

# U.S. Department of Justice Scientific Integrity Policy

*This policy is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States; its departments, agencies, or entities; its officers, employees, or agents; or any other person.*

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## Purpose

To restore Americans' trust in federal scientific processes, President Trump issued Executive Order 14303, "Restoring Gold Standard Science" (EO 14303).<sup>i</sup> EO 14303 § 5(b) directs agencies to update scientific integrity policies to ensure that they are in alignment with the nine tenets of Gold Standard Science and ensure that they encourage the open exchange of ideas, provide for consideration of different or dissenting viewpoints, and protect employees from efforts to prevent or deter consideration of alternative scientific opinions.

Gold Standard Science represents a commitment to the highest standards of scientific integrity, defined by nine core tenets: reproducible; transparent; communicative of error and uncertainty; collaborative and interdisciplinary; skeptical of its findings and assumptions; structured for falsifiability of hypotheses; subject to unbiased peer review; accepting of negative results as positive outcomes; and without conflicts of interest.<sup>ii</sup>

This Scientific Integrity Policy aligns with the tenets of Gold Standard Science and establishes the expectations and responsibilities for maintaining scientific integrity at the U.S. Department of Justice (Department or DOJ). This policy provides principles to establish and maintain a continuing culture of scientific integrity throughout the Department and its components. Scientific integrity, defined in greater detail later, refers to an adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity in scientific matters. This policy aims to ensure the integrity of all aspects of scientific activities.

DOJ is the Nation's public litigator. In that role, it is responsible for the fair and efficient administration of justice in both criminal and civil matters. The Department is entrusted with tremendous responsibilities and must consistently use credible and reliable evidence in support of its mission. This is particularly important in the scientific domain, where the trustworthiness of evidence and data often depends upon the circumstances under which it was discovered or generated, the methods by which it was produced or examined, and the integrity of researchers and sponsors. The Department's core investigative and prosecutorial missions rely upon sound scientific, technical, or specialized knowledge.

To ensure its mission is appropriately met, the Department aims to be at the forefront of scientific research on topics that pertain to its law enforcement goals. For example, the National Institute of Justice sponsors research on the causes of crime, the operation of the criminal justice system, forensic science, and the development of law enforcement technology. The Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collect and publish statistics on crime rates, victimization, and criminal justice activities at the federal, state, local, and Tribal levels. Various Department components also conduct research that informs policy, operational practices, and regulatory decisions. The quality of this work relies upon the integrity of those who engage in these activities. It also relies on a commitment to rigorous scientific principles, practices, and values. In all Department activities, it is vital that the principles and methods used are valid and reliable, that the bases for all scientific and technical claims are clear and transparent, and that the limitations of any findings or conclusions are fully explained.

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## **Effective Date and Policy Amendments**

This policy is effective when adopted on September 8, 2025. The Department shall review this policy on an annual basis.

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## Applicability and Scope

All Department employees, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, shall comply with the principles set forth in this policy when designing, conducting, reviewing, and managing science; communicating about science; and using scientific information in Department decision making or policy development. Grant recipients funded by the Department to conduct scientific activities shall abide by the principles set forth in this policy and any supplemental guidance on scientific integrity provided by Department grantmaking components. This policy does not apply in instances where adhering to the policy would be inconsistent with applicable statutes; regulations; rules; case law; attorney-client or other privileges; Department policies; ethical obligations; professional responsibilities; the protection of law-enforcement and litigation-related sensitivities; and privacy, confidentiality, security, and classification laws, rules, procedures, and policies.

This policy supersedes all previous DOJ scientific integrity policies.

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## Definitions

- **Inappropriate influence** refers to any attempt to shape, alter, or interfere with scientific activities, or the communication about or use of scientific activities or findings, in a manner that is dishonest or misleading, or otherwise contrary to Department policy. Reasonable representations of science, scientific activities, scientific findings, or scientific work in connection with ordinary litigation-related activities, including the preparation of briefing materials, coordination with expert witnesses, or the presentation of arguments, in compliance with rules of professional conduct and ethics, do not constitute inappropriate influence. Differences of opinion reached in good faith and reasonable resolution of conflicts involving conflicting scientific findings or differing reasonable interpretations of scientific findings do not constitute inappropriate influence.
- **Science** refers to the development and use of evidence to construct testable explanations and predictions of natural phenomena, as well as the knowledge generated through this systematic process. Science refers to the full spectrum of scientific endeavors, including basic and applied work in the physical, life, social, and behavioral sciences.

- **Scientific activities** refer to activities engaged in by scientists to generate, apply, advance, and disseminate scientific and technical knowledge.
- **Scientific misconduct** means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting the results of scientific research, but does not include honest error or differences of opinion. For the purposes of this definition:
  - **fabrication** is making up data or results and recording or reporting them;
  - **falsification** is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record; and
  - **plagiarism** is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.
- **Scientific findings** refer to the results of scientific activities.
- **Scientific information** means factual inputs, data, models, analyses, technical information, or scientific assessments related to such disciplines as the behavioral and social sciences, public health and medical sciences, life and earth sciences, engineering, physical sciences, or probability and statistics. This includes any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data, in any medium or form, including textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative, or audiovisual forms
- **Scientific integrity** is the adherence to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities. Inclusivity, transparency, and protection from inappropriate influence are hallmarks of scientific integrity.
- **Scientific work** refers to work product, the primary purpose of which is to describe or explain scientific activities or scientific findings. Documents prepared for purposes of litigation or in anticipation of litigation will generally not qualify as "scientific work."
- **Scientist** refers to an individual whose responsibilities include collection, generation, or evaluation of scientific and technical data, analyses, or products. It does not refer to an individual whose primary job function is non-scientific, even if the individual's job may require the use of scientific findings or if that individual has scientific and technical training (*e.g.*, attorneys, policymakers, public-affairs communicators, or medical professionals).
- **Weight of scientific evidence** means an approach to scientific evaluation in which each piece of relevant information is considered based on its quality and relevance, and then transparently integrated with other relevant information to inform the scientific evaluation prior to making a judgment about the scientific evaluation. Quality and relevance determinations, at a minimum, should include

consideration of study design, fitness for purpose, replicability, peer review, and transparency and reliability of data.

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## **Promoting a Culture of Scientific Integrity**

Department personnel at all levels shall recognize, support, and promote this policy and its underlying principles, as well as model behavior exemplary of a strong culture of scientific integrity.

DOJ shall promote a culture of scientific integrity. This can be accomplished by creating an environment that is conducive to innovation and progress, while also protecting the independence and objectivity of Department scientists and scientific inquiry. Scientific findings and products must not be suppressed, delayed, undermined, or altered for inappropriate purposes and must not be subject to inappropriate influence.

A strong culture of scientific integrity begins with ensuring the responsible and ethical conduct of scientific activities in an environment that is safe and free from harassment, retaliation, and discrimination. To instill and enhance a culture of scientific integrity, DOJ shall post this policy on its website on a webpage dedicated to scientific integrity, and take other measures, as appropriate, to keep scientific integrity visible within the Department. The Department shall educate all employees on a recurring basis, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and inform all contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department about their rights and responsibilities related to scientific integrity.

To promote scientific integrity at DOJ, this policy outlines seven specific areas:

- I. Scientific Processes
- II. Use and Communication of Scientific Information
- III. Decision Making Processes
- IV. Enforcement and Oversight
- V. Merit System Principles and Whistleblower Protections
- VI. Professional Development for Scientists
- VII. Federal Advisory Committees

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### **I. Scientific Processes**

It is the policy of the Department that there shall be no inappropriate influence on scientific activities or scientific findings. In conducting scientific activities, it is the policy of the Department to encourage the open exchange of ideas, provide for consideration of different or dissenting viewpoints, and protect employees from efforts to prevent or deter consideration of alternative scientific opinions. All Department employees, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, shall not engage in scientific misconduct nor knowingly rely on information resulting from scientific misconduct, and they shall use their best efforts to—

1. avoid and prohibit inappropriate influence on scientific activities or scientific findings;
2. reasonably ensure the accuracy of scientific information when engaged in scientific activities;
3. represent their contribution to scientific work fairly and accurately;
4. reasonably ensure that scientific work is reviewed by unbiased scientists or technical experts with expertise, experience, and education in the discipline for the work being conducted;
5. comply with Department policy requiring the disclosure of conflicts of interest; and
6. ensure that scientific activities are conducted in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, and ethics.

## **II. Use and Communication of Scientific Information**

It is the policy of the Department that there shall be no inappropriate influence in the communication about or use of scientific activities or scientific findings. Gold Standard Science means that scientific activities are conducted in a manner that is transparent, communicative of error and uncertainty, subject to unbiased peer review, and without conflicts of interest. All Department employees, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, shall use their best efforts to—

1. avoid and prohibit inappropriate influence in the communication about or use of scientific activities or scientific findings; and
2. ensure that the scientific activities, findings, and work of Department personnel who engage in scientific activities on behalf of the Department are accurately represented in Department communications that discuss such activities, findings, or work; and

3. give Department scientists the option to review and provide comments on Department communications that identify them as an author or represent their scientific opinion.

In support of this policy, the Department shall, as appropriate—

1. promote openness and transparency, while ensuring full compliance with the limits on disclosure of classified, law enforcement sensitive (unclassified but sensitive), and statutorily protected information, and as consistent with applicable law and policy with respect to the disclosure of privileged or confidential information and the attorney-client relationship;
2. make available communications training and support to Department personnel who engage in scientific activities on behalf of the Department to enable them to clearly communicate their scientific activities and scientific findings, both to policymakers within the Department, and, as appropriate, to the public and interested parties more broadly;
3. permit and encourage, but not require, Department scientists to participate in DOJ communications with the media regarding their scientific activities on behalf of the Department, in a manner consistent with the Department's Confidentiality and Media Contacts policy and applicable component policies; and
4. ensure that Department personnel are guided on policies regarding the appropriate use of Department and personal social media as it pertains to communication of scientific information.

### **III. Decision-Making Processes**

It is the policy of the Department to support the use of the most credible, reliable, and impartial scientific evidence available in Department decision-making. When scientific or technological information is used to inform evaluations and subsequent decision-making, the Department shall apply a "weight of scientific evidence" approach and shall transparently acknowledge and document uncertainties. All Department employees, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, shall use their best efforts to—

1. ensure that scientific findings and scientific work used to support Department policymaking and decision-making are credible, reliable, impartial, and well founded;
2. where legally permissible and appropriate, directly include scientists in Department policy and management decisions for which they are the agency subject matter expert to ensure that the science is accurately represented and interpreted; and

3. employ appropriate and transparent mechanisms for Department personnel to express differing scientific opinions.

#### **IV. Enforcement and Oversight**

It is the policy of the Department to support compliance with this Scientific Integrity Policy. The Department shall—

1. establish internal processes to report and evaluate alleged violations of the requirements of this policy, to be developed and administered under the direction of a senior appointee;
2. advise Department personnel about best practices under this policy and how to prevent, report, and remedy violations of this policy;
3. encourage Department components to develop their own supplemental scientific integrity policies or guidance tailored to component activities, consistent with Gold Standard Science, this, and other Department policies and governing laws;
4. develop and implement a plan to regularly measure, monitor, and assess ongoing scientific integrity activities and outcomes; and
5. make information regarding scientific integrity activities and outcomes available, as appropriate, to Department staff and the public in a timely manner.

#### **V. Merit System Principles and Whistleblower Protections**

It is the policy of the Department to protect scientists from inappropriate influence and to protect Department personnel from retaliation for compliance with this Scientific Integrity Policy. All Department employees, regardless of the nature of their appointment, and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, shall use their best efforts to—

1. select and retain candidates for scientist and technical positions based on the candidate's scientific and technical knowledge, credentials, experience, and integrity, consistent with merit system principles;
2. hold scientists to the applicable standards of professional and scientific ethics, including the Federal Policy on Research Misconduct and the Department's Standards of Conduct and Code of Professional Responsibility for the Practice of Forensic Science;
3. promote equal employment opportunity in the scientific workforce as required by federal antidiscrimination laws and create workspaces that are free from harassment and discrimination; and
4. comply with whistleblower protections, including:



- A. prohibited personnel practices in reprisal for engaging in protected activity related to scientific integrity (as provided in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b) and 5 U.S.C. § 2303 for employees of the FBI);
- B. the requirements of the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, and its expanded protections enacted by Pub. L. No. 103-424 and the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012;
- C. whistleblower protections to employees of federal government contractors, subcontractors, grant and subgrant recipients, 41 U.S.C. § 4712; and 2 C.F.R. 200.217; and
- D. Presidential Policy Directive 19, which prohibits supervisors from taking, failing to take, or threatening to take or fail to take any action affecting an employee's eligibility for access to classified information in reprisal for making a protected disclosure.

## **VI. Professional Development for Scientists**

It is the policy of the Department to encourage DOJ scientists and other DOJ employees and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department to interact with the broader scientific community in a manner that is consistent with Department policy, federal ethics rules and job responsibilities, professional-responsibility obligations, and to the extent practicable given the availability of funding to support such interactions and other budgetary restraints.

The Department encourages DOJ scientists and contractors who perform scientific activities for the Department, in consultation with ethics officials as appropriate, to develop and maintain the highest levels of competency, proficiency, integrity, and credibility within their disciplines through means that may include—

- 1. publishing scientific findings in peer-reviewed, professional or scholarly journals;
- 2. presenting scientific developments and findings at professional meetings;
- 3. serving as editors or editorial board members of professional or scholarly journals;
- 4. participating in scholarly societies, committees, task forces and other specialized bodies of professional societies – including, where appropriate, serving as officers or on governing boards on such societies; and
- 5. receiving honors and awards for their scientific activities.

## **VII. Federal Advisory Committees**

Federal Advisory Committees (FACs) are an important tool for ensuring the credibility, quality, and transparency of DOJ science. When convening FACs tasked with giving

scientific advice, the Department shall act in a manner consistent with applicable laws, regulations, guidance, and the following principles:

1. The recruitment process for new FAC members should be as transparent as practicable. When practicable and appropriate, the Department should announce FAC member vacancies widely, including notification in the Federal Register with an invitation for the public to recommend individuals for consideration and for self-nominations to be submitted.
2. Professional biographical information (including current and past professional affiliations) for appointed committee members should be made widely available to the public (*e.g.*, via a website) subject to Privacy Act and other statutory/regulatory considerations. Such information should clearly illustrate the individuals' qualifications for serving on the committee.
3. The selection of members to serve on a scientific or technical FAC should be based on expertise, knowledge, and contribution to the relevant subject area. Additional factors that may be considered are availability of the member to serve and the ability to work effectively on advisory committees. Committee membership should be fairly balanced in terms of points of view represented with respect to the functions to be performed by the FAC. The Department shall include employees with relevant subject-matter expertise in the selection of members.
4. Members of scientific or technical FACs should receive appropriately tailored ethics counseling, including with respect to this policy, before accepting positions on DOJ FACs, and periodically during service on such a committee.
5. Except when prohibited by law, agencies should make all conflict-of-interest waivers granted to committee members publicly available.
6. Except when explicitly stated in a prior agreement between DOJ and a FAC, all reports, recommendations, and products produced by FACs should be treated as solely the findings of such committees rather than of the U.S. Government and thus are not subject to intra- or inter-agency revision.

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<sup>i</sup> Exec. Order No. 14,303, 90 Fed. Reg. 22601 (May 23, 2025). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-05-29/pdf/2025-09802.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> See Memorandum from Michael J. Kratsios, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, Office of Science and Technology Policy to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, (June 23, 2025). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/OSTP-Guidance-for-GSS-June-2025.pdf>