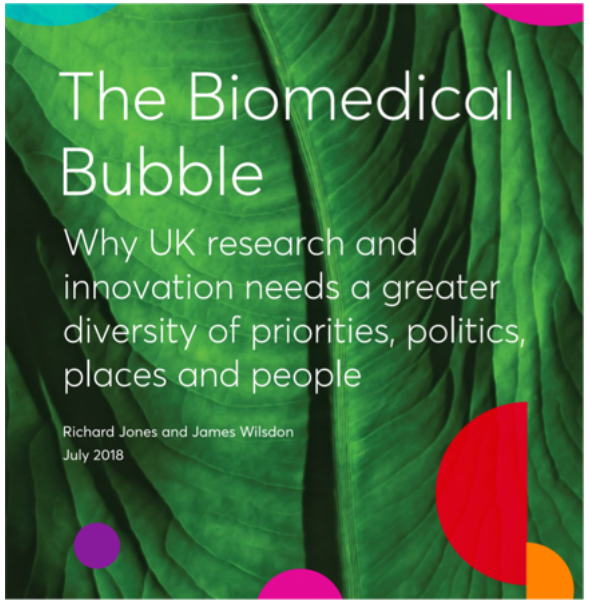
University of Warwick Research Staff Forum

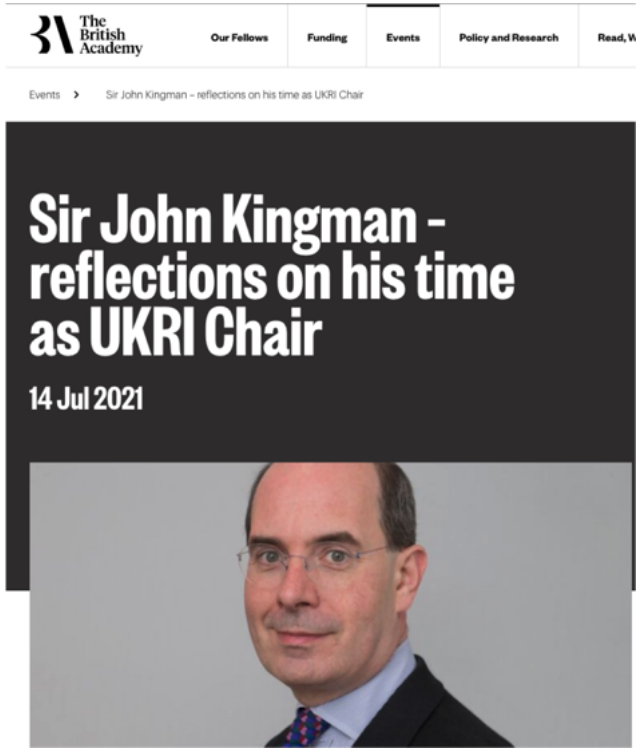
22 February 2024

www.researchonresearch.org









"If I look back on many years of involvement in political decision-making and policy-making around science, innovation and R&D, I am struck by how much of it tends to turn on gut feel of the individuals involved, than on hard evidence and analysis. This is ironic, since good science is all about testing hypotheses against data, empirical results and facts….We should, in short, live by our values!"

Funding opportunity

Pre-announcement: UKRI Metascience research grants

Opportunity status:	Upcoming
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Medical Research Council (MRC), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)
Co-funders:	Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£3,000,000
Publication date:	9 February 2024
Opening date:	To be confirmed
Closing date:	To be confirmed

The Metascience Grants Programme will support projects using scientific methods to deepen our understanding of how different structures, incentives, and funding practices

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Guidance on good research

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JAMES WILSDON | COMMENT | 27/11/23

WONKHE

Government adoption of metascience can make UK research work better and smarter

The science of science policy is a new priority for government. But, as James Wilsdon explains, it is a mature field and a lot of important work is already under way

wonkhe-science-of-science

James Wilsdon

James Wilsdon is professor of research policy at University College London and executive

For keen observers of the science policy scene, the most eye-catching announcement in last week's government response to Nurse 2.0 (or *The Independent Review of the UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape*, to give its formal title) was the launch of a new metascience unit.

RoRI RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Projects Resources Events About Get Involved

We're transforming research systems and cultures

Ensuring that we have the evidence we need to realise the full potential of research.

Projects → About Us →

Unlocking the potential of the US$2.5 trillion invested globally in research.

RoRI aims to unlock more of the potential of the US$2.5 trillion invested globally in research every year. By turning the tools of research back on itself, RoRI generates data and analysis to improve how we fund, practice, evaluate and communicate research.

RoRI RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Research on research

Research on research (also known as meta-research, the science of science and meta-science) is the study of research itself.

It's an evolving discipline that aims to produce evidence on how to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, fairness and impact of research.

Why it's important to us

Wellcome, and the research we support, aims to be a social good. We're acutely aware of the influence we have on research culture and systems. This influence can be used positively to drive change, and we want to help **build a better research culture** – one that is creative, inclusive and honest.

However, our own systems can have unintended consequences – such as sometimes creating a focus on outputs and increased productivity at the expense of how research is achieved. This is often underpinned by the decisions we make and how we make them at the strategic and individual funding level.

Wellcome
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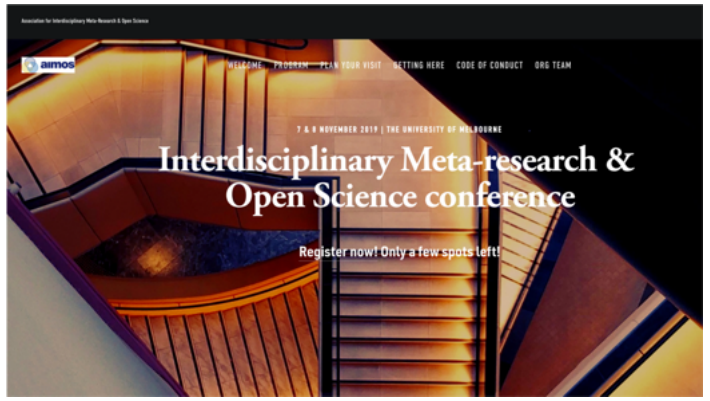
Funders must find new ways to measure excellence and recognise success in its many forms 💡 That's why we've formed the @RoRInstitute to bring together funders across the world to #ReimagineResearch 💫

researchonresearch.org/rori-lanches | @chonnettia | #RoRILaunch

12:10 PM · Sep 30, 2019

Are we all meta-researchers now?



A Vision of Metascience

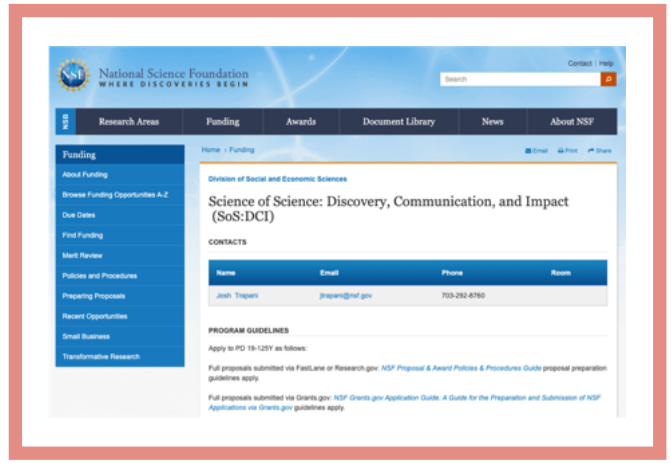
An Engine of Improvement for the Social Processes of Science

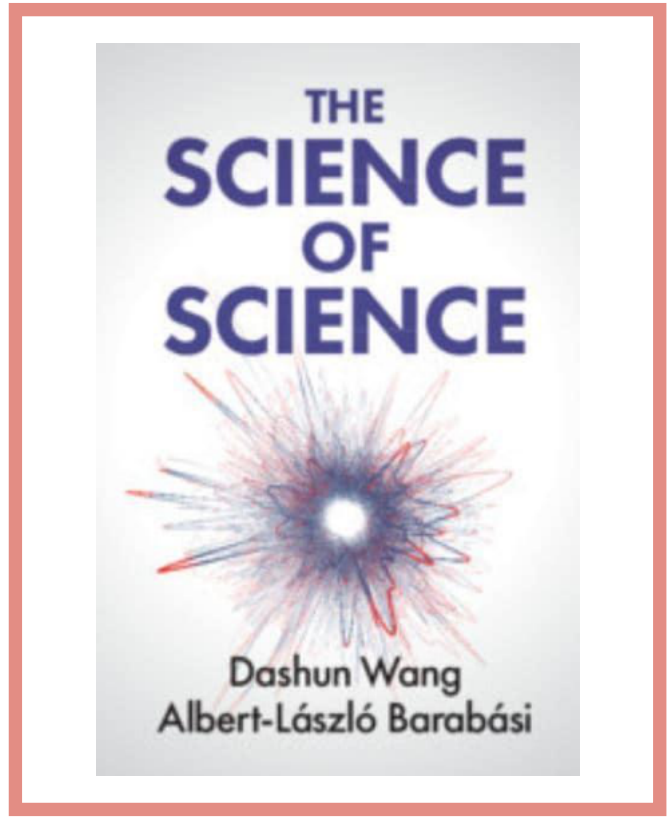
By Michael Nielsen and Kanjun Qiu

October 18, 2022

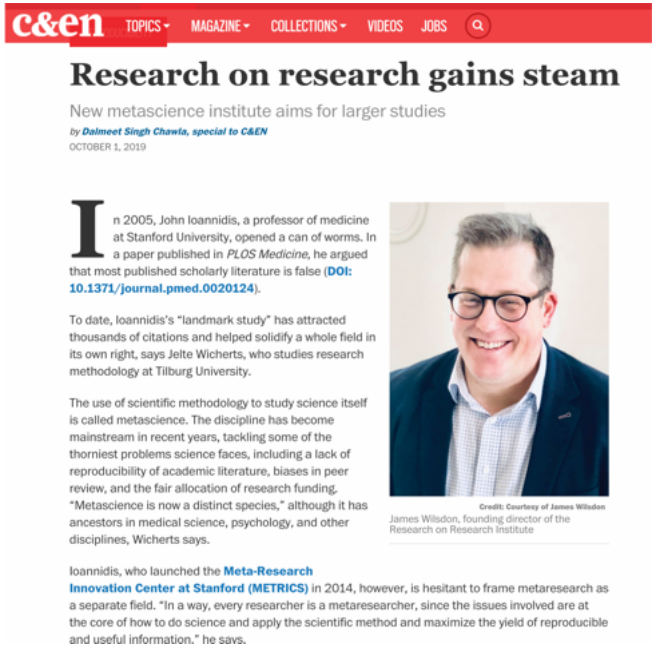
Or meta-scientists?

Scientists of science?





Or researchers on research?



c&en TOPICS MAGAZINE COLLECTIONS VIDEOS JOBS

Research on research gains steam

New metascience institute aims for larger studies

by Dalmeet Singh Chawla, special to C&EN

OCTOBER 1, 2019

In 2005, John Ioannidis, a professor of medicine at Stanford University, opened a can of worms. In a paper published in *PLOS Medicine*, he argued that most published scholarly literature is false (DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.0020124).

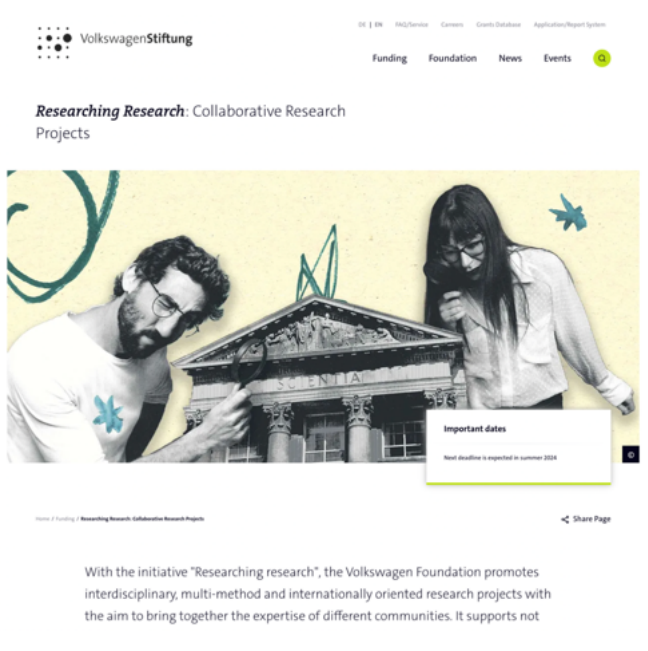
To date, Ioannidis's "landmark study" has attracted thousands of citations and helped solidify a whole field in its own right, says Jelte Wicherts, who studies research methodology at Tilburg University.

The use of scientific methodology to study science itself is called metascience. The discipline has become mainstream in recent years, tackling some of the thorniest problems science faces, including a lack of reproducibility of academic literature, biases in peer review, and the fair allocation of research funding. "Metascience is now a distinct species," although it has ancestors in medical science, psychology, and other disciplines, Wicherts says.

Credit: Courtesy of James Wilsdon

James Wilsdon, founding director of the Research on Research Institute

Ioannidis, who launched the Meta-Research Innovation Center at Stanford (METRICS) in 2014, however, is hesitant to frame metaresearch as a separate field. "In a way, every researcher is a metaresearcher, since the issues involved are at the core of how to do science and apply the scientific method and maximize the yield of reproducible and useful information," he says.



VolkswagenStiftung

Funding Foundation News Events

Researching Research: Collaborative Research Projects

Important dates

Next deadline is expected in summer 2024

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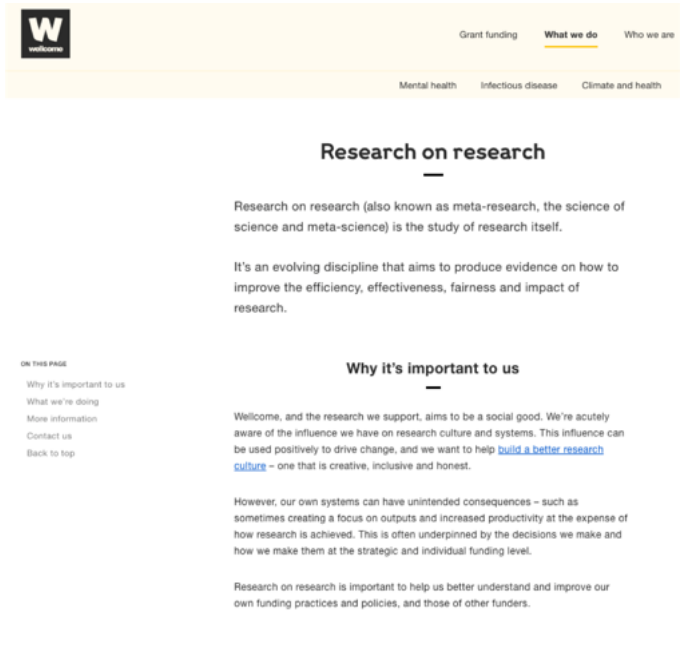
With the initiative "Researching research", the Volkswagen Foundation promotes interdisciplinary, multi-method and internationally oriented research projects with the aim to bring together the expertise of different communities. It supports not



Grant funding What we do Who we are

Mental health Infectious disease Climate and health

Research on research

Research on research (also known as meta-research, the science of science and meta-science) is the study of research itself.

It's an evolving discipline that aims to produce evidence on how to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, fairness and impact of research.

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What we're doing

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Why it's important to us

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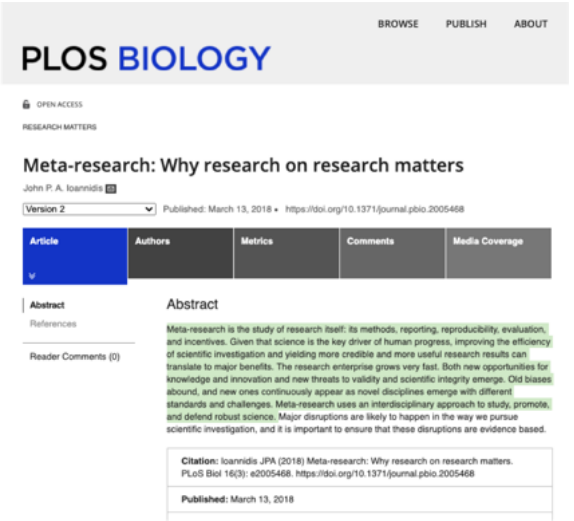
However, our own systems can have unintended consequences – such as sometimes creating a focus on outputs and increased productivity at the expense of how research is achieved. This is often underpinned by the decisions we make and how we make them at the strategic and individual funding level.

Research on research is important to help us better understand and improve our own funding practices and policies, and those of other funders.

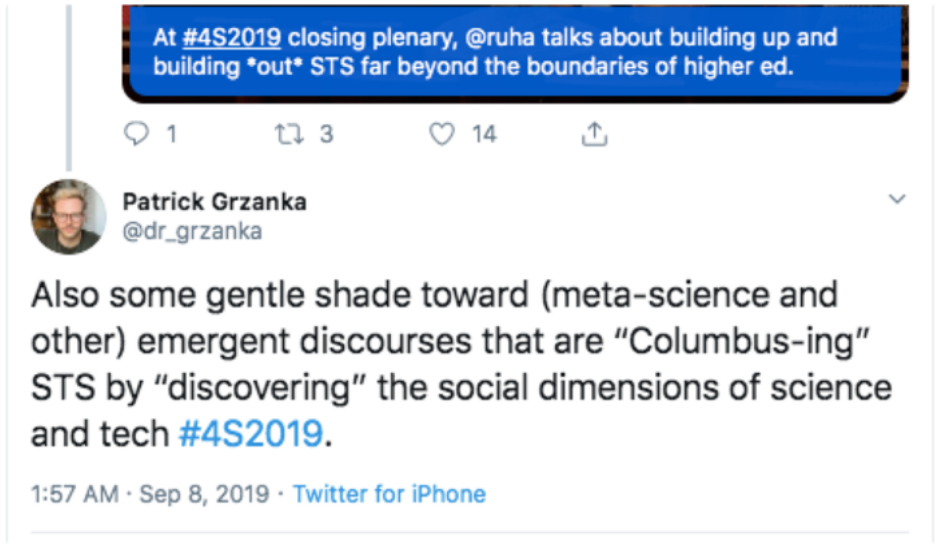
Some definitions….

"…the first comprehensive overview of the 'science of science,' an emerging interdisciplinary field that relies on big data to unveil the reproducible patterns that govern individual scientific careers and the workings of science. "

"Meta-research is the study of research itself: its methods, reporting, reproducibility, evaluation, and incentives…Meta-research uses an interdisciplinary approach to study, promote, and defend robust science."



a “new discipline”?

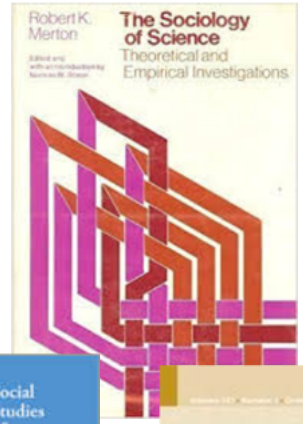


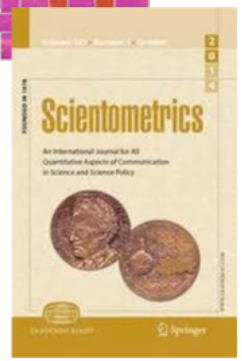
About

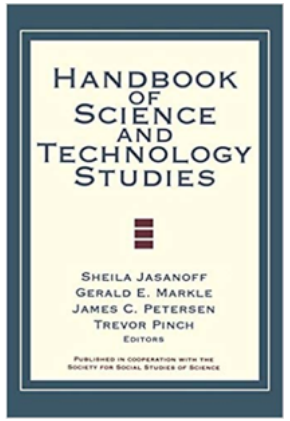
There is a long history of research about the scientific process, particularly with fields such as philosophy of science, sociology of science, and science-technology studies contributing unique insights about how science operates. There is also a growing cadre of researchers deploying modem methodologies and big data to investigate the scientific process.

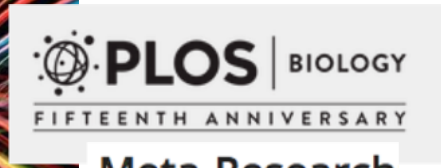
Together, these communities of researchers and stakeholders are the research and development pipeline for improving research practices. The Metascience 2021 meeting is a point of convergence to share knowledge, foster community, and define a roadmap of research and intervention priorities to accelerate science.

Research on research: a rough history!









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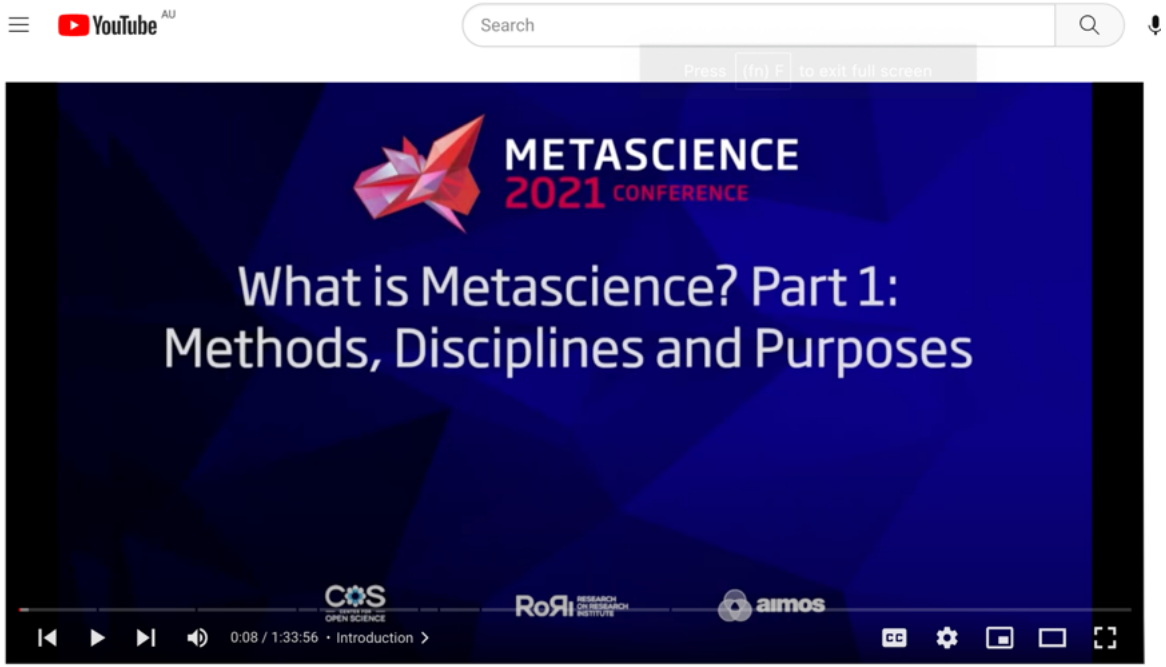

METASCIENCE 2021-9-16 What is Metascience? Part 1

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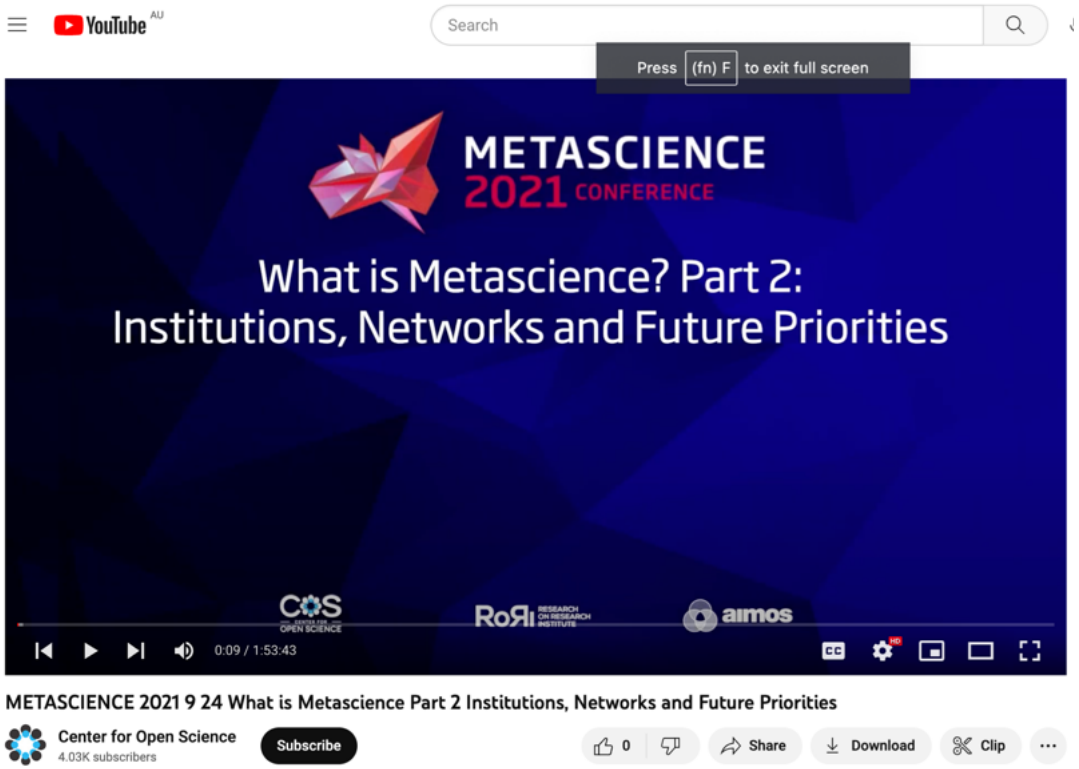

METASCIENCE 2021 9 24 What is Metascience Part 2 Institutions, Networks and Future Priorities

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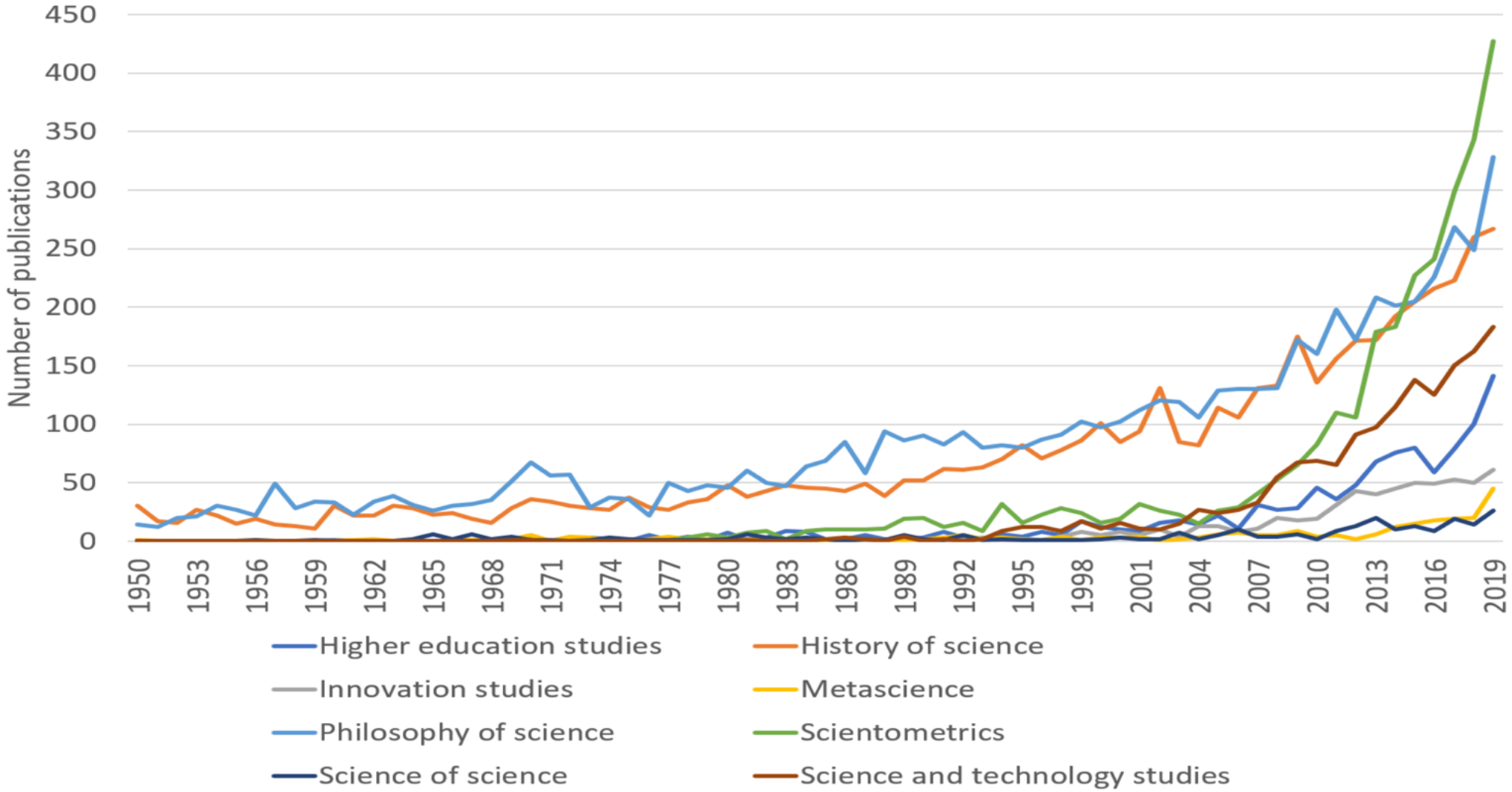
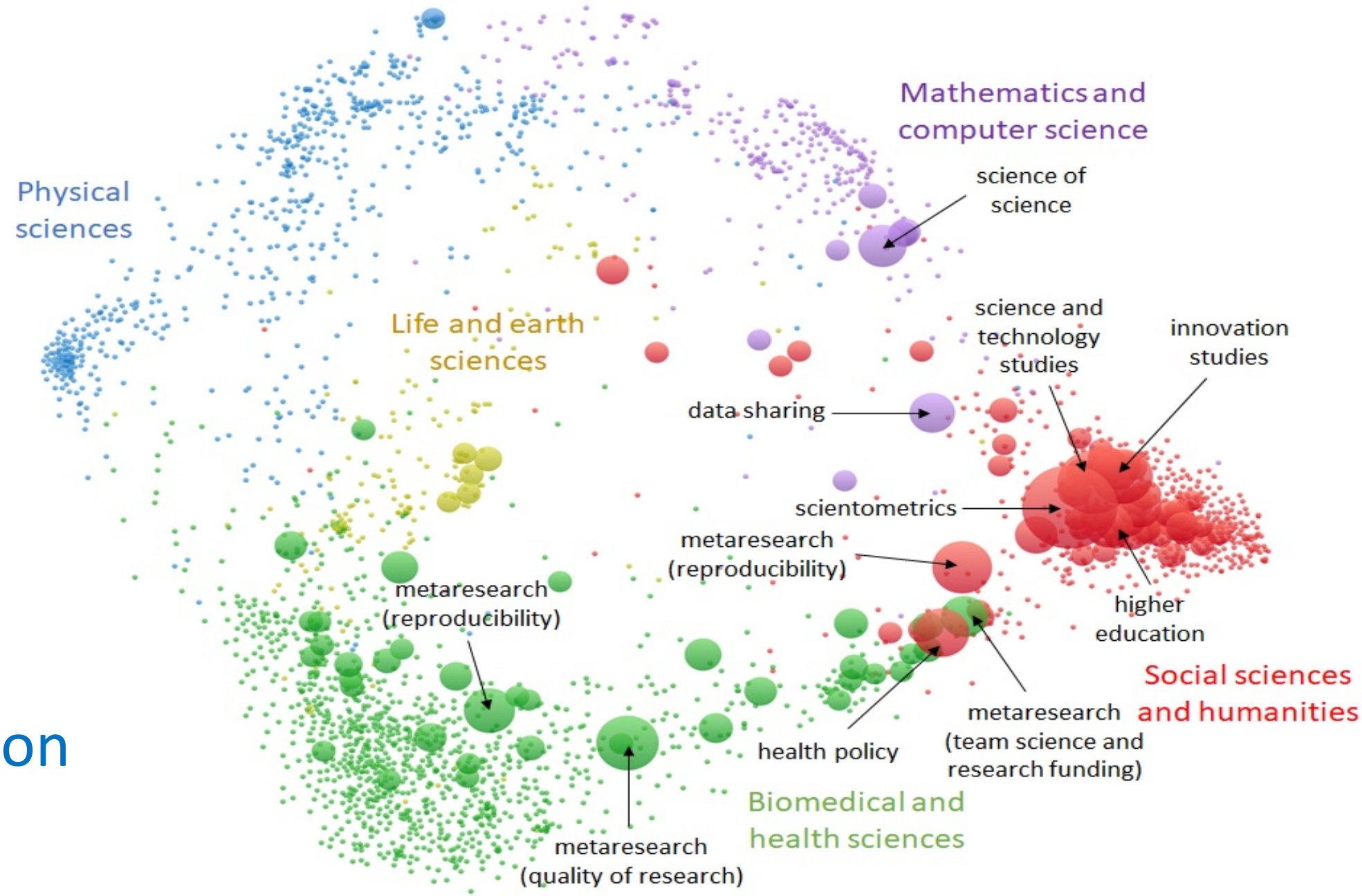


Number of publications in which the field is mentioned in the title or abstract

Mapping research on research



Thursday, 15 June

Can AI predict research impacts?

Join this RoRI seminar to debate whether deep content models should replace citations as a basis for science policy and funding?

By **Research on Research Institute**

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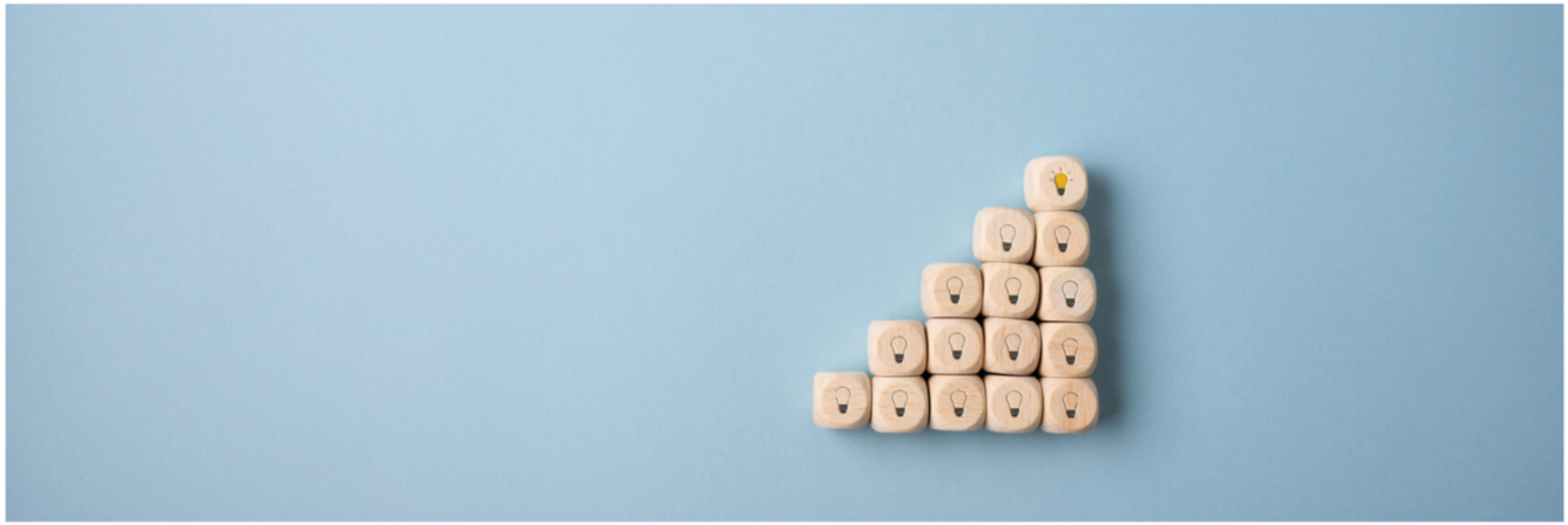
Details

New partners, new projects and a new nonprofit: RoRI embarks on its next five years of research on research

20.06.2022 RORI UPDATES

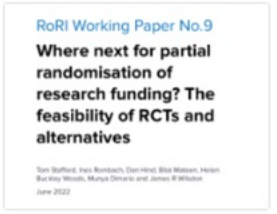


Today marks the start of RoRI's Phase 2. With our international consortium of partners, we're excited to launch another five years of generating, synthesising and translating ideas and evidence into practical solutions to improve research

Scholarly Communication in Times of Crisis

The response of the scholarly communication system to the COVID-19 pandemic

RoRI Funder Data Platform & CRITERIA project overview
Presentation posted on 20.06.2022
Vincent Traag



Where next for partial randomisation of research funding? T…
Preprint posted on 20.06.2022
Tom Stafford

Research on Research Institute: Independent Review of Pilot Phas…
Report posted on 20.06.2022
Ian Carter

The experimental research funder's handbook (Revised …
Report posted on 20.06.2022
Sandra Bendiscioli

A checklist for funder experiments with partial randomisation
Online resource posted on 20.06.2022
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Can we fix it? Are incremental tweaks to research practices, …
Presentation posted on 25.05.2022
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Career pathways in research: the current data landscape (Ro…
Report posted on 18.04.2022
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RoRI Institute

The changing role of funders in responsible research assessme…
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Stephen Curry

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RoRI RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Research on Research Institute: Independent Review of Pilot Phase (2019-2021)

Dr Ian Carter
Director, Carter Research Navigation Ltd
June 2022

"When the RoRI founding partners met for the first time in London, we knew we had a bold vision: to transform the way that research is funded, communicated and evaluated. This vision would only be possible if we worked together with strategic partners around the world to create a trusted and collaborative environment where partners could openly share, experiment and take risks."

Dr Chonnettia Jones, Executive Director, Addgene and Co-Founder of RoRI

RoRI RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Phase 2 structure

Core partners

12-15 research funders, universities and technology providers. Together these partners govern and sustain the core functions of RoRI.

Partnership board
Core partners (including those who are CIC members)
Strategic direction, priorities, management of funds

Sub-committees of Partnership Board
Including Audit & Finance

Executive team
Day-to-day operations and oversight of projects

RoRI research fellows
Lead individuals from within Core Partners
Dedicated time on RoRI projects

RoRI nodes / labs
Smaller nodes or labs hosted by core partners
Operating at national or regional system level

RoRI Ltd
A Community Interest Company (CIC) under UK law. Brings legal and bureaucratic simplification
Holds funds. Owns, manages and preserves infrastructure and other IP. Devolves all other responsibilities to the Partnership Board.

Board of directors
Nominated from CIC members.
Light touch governance: audit, accounts

Infrastructure
Funder Data Platform, FAIRware etc

Project partners
Funders, scholarly communication platforms & publishers; researchers; tech providers.
Ad hoc project participation & support.

International advisory group
Academic, policy, funder & scholarly communication leaders. Source of informal high-level guidance and advice

Associate faculty
Leading researchers from universities and institutions worldwide who collaborate on specific RoRI projects

Gert V Balling, Katrin Milzow and Sarah de Rijcke (Co-Chairs of RoRI)

RoRI Phase 2 Core Partners

Luxembourg National Research Fund

Swiss National Science Foundation

Michael Smith Health Research BC

novo nordisk foundation

VolkswagenStiftung

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

DIGITAL science

Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

UKRI Research England

UCL

CWTS Meaningful metrics

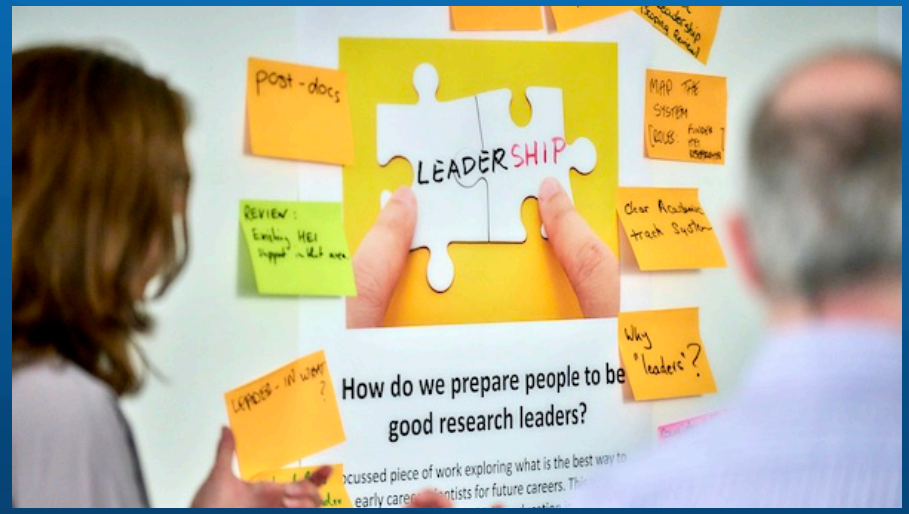
Australian Government Australian Research Council

NWO

wellcome

Projects

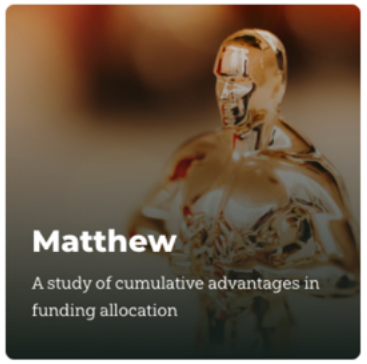
Find out about our flagship current projects for 2023 to 2024 and our pilot projects from 2019 to 2022.



RoRI experiments, translates and transforms

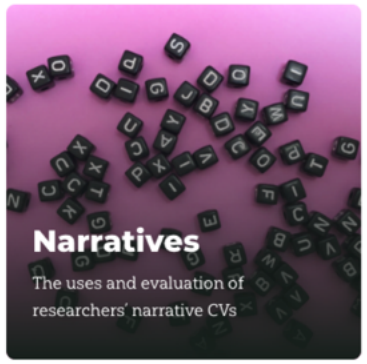
RoRI's methods are highly collaborative. We bring together organisations and people who want to change research for the better, creating space to co-design and deliver transdisciplinary projects, grounded in high-trust relationships with our partners.

Our projects for 2023 and 2024 include:



Matthew

A study of cumulative advantages in funding allocation



Narratives

The uses and evaluation of researchers' narrative CVs

GRAIL

Getting responsible about AI and machine learning in research funding and evaluation

Funder Data Platform

Supporting data-sharing to unlock insights into research funding

AGORRA

A global observatory of responsible research assessment

Undisciplined

Future models of funding and evaluating transdisciplinary research

Peer Review

RoRI Atlas of Peer Review

Portfolios

Research funding landscape analysis

MetaROR

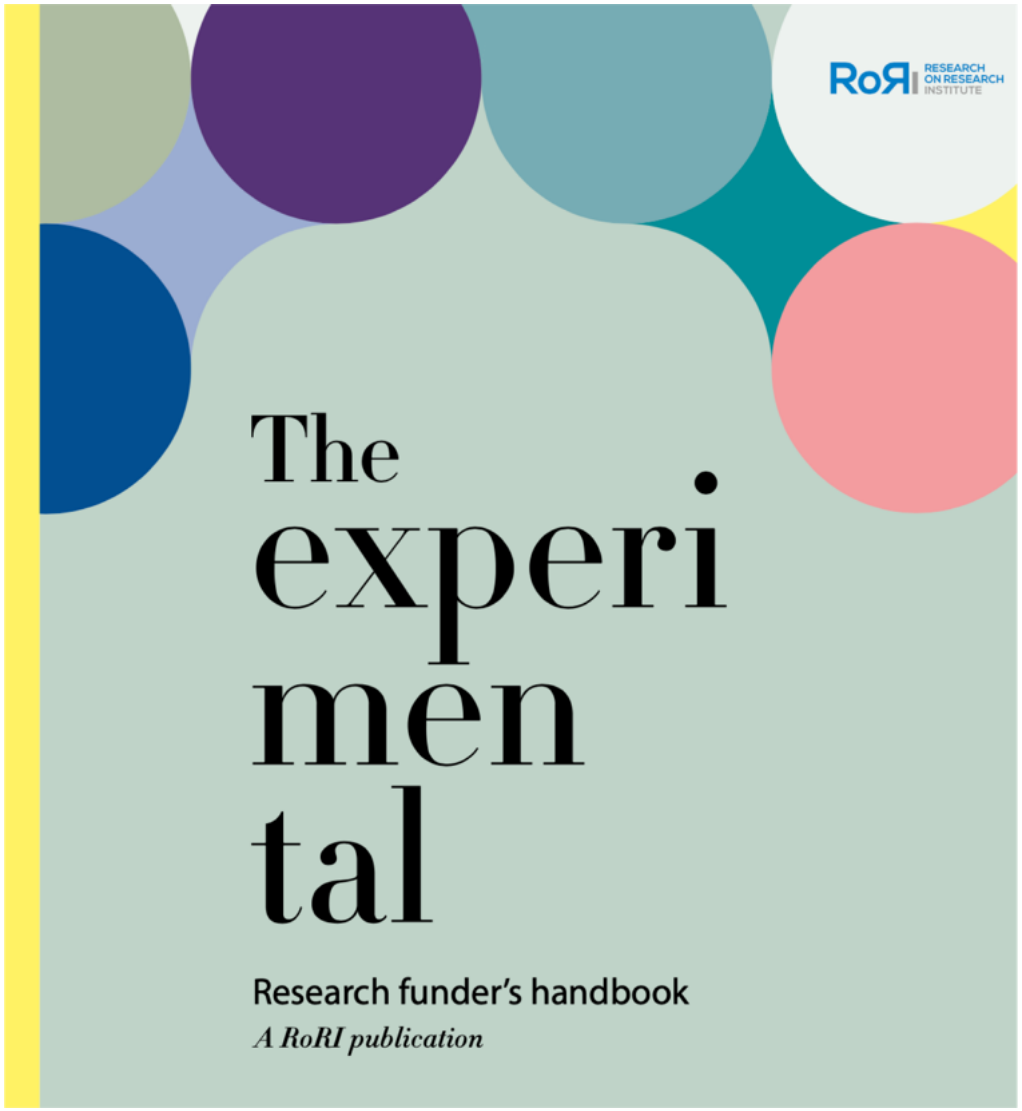
A new platform for metaresearch

AFIRE

Accelerator For Innovation & Research Funding Experimentation

3 examples of RoRI projects

1) Funder experiments
2) Future of peer review
3) Funder Data Platform



The experimental research funder's handbook

It can be challenging to trial novel methods of funding allocation and evaluation but a growing number of funders are now engaged in such experiments. Peer networks (such as SPA-MEL and RoRI) offer support in sharing lessons and insights into these methods.

There is a need for more robust experimental studies, with defined baselines and controls—ideally involving multiple funders. The potential of early pilots by a small number of funders will not be realised if these don't mature into more ambitious experiments which can generate a compelling evidence base for the pros and cons, opportunities and limitations of specific interventions.

VolkswagenStiftung

Experiment! In search of bold research ideas

Swiss National Science Foundation

Postdoc.Mobility Fellowships

FWF Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

1000 Ideas Programme

hrc nz

Explorer Grants

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Funding Foundation Events News & Press DE

Funding → Our Funding Portfolio at a Glance → Experiment! – In search of bold research ideas (completed)

Experiment! – In search of bold research ideas (completed)

- area of research: science and engineering, life sciences
- type of funding: research projects
- up to 120,000 Euro (flexible use)
- up to 18 months
- postdoctoral researchers and professors in Germany, optionally international partners
- short application; anonymized jury selection plus lottery (test phase)
- additional benefits: funding for communication of science and research

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Comment > The British Academy is trialling a new, fairer method of selecting it...

The British Academy is trialling a new, fairer method of selecting its Small Research Grants - here's why

by Professor Simon Swain FBA

7 SEP 2022

For academics in SHAPE disciplines (social sciences, humanities and the arts for people and the environment/economy), securing research funding is a brilliant achievement. But finding the time to apply is tough, as I heard at a recent British Academy funded grant-writing workshop in Leicester. Assessors like me can also find it challenging to carve out the time needed for our part of the job.

The international journal of science / 22 September 2022

nature

The case for lotteries as a tiebreaker in research funding

More funders should consider using randomization to choose grant recipients when decisions are too close to call.

Earlier this month, the British Academy, the United Kingdom's national academy for humanities and social sciences, introduced an innovative process for awarding small research grants. The academy will use the equivalent of a lottery to decide between funding applications that its grant-review panels consider to be equal on other criteria, such as the quality of research methodology and study design.

Using randomization to decide between grant applications is relatively new, and the British Academy is in a small group of funders to trial it, led by the Volkswagen

> **Deciding who to fund by entering applicants into a lottery**

Deciding who to fund by entering tie-breaker applicants into a lottery is one way to reduce unfairness. The fix isn't perfect: studies show that biases still exist during grant review[1,2]. But biases, such as recognizing more senior researchers, people with recognizable names, or people at better-known institutions, are more likely to creep in and influence the final decision when cases are too close to call.

It is good to see research-informed innovation in grant-giving – even a decade ago, it is highly unlikely that lotteries would have become part of the conversation. That they have now, is in large part down to research, and in particular to findings from studies of research funding. Funders must monitor the impact of their changes – assessing in particular whether lotteries have increased the diversity of applicants or made changes to reviewer workload. At the same time, researchers (and funders) need to test other models for grant allocation. One such model is what researchers call 'egalitarian' funding, by which grants are distributed more equally and less competitively[3].

Innovating, testing and evaluating are all crucial to reducing bias in grant-giving. Using lotteries to decide in tie-breaker cases is a promising start.

1. Graves, B., Barnett, A. G. & Clarke, P. *BMJ* **343**, d4797 (2011).
2. Fogelholm, M. *et al. J. Clin. Epidemiol.* **65**, 47–52 (2012).
3. Vaesen, K. & Katzav, J. *PLoS ONE* **12**, e0183967 (2017).

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Research Culture

Strategic Plan 2023-2028

A partially randomised approach to internal funding allocation

A pilot by the University of Leeds' Research Culture team

Written by

Prof Cat Davies, Dean for Research Culture

Holly Ingram FHEA, Research Culture Project Manager

November 2023

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REVIEW

Where next for partial randomisation of research funding? The feasibility of RCTs and alternatives [version 1; peer review: 2 approved, 1 approved with reservations]

Tom Stafford, Ines Rombach, Dan Hind, Bilal Mateen, Helen Buckley Woods, Munya Dimario, James Wilsdon

Abstract

We outline essential considerations for any study of partial randomisation of research funding, and consider scenarios in which randomised controlled trials (RCTs) would be feasible and appropriate. We highlight the interdependence of target outcomes, sample availability and statistical power for determining the cost and feasibility of a trial. For many choices of target outcome, RCTs may be less practical and more expensive than they at first appear (in large part due to issues pertaining to sample size and statistical power). As such, we briefly discuss alternatives to RCTs. It is worth noting that many of the considerations relevant to experiments on partial randomisation may also apply to other potential experiments on funding processes (as described in The Experimental Research Funder's Handbook. RoRI, June 2022).

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✓ ✓ ?

	1	2	3
VERSION 1 17 Jul 23	✓ view	✓ view	? view

1. **Becky Ioppolo**, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England, UK
2. **Rachel Heyard**, University of Zurich, Zürich, Switzerland
3. **Merle Jacob**, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

Comments on this article

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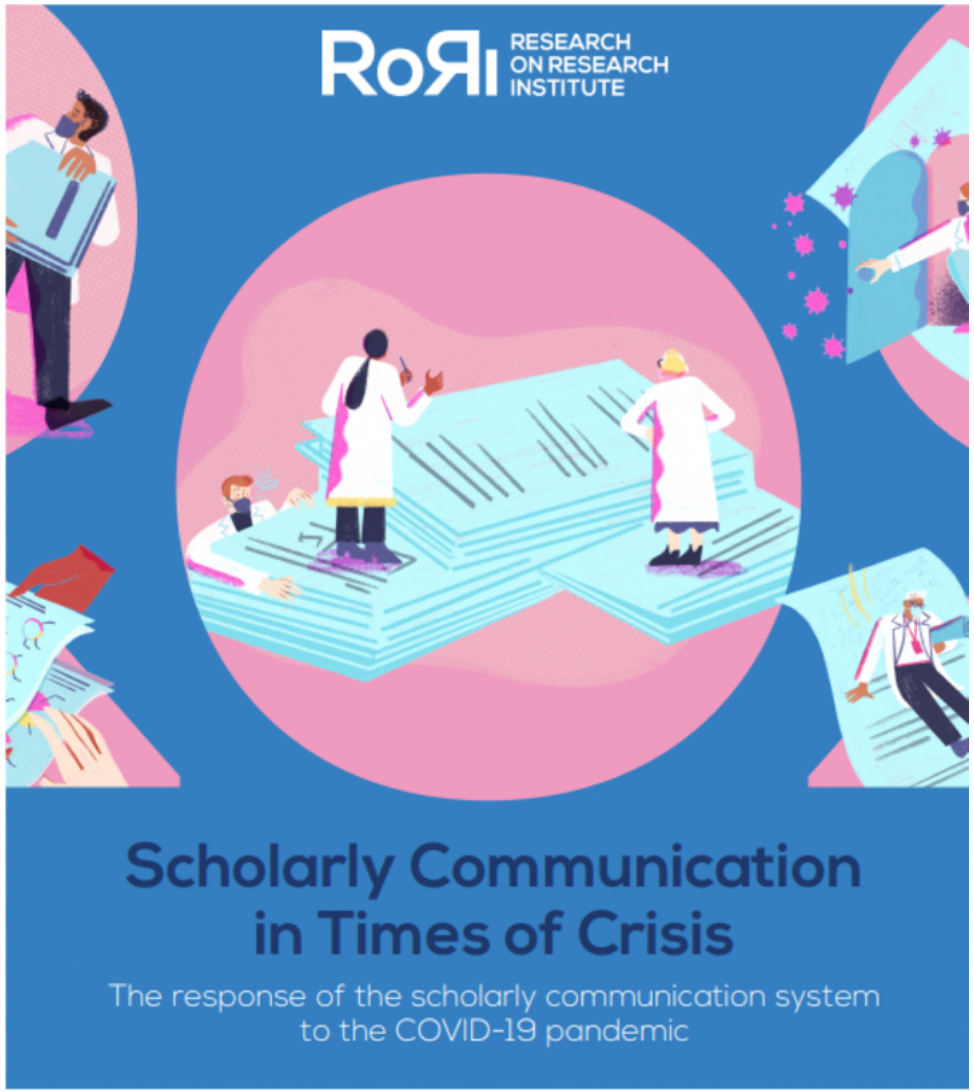

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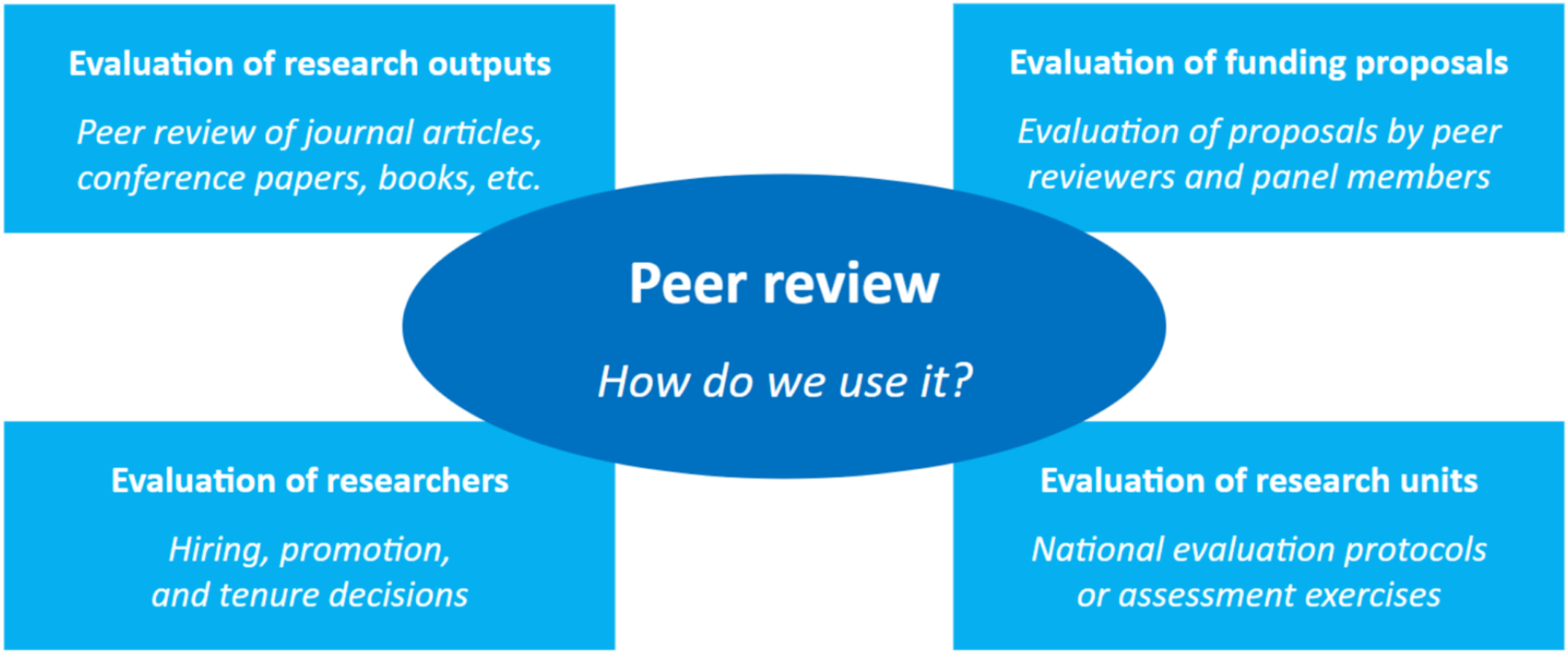
How to improve scientific peer review: Four schools of thought

Ludo Waltman, Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner, Stephen Pinfield, Helen Buckley Woods

First published: 27 April 2023 | https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1544

Abstract

Peer review plays an essential role as one of the cornerstones of the scholarly publishing system. There are many initiatives that aim to improve the way in which peer review is organized, resulting in a highly complex landscape of innovation in peer review. Different initiatives are based on different views on the most urgent challenges faced by the peer review system, leading to a diversity of perspectives on how the system can be improved. To provide a more systematic understanding of the landscape of innovation in peer review, we suggest that the landscape is shaped by four schools of thought: The Quality & Reproducibility school, the Democracy & Transparency school, the Equity & Inclusion school, and the Efficiency & Incentives school. Each school has a different view on the key problems of the peer review system and the innovations necessary to address these


Evaluation of research outputs
Peer review of journal articles, conference papers, books, etc.
Evaluation of funding proposals
Evaluation of proposals by peer reviewers and panel members
Peer review
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Learning from and building on related innovations in open research…

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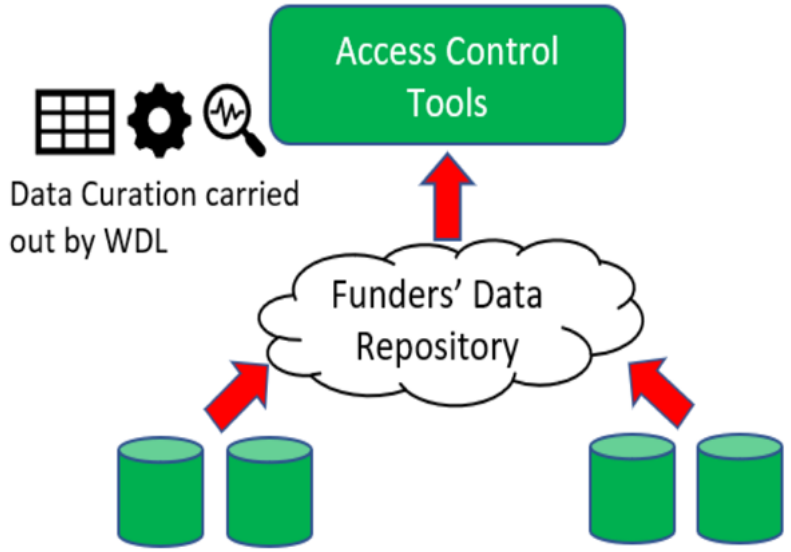
CRITERIA_WellcomeTrust	Wellcome Trust	2021-12-16	11.3	csv
NNF application data	Novo Nordisk Foundation	2021-12-14	36.0	json



Matthew

A study of cumulative advantages in funding allocation

Summary Outputs Related projects

Summary

The Matthew effect is one of the most widely discussed phenomena in research funding. Coined in 1968 by Robert K. Merton, and developed by Harriet Zuckerman, the term comes from the Parable of the Talents in the Bible, and can be summed up as "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In a scientific context, Merton defined it as "the accruing of greater increments of recognition for particular scientific contributions to scientists of considerable repute and the withholding of such recognition from scientists who have not yet made their mark."

Recent studies have highlighted complex dynamics at play in Matthew effects. The **MATTHEW project** will use data from RoRI partners to explore whether review processes are functioning as expected or are influenced by inappropriate factors. This work will support efforts to improve diversity and inclusion in research cultures, and is relevant to ongoing debates over the effects of funding on research career trajectories.

We propose to replicate two recent studies of Matthew effects using data from multiple funders.

The first study (Bol et al., 2018) finds that researchers who have early success in winning funding have a greater chance of accumulating subsequent grants and continuing an academic career, compared to researchers who narrowly miss out on funding. This calls into question the effectiveness of funding allocation processes and their

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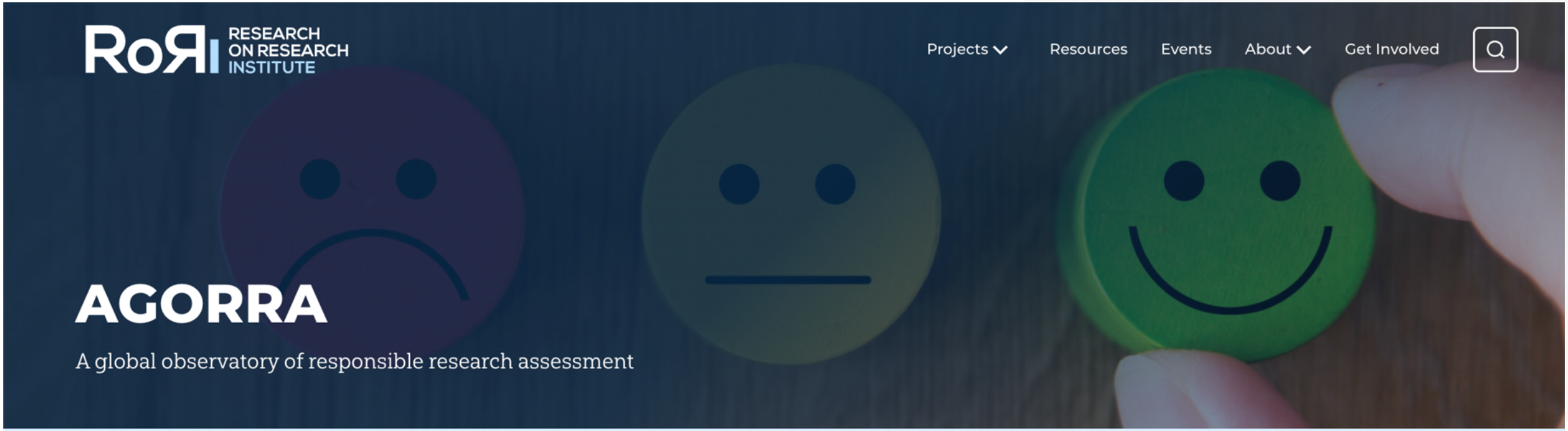

AGORRA

A global observatory of responsible research assessment

Summary Outputs Related projects

Summary

Less than a year after **it started rolling**, the **CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment)** convoy is gathering speed. The tally of organisational signatories to its underpinning **Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment** is rising by dozens each week.

In May 2023, **DORA (The Declaration on Research Assessment)**—on whose foundations CoARA builds—marked its 10th anniversary with a series of workshops around the world. And at a national level, we've seen a sharper focus on these agendas in light of ongoing or proposed

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Harnessing the Metric Tide

indicators, infrastructures and priorities for responsible research assessment in the UK

STEPHEN CURRY, ELIZABETH GADD AND JAMES WILSDON

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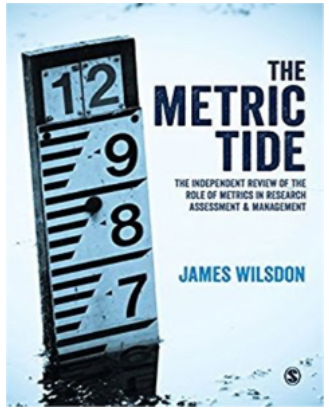

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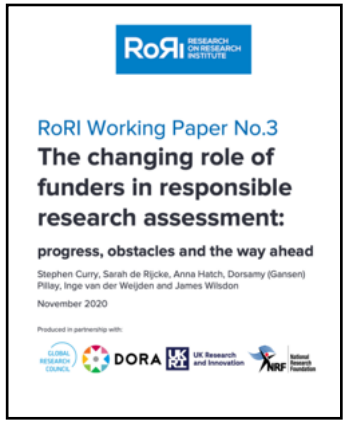

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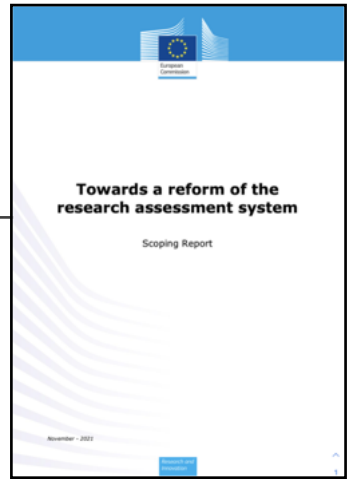

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CoARA

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Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

Our vision is that the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations recognises the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. This requires basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.

The Agreement

Based on 10 commitments, establishes a common direction for research assessment reform, while respecting organisations' autonomy. The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment sets a shared direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing organisations, with the overarching goal to maximise the quality and impact of research

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EDITORIAL | 27 July 2022

Support Europe's bold vision for responsible research assessment

There have been many initiatives to combat the distorting effect of research assessment exercises. The latest looks like it might work

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The Future of Research Evaluation: A Synthesis of Current Debates and Developments

May 2023

Policy for Science

LEADING AUTHORING INSTITUTION

The InterAcademy Partnership (IAP)

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A question widely debated by stakeholders around the world is whether current research evaluation systems are effective in identifying high-quality research and in supporting the advancement of science. Over recent years, concerns have risen about the limitations and potential biases of traditional evaluation metrics which often fail to capture the full range of research impact and quality. Consequently there has been an increased demand by

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Plans for REF 2028 should be debated, not throttled

Moves against emphasis on culture are mistaken, say Stephen Curry, Elizabeth Gadd and James Wilsdon

Comment on this article

When the proposals for the next Research Excellence Framework were published in June, reactions were broadly positive.

In the past five years, the acute problems in research cultures have received steadily more attention from university leaders, policymakers and funders. REF 2028's increased attention to people, culture and environment offered a route to tackling these concerns, rebalancing incentives towards the collective and collaborative aspects of a healthy, dynamic and fair research system.

Yet as summer edged into autumn, in some quarters that confidence seems to have collapsed. Critics are circling the REF 2028 proposals, hoping to dilute or scrap them altogether, in favour of the status quo.

20 Oct 23, 07:00

By Stephen Curry, Elizabeth Gadd and James Wilsdon

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A pragmatic approach to people, culture and environment measures in the next REF

COMMENT | 22/11/23

With consultation ongoing over an increased emphasis on research culture in the next REF, Christina Boswell offers reassurance that it can be done rigorously and effectively

Image: Shutterstock

Christina Boswell

Christina Boswell is Vice Principal for Research and Enterprise at the University of Edinburgh

The proposal for the 2028 Research Excellence Framework to devote a quarter of the score to "People, Culture and Environment" (PCE) has generated much debate across the sector.

Concerns have focused on the lack of an agreed definition of "research culture", how it is to be measured and assessed, and the relatively short time frame for implementing the new statement.

Many have also questioned whether the REF is the appropriate mechanism for

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People, Culture and Environment update January 2024

The REF Steering Group is pleased to announce an update on the development of approaches to the assessment of People, Culture and Environment (PCE) in the next REF exercise.

A project has now been commissioned with Technopolis and CRAC-Vitae in collaboration with a number of sector organisations, which will develop indicators to be used for the assessment of PCE. The project team will engage extensively with the research community to co-develop a shortlist of indicators to be used to evidence and support institutions' PCE submissions as part of a structured questionnaire for REF submissions.

Given the decision to extend the timeframe of the REF to 2029, there is an opportunity for more in-depth testing of the indicators developed through the commissioned PCE indicators project. The REF Steering Group is therefore also announcing a pilot exercise which will involve drafting of example PCE submissions by a sample of higher education institutions (HEIs) for assessment by pilot panels in a selected number of Units of Assessment (UoAs).

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National Centre for Research Culture

"When it comes to research culture, universities are not islands, they are part of a larger community. To improve research culture, universities and their partners must coordinate, cooperate and share their good practices. To help achieve this, the University of Warwick has established the National Centre for Research Culture, for the benefit of the entire UK research community."

- Professor Sotaro Kita, Director of the National Centre for Research Culture and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Infrastructures and institution-building

Buoyed by the funding, in 2013 Nosek left the University of Virginia to start the Center for Open Science. This may seem strange: why not keep it at the university? But as we've seen the work of the COS was not social psychology in the conventional sense. Rather, Nosek was something else, a *metascience entrepreneur*, working to achieve a scalable change in the social processes of science. Setting the COS up independently gave them freedom to operate in ways difficult in a conventional academic environment. For instance, in many universities it would be difficult and slow to hire the designers and programmers needed to develop infrastructure such as OSF and Registered Reports. Nosek estimated to us that roughly 1-in-5 of the COS staff could be considered researchers in anything like the conventional sense. The repeated objection when attempting to make such hires in an academic environment is "that's-not-really-science". It's ironic, in retrospect: Nosek and the COS are having tremendous impact on psychology, as a consequence of placing metascience at the core of their practice. It's a more expansive view of what a scientist can be.

Michael Nielsen & Kanjung Qiu "A vision of metascience"

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