

## Experiments in evaluation: lessons from randomisation in research funding

An SNSF, EMBO & RoRI workshop, 1 & 2 December 2021

Virtual meeting via Webex (Day 1) and Zoom (Day 2)—[see links in purple below](#)

We are pleased to invite you to join us for a two-day workshop on **Experiments in evaluation** on **1 & 2 December 2021**, at which we will share and discuss findings from RoRI's pilot project on uses of randomisation and experimentation by research funders.

Given the winter wave of Covid-19 cases affecting several European countries, this will now be a **fully online event**, but we aim to make online participation as interactive as we can. In light of the move to fully online, we have compressed the agenda slightly, to end at lunchtime (13:00 CET) on Day 2.

The meeting is the culmination of a fifteen month workstream, through which RoRI partners have collaborated to experiment and exchange insights on uses of partial randomisation in grant allocation. Our efforts to date have been focused in three areas:

- bespoke support for partners in undertaking trials of partial randomisation or other experimental funding methods;
- the creation of a practical manual *The Experimental Research Funders' Handbook*;
- a qualitative study exploring motivations and drivers for partial randomisation.

The purpose of this final workshop is to share the results of this work, and also to design and plan a further wave of funder experiments to begin in 2022. We begin on 1 December with a morning session, open to a wider public audience, where we will hear updates from strategic partners on the experiments they have conducted. We will also present headline insights from *The Experimental Research Funders' Handbook* and our study of funder motivations for uses of partial randomisation.

After this opening session, the remainder of the meeting will be for RoRI partners and invited guests only, to enable open sharing and discussion. This is an opportunity to reflect on experiences of funder experimentation in a supportive environment, and work together to design further projects and trials, which build on our findings from the past year.

**Please reply by email to Helen Buckley Woods on [h.b.woods@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:h.b.woods@sheffield.ac.uk) if you (or a colleague) would like to attend the partners-only sessions.**

## Day One—Wednesday 1 December 2021 (all times in CET / GMT+1)

### Session 1: Experiments and the future of evaluation

**Join via Webex:** <https://snsf.webex.com/snsf/j.php?MTID=m9dbf5731980822969e7845d4f17582f5> with password for participants: **TEpmfa9VK37** and password for panelists: **BWzwm9VMC47**

- 09:30 *Welcome and reflections on SNSF's journey into experimental research funding*  
**Matthias Egger**, President, Swiss National Science Foundation
- 09:45 *Chair and introduction to RoRI's work on randomisation and experimentation*  
**James Wilsdon**, Director, Research on Research Institute
- 09:50 *The Experimental Research Funders' Handbook: highlights and insights*  
**Sandra Bendiscioli**, Senior Programme Officer, EMBO,  
**Teo Firpo** and **Albert Bravo-Biosca**, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta
- 10:05 *Funder motivations for the use of partial randomisation*  
**Helen Buckley Woods**, Research Associate, RoRI
- 10:15 *Questions and discussion*
- 10:30 *Coffee break (15 mins)*

### Session 2: Insights and evidence from trials of partial randomisation

- 10:45 *Chair & opening remarks*  
**Michele Garfinkel**, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO
- 10:50 *Randomising in pursuit of equity and impact: lessons from New Zealand*  
**Lucy Pomeroy**, Health Research Council of NZ (online)
- 11:05 *Rethinking the funding line: random selection at the Swiss National Science Foundation*  
**Marco Bieri**, Scientific Officer & **Rachel Heyard**, Statistician, SNSF
- 11:20 *Volkswagen Foundation's "Experiment!": risky research by lottery<sup>1</sup>*  
**Dagmar Simon**, Managing Director, EvaConsult
- 11:35 *1000 Ideas Programme: a novel mechanism for novel ideas<sup>2</sup>*  
**Elisabeth Nindl**, Senior Evaluation Officer, Austrian Science Fund (FWF)
- 11:50 *Discussion panel for Session 2 speakers (joined also by **Matthias Egger**, President, SNSF)*
- 12:25 *Closing remarks*  
**Michele Garfinkel**, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO  
**James Wilsdon**, Director, Research on Research Institute
- 12:30 *Lunch break*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/funding/our-funding-portfolio-at-a-glance/experiment/partially-randomized-procedure>

<sup>2</sup> <https://m.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/fwf-programmes/1000-ideas-programme/>

### **Session 3: Funder-to-funder exchange and peer learning**

**Join via Webex:** <https://snsf.webex.com/snsf/j.php?MTID=md69ef032b1d37cdb26eba88efd9ab43b>  
with password: **CmW9Xy7eVj3**

- 13:30 *Chair and opening remarks*  
**Jon Holm**, Special Adviser, Research Council of Norway
- 13:40 *Building the internal strategic case for experimentation in public and private funders*  
Opening perspectives (5 mins each), followed by discussion:  
**Kasper Nørgaard**, Senior Scientific Lead, Novo Nordisk Foundation  
**Vanessa Cuthill**, Director of Research, The British Academy  
**Albert Bravo-Biosca**, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta
- 14:30 *Legal issues and practical implementation*  
Opening perspective, followed by discussion:  
**Thomas Werder Schläpfer**, Member, Executive Management, SNSF
- 15:10 *Afternoon break (20 mins)*
- 15:30 *Communication & stakeholder perceptions*  
Opening perspectives (5 mins each), followed by discussion:  
**Amanda Blatch-Jones**, National Institute for Health Research  
**Michele Garfinkel**, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO  
**Philippa Shelton**, First Create the Media
- 16:15 *Closing remarks for day one*  
**Matthias Egger**, President, SNSF and **James Wilsdon**, Director, RoRI
- 16:30 *Close of Day One*

### **Day Two—Thursday 2 December 2021 (all times in CET / GMT+1)**

**Join via Zoom** (meeting ID: 829 1115 2184, passcode: 253542) and using this link:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82911152184?pwd=M1pISGpVNVFpMmIVZUd6OWZxeGg2QT09>

### **Session 4: Expanding options and selecting methods**

- 09:00 *Introduction and goals of Day Two*  
**James Wilsdon**, Director, RoRI
- 09:05 *Opening provocations (15 mins each)*
- Field experiments with grant peer review*  
**Chiara Franzoni**, Associate Professor, Associate Professor at Polytechnic University of Milan
- Experimental methods and cost measurement for different funding modes*  
**Adrian Barnett**, Professor in the Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology  
**Philip Clarke**, Professor of Health Economics, University of Oxford

09:50 *Questions and discussion*

10:00 *Elevator pitches of ideas shared in advance or emerging from the meeting*

10:30 *Coffee break*

### **Session 5: Develop, refine and co-design**

11:00 Chair and opening remarks

**Gert V. Balling**, Senior Impact Partner, Novo Nordisk Foundation

11:10 *Divide into three groups to develop and refine project ideas (50 mins)  
(via Zoom breakout rooms)*

*Facilitators:*

*Group 1: **Teo Firpo** & **Albert Bravo Biosca**, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta*

*Group 2: **Michele Garfinkel** & **Sandra Bendiscioli**, EMBO*

*Group 3: **Tom Stafford** & **Helen Buckley Woods**, University of Sheffield*

12:00 Groups report back on progress (5 mins each)

12:15 Plenary discussion of emerging priorities and opportunities

12:45 Concluding remarks and next steps

**Katrin Milzow**, Head of Strategy Division, SNSF and **James Wilsdon**, Director, RoRI

13:00 Close of Day 2