



Animal Methods Bias Advocacy Toolkit

[Animal methods bias](#) is a peer review bias characterized by a preference for animal-based research methods or lack of expertise to adequately evaluate nonanimal methods. It can affect the quality or fairness of nonanimal research assessments, including peer reviews of [grant applications](#) and [manuscripts](#) that include new approach methodologies (NAMs). **While researchers can play an important role in preventing and addressing this phenomenon, funding bodies must also take action to ensure that peer review is not a barrier to the broader development and use of NAMs.**

This toolkit was developed to accompany an advocacy webinar hosted by the Coalition to Illuminate and Address Animal Methods Bias ([COLAAB](#)), an international collaboration of researchers and advocates aiming to better characterize and address this important issue. Along with the [Animal Methods Bias Advocacy Template Letter](#), this toolkit is intended to facilitate researchers as they advocate for their funders to level the playing field for NAMs.

Advocacy Steps

Step 1. Determine which funding body you would like to engage with.

Consider funders in the country or governing region where you work and ones you have an existing relationship with, where you have been a grant recipient, peer reviewer, or advisor. It is important for you to leverage your personal relationship with the funder so they are more receptive to the issue.

Step 2. Determine the most appropriate manner of engagement.

Consider all official avenues of engagement with the funding body. There are likely general means of contact but try to find a more specific avenue of engagement where your advocacy can be more tailored, such as a meeting where public comments are accepted or an opportunity for feedback on programs or strategies. If there are no specific avenues of engagement, that's okay! Try to find a general contact for the offices or departments that coordinate funding opportunities and/or peer review. There are other ways to advocate for change that don't involve direct engagement with funding bodies, such as engaging with lawmakers and publishing perspectives, letters to the editor, and op-eds. Don't have any idea where to begin? Check the [Appendix: Avenues of Engagement with Funding Bodies Around the World](#) for potential engagement opportunities in your country or governing region. Don't see your country or have any questions? [Reach out](#) and we'd be happy to try to help you find an appropriate engagement opportunity!

Step 3. Complete the Animal Methods Bias Advocacy Template Letter.

Fill in all highlighted areas. Be sure to include personal details about the kind of research you conduct, your relationship to the funding body, and if you have personally experienced animal methods bias. It is important to include these personal details because it humanizes the issue, fostering empathy and understanding. It also helps you build a stronger relationship with your funder, which makes them more receptive and likely to take action. If you aren't sure whether you've experienced animal methods bias, please [reach out](#)! We would be happy to discuss it with you.

Step 4. Send your letter to the appropriate contact.

Be sure to address your letter to the appropriate contact. In your email, you may wish to include multiple recipients to ensure that your letter is received. If you are unsure who to send your letter to, please [reach out](#) and we would be happy to try to help you figure it out.

Appendix: Avenues of Engagement with Funding Bodies Around the World

Indirect Avenues of Engagement

Engaging with Lawmakers

Because government funding bodies are often accountable to lawmakers, engaging with lawmakers is a great way to indirectly influence funding priorities and policies. There are multiple ways for researchers to engage with lawmakers, including sending an email, calling, scheduling a meeting, or providing testimony. Smaller scale communications like emails, calls, and meetings with staff can be useful for making your representatives aware of biomedical research issues, including animal methods bias. Often lawmakers and their staff don't have a scientific background; lending your expertise as a resource can be quite useful for them. Then, when there are laws related to biomedical research being introduced or discussed, you can provide your expert input, potentially through formal avenues such as official testimony.

Publishing Perspectives, Letters to the Editor, and Op-Eds

You can advocate for funding body changes to address animal methods bias through peer-reviewed publications like perspective or commentary articles and through print media publications like letters to the editor and opinion editorials. With broad audiences, such pieces can reach the scientific community, the lay public, and even sometimes funders and lawmakers. Either way, they can help raise awareness about the advantages of nonanimal research approaches and the barriers to their broader use, including animal methods bias.

Canada

Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

CIHR is Canada's federal funding agency for health research. It is comprised of 13 institutes that set research priorities and support a broad spectrum of research in their respective areas. Rather than

brick-and-mortar buildings, these "virtual" Institutes are located within research institutions throughout Canada. There are other federal and provincial governmental funding opportunities, but CIHR remains the largest funder of health research in Canada.

1. Scientific Directors and Advisory Boards

Each of CIHR's 13 institutes is led by a Scientific Director who is supported through the advice of Institute Advisory Boards. These institutes are guided in their work by the [Governing Council](#). They can have up to 18 members. Sixteen members, including the Chair, are voting members, and 2 are non-voting, ex officio members: the Deputy Minister and the President of CIHR. Contacting the [Scientific Directors](#) could be a potential avenue of engagement. [Applying](#) to be included in an Institute Advisory Board is another approach, though you cannot be on multiples boards at once.

2. General Contact

CIHR Contact Centre, support-soutien@cihr-irsc.gc.ca

European Union

European Commission (EC)

The EC [Directorate-General Research and Innovation](#) develops and carries out the Commission's policies on research and innovation. It oversees the current EU research and innovation funding programme, [Horizon Europe](#), as well as [EU Missions](#).

1. Public Consultations

In the EU, the public can provide comments through [public consultations](#) launched directly by the EC when a new policy or regulation is proposed, or when other decisions are to be taken (such as planning the [next EU budget](#)). Generally, these consultation opportunities are linked to high-level documents, such as new regulation proposals. However, if the topic is science-related, such as the recently launched call for evidence linked to the new [EU life sciences strategy](#) proposed by the EC, science-related issues can be discussed, including the need to increase funding for NAMs, the lack of translatability of animal research, and animal methods bias.

2. European Research and Innovation Days

The EC hosts annual [European Research and Innovation Days](#), bringing together researchers and other stakeholders to discuss and ideally influence the future of research and innovation in Europe. These events are organized once a year and serve as platforms for high-level discussions to engage scientific panels and facilitate networking. They could be an opportunity to discuss science-related issues with other scientists and EC representatives. However, the effectiveness of this engagement avenue to discuss scientific biases may be limited.

3. General Contact

The [Research Enquiry Service](#) can be used to submit questions about research in Europe, Horizon 2020, or other research programmes and funding instruments. It can be contacted

any time, but the effectiveness of this engagement avenue to discuss scientific biases may be limited.

The [National Contact Points](#) network provides guidance, practical information, and assistance on all aspects of participating in Horizon Europe. These can be contacted any time, but the effectiveness of this engagement avenue to discuss scientific biases may be limited.

United Kingdom

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

UKRI is composed of nine Research councils, funded by the UK government. Some of these fund biomedical research and development—the most relevant are listed below along with other avenues of engagement.

1. Medical Research Council (MRC)

For information about upcoming meetings, visit the [MRC webpage](#). For general enquiries regarding MRC funding, including remit, funding schemes, policy, and your eligibility, email rfdp@mrc.ukri.org. To arrange a meeting with the Executive Chair, email private.office@mrc.ukri.org.

2. Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

For more information about upcoming meetings, visit the [BBSRC Council webpage](#). To contact the Council Secretariat, email bbsrc.cau@bbsrc.ukri.org. [BBSRC Strategic Panels](#) include:

- [Bioscience for an Integrated Understanding of Health Strategy](#); contact bfh@bbsrc.ukri.org
- [Transformative Technologies Strategy Advisory Panel](#); contact tt@bbsrc.ukri.org
- [Various Research Committees](#) charged with assessing grant applications in diverse areas

3. Innovate UK

For more information about upcoming Innovate UK Council meetings, visit the [Council webpage](#). To contact the Council, email support@iuk.ukri.org.

4. UKRI Community Engagement

[UKRI Community Engagement](#) includes:

- [UKRI Engagement Hub](#): lists engagement activities and is searchable
- [Shaping Future Priorities](#): invites council-specific “big ideas” for its future research pipelines
- [Research Organisation Consultation Group](#): acts as a sounding board on innovation and for strategy and policy development; contact sophia.viola@ukri.org
- [Advise UKRI and our councils](#): lists general vacancies on committees, panels, forums and networks, as well as links to vacancies on specific panels

Private Funders

1. Alzheimer's Research UK

- General contact: enquiries@alzheimersresearchuk.org

2. The Alzheimer's Society

- [General enquiries form](#)
- [Feedback form](#)

3. Barts Charity

- For research grant policies and strategy queries: funding@bartscharity.org.uk
- For funding and impact enquiries: funding@bartscharity.org.uk

4. Breast Cancer Now

- General contact: hello@breastcancer.org

5. The British Heart Foundation

- General contact: heretohelp@bhf.org.uk

6. Cancer Research UK

- General contact: supporter.services@cancer.org.uk

7. The Francis Crick Institute

- [Contact form](#)

8. Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity

- General contact: supporter.care@gosh.org

9. Versus Arthritis

- To express an interest in joining a Research Advisory Group: awards@versusarthritis.org
- General contact: enquiries@versusarthritis.org

10. Wellcome Trust

- [Queries and feedback form](#)

United States of America

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

1. Advisory Council Meetings

NIH advisory councils are comprised of members who are independent of the NIH and have expertise to advise the NIH Director and other NIH officials on programs, plans, and policies. Advisory council meetings at the NIH are subject to the Federal Advisory

Committee Act and therefore must be announced on the [Federal Register](#) and open to the public. They often have opportunities for public input via written or oral comments. Look out for an advisory council with a charge that is relevant to peer review or NAMs, such as the [Center for Scientific Review Advisory Council](#) (which advises on the review of grant applications), the [Council of Councils](#) (which advises on activities of the Common Fund and thus the [Complement-ARIE](#) program), and the [Advisory Committee to the Director](#) (which advises on NIH-wide programs and policies). Most advisory councils meet two to three times per year and are a great opportunity to provide feedback on measures that would help mitigate animal methods bias, especially if there is a relevant topic on the agenda.

2. Requests for Information (RFIs)

When the NIH conducts strategic planning or proposes large-scale policy changes, there are often solicitations for public input via RFIs. These don't occur as frequently as advisory council meetings, but if the topic is related to peer review or NAMs, an RFI could be a perfect opportunity to provide feedback on measures that would help mitigate animal methods bias.

3. General Contact

If there are no appropriate advisory council meetings or RFIs, you can send your letter to:

- Jayanta Bhattacharya, MD, PhD, Director, National Institutes of Health, Jayanta.Bhattacharya@nih.gov
- Noni Byrnes, PhD, Director, Center for Scientific Review, Noni.Byrnes@nih.gov

Department of Defense (DoD)

1. Advisory Committee Meetings

The Department of Defense (DoD) advisory committee meetings are governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and the Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976. These meetings are open to the public and must be announced in advance, with notices appearing in the [Federal Register](#). The public also has the right to write committee members at any time or in response to an announced meeting agenda. Look for an advisory committee meeting with a charge that is relevant to the health research priorities of the DoD. The [Defense Health Board](#) is a federal advisory committee to the secretary of defense that provides independent advice and recommendations on health related matters of interest to the DOD. Most Advisory committees meet about three to four times a year.

2. Request for Information (RFIs)

The DoD occasionally asks for public input via RFIs. Here is an [example](#). These are not as frequently available as advisory committee meetings. Still, if the topic is related to the DoD's research priorities, an RFI could be a perfect opportunity to provide feedback on mitigating animal methods bias.

3. General Contact

If there are no appropriate advisory council meetings or RFIs, you can send your letter to the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP). Complete the [CDMRP Feedback submission form](#) and send it to dha.detrick.cdmrp.mbx.public-affairs@health.mil. You can also reach out to that address to ask for an email contact for Colonel Mark G. Hartell, PhD, Director of CDMRP.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

1. Advisory Council Meetings

The VA also holds advisory council meetings under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Potentially relevant advisory councils include: the [National Research Advisory Council](#), which advises the secretary on the nature and scope of research and development sponsored or conducted by the Veterans Health Administration; the [Joint Biomedical Laboratory Research and Development and Clinical Science Research and Dev](#), which advises research program officials on program priorities and policies; and the [Health Systems Research Service Merit Review Board](#), which advises on the fair and equitable selection of the most meritorious research project for support by VA research funds and the adequacy of protection of human and animal subjects. Advisory council meetings are also open to the public and can be found on the [Federal Register](#).

2. Request for Information (RFIs)

The VA occasionally asks for public input using RFIs. You can find them on [SAM.gov](#).

3. General Contact

If there are no appropriate advisory council meetings or RFIs, you can send your letter to the Office of Research and Development: VAResearch@va.gov.

Private Funders

Because private funders are not legally required to accept public input, advocacy to these organizations most often involves direct contact with grants offices and their staff. Below you can find relevant information for some of the largest private and charitable biomedical research funders in the US. When researching how to contact organizations not on this list, check website sections that list grant opportunities and staff directories.

1. Alzheimer's Association

- General contact: grantsapp@alz.org
- [Medical and Scientific Advisory Group](#)

2. American Cancer Society

- General Contact: grants@cancer.org
- Christina Annunziata, MD, PhD, Senior Vice President, Extramural Discovery Science, who leads grant peer review for ACS, christina.annunziata@cancer.org

- Kimberly Clarke, PhD; Director of Special Programs and Projects, Extramural Discovery Science, kimberly.clarke@cancer.org

3. American Heart Association

- General contact: apply@heart.org

4. Burroughs Wellcome Fund

- [Full staff list](#)
- [Contact information](#)
- Program Officers
 - Tammy Collins, PhD, tcollins@bwhfund.org; Programs: Career Awards at the Scientific Interface, Innovation in Regulatory Science Awards
 - Paige Cooper Byas, PhD, pcooper@bwhfund.org; Programs: Career Awards for Medical Scientists, Next Gen Pregnancy Initiative
 - Alfred Mays, amays@bwhfund.org; Programs: Graduate Diversity Enrichment Program, Postdoctoral Diversity Enrichment Program
 - Victoria McGovern, PhD, vmcgovern@bwhfund.org. Program: Investigators in the Pathogenesis of Infectious Disease (PATH)

5. Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

- General contact: sciencegrants@chanzuckerberg.com

6. Dana Foundation

- Celina Sooksatan, Director of Grants, csooksatan@dana.org
- Devon Collins, PhD, Director, Dana Frontiers Program, dcollins@dana.org
- Ishan Dasgupta, JD, MPH, Program Officer, Dana NextGen Program, idasgupta@dana.org

7. Gates Foundation

- Grand Challenges grant opportunities general contact: grandchallenges@gatesfoundation.org

8. Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI)

- The HHMI Freeman Hrabowski Scholars program provides funding for basic researchers, including physician-scientists. General contact: FHScholars@hhmi.org
- The HHMI Hanna H. Gray Fellows Program provides funding for early career researchers. General contact: fellows@hhmi.org

9. The Kavli Foundation

- General contact: science@kavlifoundation.org

10. The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

- General contact: research@michaeljfox.org or grants@michaeljfox.org

11. National Organization for Rare Disorders

- General contact: research-programs@rarediseases.org or research@rarediseases.org

12. Simons Foundation

- General contact: sfgrants@simonsfoundation.org or sciencerfa@simonsfoundation.org
- Neuroscience grants: neurogrants@simonsfoundation.org
- Pivot fellowship: pivotfellowship@simonsfoundation.org
- Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative: sfarigrants@simonsfoundation.org