

Factsheet: Research Governance

Why this fact sheet?

This fact sheet is designed to show in a straightforward way why research activities need specific research governance and what it might look like. Research governance would form part of an organisation's overall corporate governance environment. The research governance model contained in this fact sheet is indicative and should be adjusted for differing research activities.

What is corporate governance?

Corporate governance is a widely used business term that can mean different things to different people in different organisations. Its overall intention is to promote confidence with stakeholders. There is a lot written about it. But considering how widely the term corporate governance is used, it is surprising there is not more definitive information on holistic frameworks, capability maturity guidance, and the link between governance and assurance.

The governing body of an organisation is ultimately responsible for an organisation's corporate governance. In a company, this will be the board of directors. In the public sector where there is not a board of directors, governance arrangements are implemented by the head of the organisation such as the secretary, director-general or chief executive.

The Institute of Internal Auditors in its 'International Professional Practices Framework' defines corporate governance as:

The combination of processes and structures implemented by the board to inform, direct, manage and monitor the activities of the organisation toward achievement of its objectives.

What is research?

Research is a systematic study into an issue to establish facts and reach conclusions. Research can be used for information gathering or to test theories and refine hypotheses. Research and how it is approached can vary in complexity from a doctoral thesis through to large-scale research projects involving human trials. Research requires strong governance in its own right.

What might be research risks?

Organisations require corporate governance to be successful and transparent. Organisations where research is performed should have formal research governance as a component of their corporate governance framework.

The need for strong research governance is driven by risks associated with the research process such as:

Confidentiality risk	Confidential research data may be released accidentally or deliberately.
Economic risk	Research subjects suffer financial or economic loss.
Exploitation risk	Vulnerable groups may have research performed against their will or treatments withheld without their knowledge.
Financial risk	Research funds not used as intended.
Fraud risk	Falsifying research results.
Physical risk	Physical health of research subjects may be compromised.
Privacy risk	Privacy of research subjects may be breached.
Psychological risk	Mental health of research subjects may be adversely affected by the research.
Social risk	Research subjects may lose self-respect, suffer embarrassment or other negative consequences.

Why have research governance?

In organisations where research is performed, the board and committees should oversee the research and ensure there is a robust research governance framework. To be credible, research needs to have strong governance together with complementary assurance activities to independently validate research results.

What is research governance?

Research governance comprises the suite of governance and assurance activities formally performed over research activities and projects.

Why is an holistic approach to research governance needed?

A focus of research governance is often on committees. This sets a sound foundation, however research governance comprises a much wider focus.

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While many research governance frameworks include commentary on other governance processes and structures, a more holistic approach that clearly defines the universe of research governance elements, inter-relationships and owners is needed.

Research governance is a key component of successful research and should also include a strong and cost-effective assurance program.

What does a research governance model look like?

Reliance on committees is problematic as research governance requires individual accountability and committees do not provide this.

The following model seeks to apply an holistic approach to research governance. Rather than a one-dimensional approach that relies almost entirely on committees as a primary governance component, this model seeks to wrap-up organisational activities in an holistic way so there is an inter-connected approach and nothing is missed.

It should be noted the model is indicative and would need to be adjusted to suit differing research scenarios.

- › **Strategic Management** is development and implementation of a research plan to help research achieve its objectives.
- › **Risk Management** is anticipating and managing risks that may have an impact on research.

- › **Resource Management** is the efficient and effective use of resources when they are needed for research to achieve its objectives.
- › **Information Management** refers to the collection, recording, processing, securing and distribution of research information.
- › **Compliance and Reporting** is important for research to demonstrate compliance with laws and codes of conduct if it is to be seen as reputable and ethical. Reporting of validated research results is important to show research transparency.
- › **Assurance** is an evaluation process to determine the validity and reliability of research information and help improve effectiveness and accountability of research projects.

Why is assurance also necessary?

Assurance is a positive declaration intended to give confidence and improve the quality of information to aid informed decision-making.

A research governance framework should set the requirements for good research governance, but there also needs to be objective research assurance, which can be defined as:

Evidence for the purpose of providing an independent assessment on governance, risk management, and control processes for research.



Acknowledgement

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Helpful references

Fact Sheet 'Corporate Governance', IIA-Australia

Fact Sheet 'Corporate Governance Responsibility Assignment Matrix', IIA-Australia

20 Critical Question Series 'Corporate Governance', IIA-Australia

20 Critical Question Series 'Assurance', IIA-Australia

