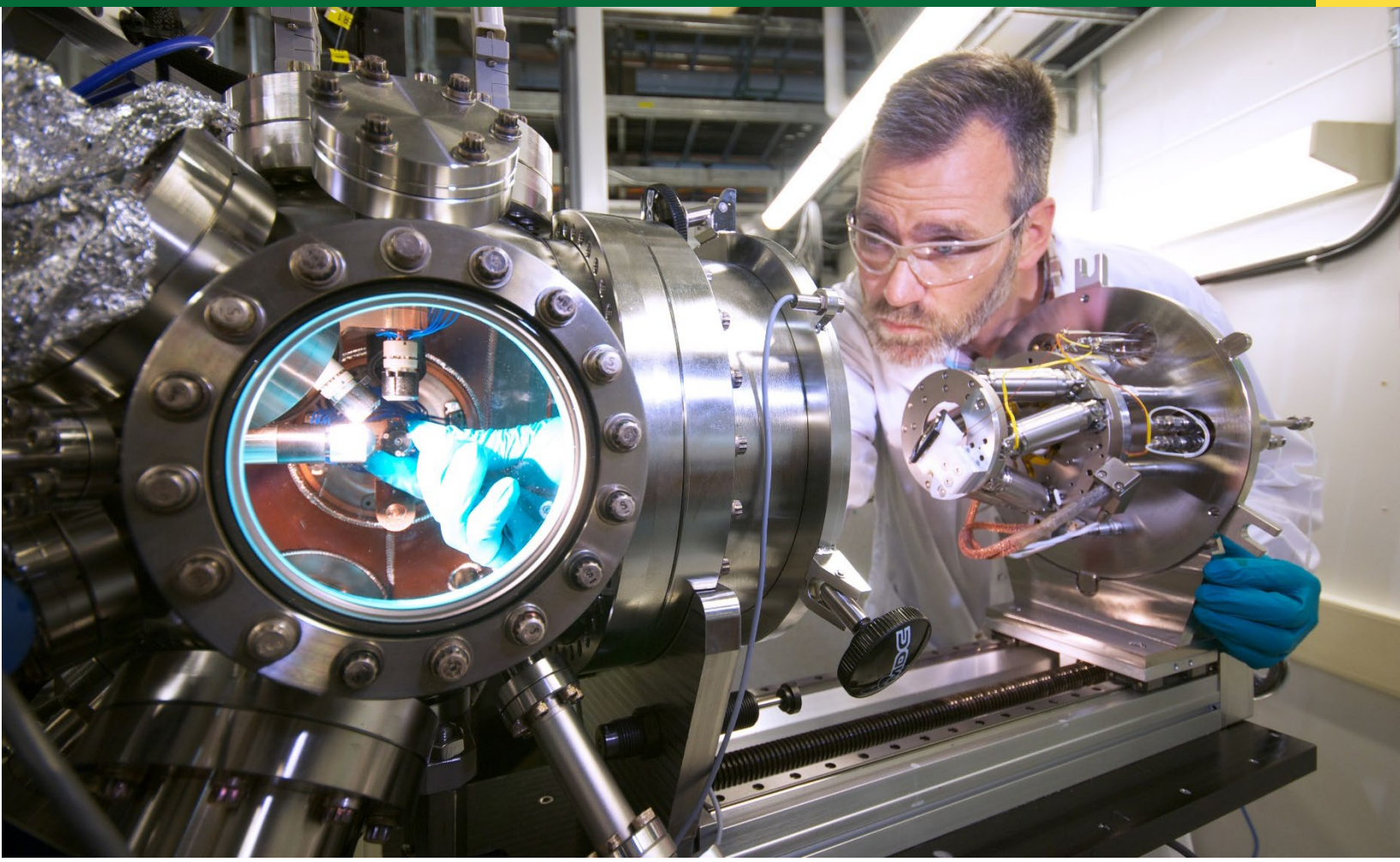
Saskatchewan's International Research Partnerships Framework



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Saskatchewan

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Introduction

Saskatchewan recognizes the importance and value of research partnerships in the post-secondary sector. Research partnerships play a critical role in innovation, growth, knowledge transfer and creates the potential for research commercialization. By combining expertise, research partnerships create the opportunity to solve more complex problems, enhance the quality of work and identify different ways to approach the issue. Research partnerships that support *Saskatchewan's Growth Plan* are of particular value to the Government of Saskatchewan.

The majority of research partnerships are created for the betterment of society; however, there may be risks involved with research and innovation, including theft, interference, or unwanted transfer of knowledge and materials which results in outcomes individuals and teams do not intend. It is important to be aware of potential research security risks and to take the necessary steps and precautions to ensure your work is protected and secure. To mitigate this risk, the Government of Saskatchewan has created a research framework for post-secondary institutions in the province. This framework aligns with the Government of Canada's *National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships*, as well as Saskatchewan post-secondary institution principles.

As the world opens post-pandemic, increased mobility and global engagement may result in a higher number of international research partnerships. Post-secondary institutions will need to evaluate these partnerships in an ever-changing global environment as they access funding for research.

Background

In July of 2021, the federal government released the *National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships* (the Guidelines). Researchers are strongly encouraged to assess all research partnerships with any partner or funder, to protect their work. Additionally, the federal government announced that the Guidelines will be applied to federal research partnership funding starting with all applications to the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada's (NSERC) Alliance grants involving a private sector organization partner. It can be expected that the federal government will expand the lens of the Guidelines to include additional research projects in the future.

In Saskatchewan, as in other provinces, post-secondary institutions have instituted a variety of policies and practices to ensure oversight and accountability in their research projects. These policies detail the expectations and processes researchers are expected to follow to ensure safe and ethical research practices.

Vision

Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions are able to explore and engage in new research partnerships while ensuring the safety of intellectual property, national security and the integrity of the province.

Principles

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes the importance of post-secondary research partnerships and the value these agreements bring to the institution, the province and Canada. With its world-class research institutes, Saskatchewan's impact is often felt internationally, and therefore, thinking beyond local and provincial benefits is important. In the interest of safeguarding research while maintaining the high quality of research performed within Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions, the following principles are considered:

1. **Academic Freedom:**
   Post-secondary institutions are able to conduct research in an academic environment free from undue influence or limitations to explore the area of interest.

2. **Institutional Autonomy:**
   Post-secondary institutions are able to establish their own set of priorities and policies for teaching and research, as outlined in provincial legislation.

3. **Freedom of Expression:**
   Freedom of expression provided through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows for the open exchange of information and ideas.

4. **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:**
   Freedom from discrimination is a human right necessary for research. Allowing for everyone regardless of background or identity, culture, ideas or viewpoints to participate in research will allow for innovative solutions.

5. **Research in the Public Interest:**
   Post-secondary institutions produce valuable research that improves quality of life and supports growth and innovation. To protect researchers and society, the risks associated with the research and the outcomes from this research need to be carefully considered.

6. **Transparency:**
   Post-secondary institutions should have a fully transparent and reciprocal sharing of methodologies, data and outcomes, while also ensuring confidentially.

   When collaborating with third parties such as businesses, government, not-for-profits, *etc.*, transparency needs to be balanced by confidentiality.

7. **Integrity:**
   Researchers must follow the best research practices honestly, accountably, openly and fairly in the search for knowledge. This includes following guidance on ethical conduct of research, accountable financial administration, owning intellectual property and declaration of conflicts of interest.

8. **Intellectual Property:**
   Post-secondary institutions should clearly state the rights on the development and ownership of intellectual property of any kind throughout the lifecycle of the research project.

9. **Collaboration:**
   Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to participate in research collaboration with those who share common goals and values to support the flow of information and learnings.

10. **Research Ethics:**
    All research should be conducted in an ethical manner. Research involving humans must be conducted in compliance with the current version of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Research involving animals can only be carried out at institutions accredited by the Canadian Council on Animal Care.

11. **Research Data Management:**
    Research that contains sensitive or the potential for dual use may require additional measures to ensure the integrity of data is not compromised. Researchers should incorporate good physical and cyber security practices and infrastructure.

12. **Confidentiality:**
    Researchers must respect and maintain the confidentiality of research conducted with third parties where there is a contractual obligation to protect intellectual property or protect the privacy of research participants.

13. **Control goods:**
    Control goods are goods, including the parts and technical data that have military or national security significance. These goods are controlled domestically by the Government of Canada and defined in the *Defence Production Act.* Anyone who deals with controlled goods or controlled technology in Canada is required to register with the Controlled Goods Directorate. Controlled Goods requires researchers to restrict access to technology or information. This limits researchers from sharing in open literature as well the personnel and training that can be involved in a project.

Risk Assessment

Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions are able to explore and engage in new research partnerships while ensuring the safety of intellectual property, national security and the integrity of the province.

In order to protect institutional research, as well as identify and mitigate potential risk, the Government of Saskatchewan has developed a risk assessment to be applied to all international research partnerships. The purpose of this assessment is to enable researchers to weigh the risks associated with the partnership versus the potential benefit. In the cases where a partnership is

deemed to have higher risk, the researcher should consider the appropriate mitigation measures, up to and including declining the partnership. This process can be time consuming and require a variety of resources. These resources are available at the post-secondary education institution level, as well as at the provincial and federal levels. Taking the time to assess the risks at the beginning of the partnership process will result in a research partnership based on transparency, shared interests and mutual benefits.

Foreign governments, militaries, their proxies and other organizations may seek to exploit research partnerships to access research information (e.g., data), materials, research knowledge and the resulting intellectual property and technology to facilitate unwanted knowledge transfer. Even when the ultimate intention of the researchers involved may be open knowledge sharing and publication, research partnerships may be exploited in a way that provides privileged and unauthorized access to their research before it is ready to be shared and could compromise sensitive information or research knowledge that is not intended to be publicly available.

These guidelines are intended to help prevent foreign interference, espionage and unwanted knowledge transfer that could contribute to advancements in the military, security and intelligence capabilities of states or groups that pose a threat to Canada or that may enable the disruption of the Canadian economy, society and critical infrastructure.

Unwanted knowledge transfers can also affect the integrity of Canada's research ecosystem by undermining established and shared research practices that include behaving honestly, accountably, openly, and fairly in the search for and in the dissemination of knowledge to the mutual and reciprocal benefit of all partners involved.

Considerations

When engaging in an international research project, a risk assessment should be undertaken based on what and who.

What – Research Area
Review the scope of the research.

- Is there potential for military and civilian applications that can be considered dual-use or sensitive? For further details, please see the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships up-to-date list.
- Could it be used to advance a foreign state's military, intelligence or surveillance capabilities or undermine Canada's national security interests?
- Can it negatively impact Canada's ability to identify and respond to threats, or disrupt the Canadian economy, society or critical infrastructure?
- Could it be used to support unwanted data access, material or knowledge transfer (both physical and digital) that may be outside the scope of the project?
- Does your research partner demonstrate respect for academic freedom?
- Does your research partner conduct research in the public interest?

- Are intellectual property considerations articulated in your partnership agreement?
- How and who will the information, materials, research and/or technology be shared with?
- Does the partner require access to sensitive facilities, IT systems and information or data?

Who – Partners
What are your partners' goals and objectives for shared outcomes?

- Is there risk in transferring the knowledge to a foreign government, military, proxy or other organizations and/or individual(s) which may harm Canada's national security interests?
- Is the partner state-owned or subject to state-influence?
- Do they lack autonomy and independence?
- Are there policies and/or laws that compel technology transfer to a foreign state?
- Is there information that suggests that your partner organization, their parent organization, and/or their subsidiaries/affiliates may have been associated with groups or organizations that could pose a risk to provincial or national security?
- Is there an offer of funding where the ultimate source of the money and/or value to the funder is unclear?
- Have you been asked not to report some/all activities to your institution and/or not to adhere to your institution's policies and practices?

Risk Mitigation

Researchers should identify all risks and apply measures that can minimize any national security implications to protect both the research and any outcomes. A risk mitigation plan will decrease the likelihood of negative outcomes.

Measures to Mitigate Risk

- Strong research team.
- Implement solid and efficient communication strategies.
- Establish an accountability and transparency strategy.
- Address and agree to intellectual property requirements of each partner.
- Assess and align your partners' motivations.
- Ensure sound cybersecurity and data management practices.
- Training, including research security, cyber security and intellectual property for research staff, students and staff on national security issues and their relation to science and research.
- Have legal counsel review and modify proposed contracts to ensure compliance with Canadian and International Law.
- Have agreements that are legally binding in Canada and the international partner's country and signed by all parties.
- Agreement on the intended use of findings, including any commitments to open science, open data and open publication.
- Cyclical review and assessment of risks throughout the project.

Conclusion

Saskatchewan supports international research partnerships to foster and create innovative solutions to complex issues. By considering the principles and completing a risk assessment prior to engaging in international partnership agreements, post-secondary institutions can mitigate the national security issues and safeguard their valuable materials, research, data, findings and intellectual property.

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