

Investigating Data Fabrication and Falsification

Beth Masimore, Ph.D.
Investigative Scientist



National Science Foundation
Office of Inspector General



Before the case

Review policies

In addition to policy considerations discussed previously:

- Can you adequately access records from *cloud technologies*?
- Are you familiar with your institution's *Data Sharing* or *Open Science* policies, if any?
- Does your institution have a *Data and/or Records Retention* policy?



Before the case

Retention requirements for records

2 CFR 200.334:

- Financial records
- *Supporting documents*
- *Statistical records*
- *All other* non-Federal entity records pertinent to a Federal award

Three years from award closure (minimum)

- Data Management Plan often states a longer retention period
- Journal policies may require additional retention and availability
- We may request retention, in writing, for investigation or audit



Before the case

Identify opportunities to facilitate best practices

Considerations:

- Do you offer *training* on data management *best practices*?
- Are there *tools and technologies* that can be provided to researchers?

Remember!

The record retention obligation rests with the institution even if the institution delegates the responsibility to researchers.



Before the case

Establish relationships & protocols

Considerations:

- Personal *relationships* often help!
- IT department
 - University, School, Department ...
- Data stewards
 - Libraries, Department, Domain repositories ...
- Other compliance offices
 - IRB, IACUC, Safety ...

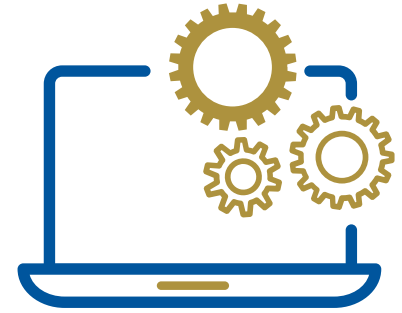


Beginning the case

Sequestering data

Considerations:

- Often part of the *inquiry* phase
- ***Protect*** the sequestered data
 - Maintain sequestered data until we notify you that we've closed our case
- Data stored on personal devices
 - ***Contact us*** if you're unable to obtain records



Beginning the case

Subject matter expertise

Considerations:

- You have *options* for ensuring your committee has access to SME
 - 1+ Committee member is SME
 - Internal or external SME as consultant
 - Technicians and staff scientists
- *Significant departure* from accepted practices

Remember!

- Investigating the potential misconduct, not reviewing the science!



Beginning the case

Identify additional records based on subject matter

Considerations:

- *Compliance documents* can provide useful context!
- Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 - Human Subjects Research
 - Even if exempt!
- Institutional Animal Care and Use (IACUC)
- Other internal forms, applications, training records, etc
 - Biohazard
 - Radiation safety
 - etc



Concluding the case

Fabrication and/or Falsification

Considerations:

- Allegations often describe potential wrongdoing as *fabrication and/or falsification*
- Your investigation should determine which type of misconduct occurred
 - A case may include both fabrication and falsification
 - And plagiarism!



Concluding the case

Providing the evidence

Considerations:

- Typically, a subset of the sequestered data is the evidence that supports the findings in the report
- We request the *supporting evidence*
- Maintain all sequestered records



Questions?

