

Guide to Organising an Institutional Forum on Responsible Research

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1. About this guide

This guide provides practical, step-by-step guidance for organizing an institutional workshop modelled on the structure, goals and vision of the [EMBO Fora on Responsible Research](#).

Between 2016 and 2025, EMBO organised Fora at research institutes in 23 [Member States](#) of the European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC). EMBC Member States are countries that have ratified the EMBC Agreement and financially support the EMBO Programmes.

The EMBO Fora were organised in collaboration with local EMBO Members, with the aim of fostering responsible research practices and open discussion within their institutions about possible policies to support their researchers.

A defining feature of an EMBO Forum was the inclusion of a follow-up meeting with institutional leadership on the day after the workshop. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss issues raised by participants during the interactive session, and explore possible improvements to institutional policies, support structures, and research culture. By linking individual experiences to organisational practices, the Fora encouraged institutions to consider how they could better support responsible research.

The EMBO Fora often served as starting points for discussion which led to concrete [initiatives](#) being implemented in host institutions.

The EMBO Fora were designed on the view that many challenges related to research integrity are shaped not only by individual behaviour, but largely by **systemic issues** such as research culture, assessment systems, incentive structures, and institutional practices. Addressing these challenges therefore requires both individual awareness and institutional commitment.

With the conclusion of the EMBO Fora, EMBO has decided to make the experience and material generated from these workshops freely available as an open resource on its website.

This guide is intended for researchers, research managers and administrators, institutional leaders, and research integrity officers (RIOs), as an aid in the planning or preparation of similar workshops.

The EMBO Fora slide decks have been adapted for external use with accompanying notes. Each slide deck corresponds to a particular topic. A series of short videos introduces the resource and summarises key messages from the slide decks.

The combination of topics you decide to present at your forum can depend on your organisation's needs and specific research environment.

2. Forum aims, target audience, structure and topics

Aims

- **Raise awareness** of responsible research practices, principles and values, and create a safe space for **discussion** of the daily challenges facing researchers.
- Open a conversation on the role of your organisation in setting or undermining responsible research practices, and **identify actionable improvements** in organisational policies and support structures.

Target audience

The fora are primarily aimed at **early- and mid-career researchers**, particularly early principal investigators (PIs) and senior postdoctoral researchers. As they prepare to lead laboratories, in many cases for the first time, these groups are newly confronted with the responsibilities of supervision, mentoring, and shaping the research culture within their groups. However, additional participants may also include doctoral students.

By raising awareness of responsible research practices, encouraging critical reflection, and providing a space to discuss system-level challenges, a forum on responsible research can help equip these future lab leaders to act as **'multipliers' of good practices**, by fostering a culture of responsible research that extends to their entire research groups and institutions.

We recommend limiting the total number of participants to **30 people**, to maintain a good environment for interactive discussion.

Topics

The programme consists of core modules on the following topics. Other themes could be included depending on local needs. In the EMBO Fora, the additional topics were chosen on the basis of discussion with the local organizers, depending on the local context.

Core modules

1. Research integrity: What it is and why should we care?
2. Supervisors: With great power comes great responsibility
3. How research assessment affects research conduct
4. Navigating conflicts of interest in science

Additional modules

Slide decks are not available for these modules. If you would like to engage experts on these topics in your forum, please contact policy@embo.org.

- Open Science: what's in it for me?
- Transparency and integrity in publishing
- The ethics of research with animals
- The ethics of human subject research

The facilitator(s) presents the slides to introduce the topics and guides the interactive discussion.

The participants are invited to reflect on, discuss and share their **concerns** regarding research integrity in research practice, as well as to suggest possible **solutions** at the levels of the laboratory, institution, and wider research system. The discussions allow participants to raise any needs for support, suggestions for training, or gaps in policies.

Participants are informed beforehand that their comments and suggestions will be **shared anonymously** with institute leaders the next day. If there is agreement, these are collected into a list that are presented in the follow-up meeting the next day.

Follow-up meetings with institutional leaders are a crucial feature of a forum, serving to extend the impact of a forum beyond raising awareness. They provide the opportunity to connect researchers' experiences in the laboratory – as explored during the interactive workshop – with the **institutional policies, practices and support structures** that shape those individual experiences.

Meeting participants may include institutional management staff, department or institute directors, deans, rectors, and other individuals in roles where they can make or influence decisions.

During the follow-up meeting, institutional leaders:

- review participants' anonymous comments and suggestions from the forum and identify any institutional challenges and opportunities they highlight;

- discuss priorities for action and explore concrete measures that could strengthen research culture and support responsible research practices within the institution.

It is recommended to set aside 1h to 1h30 with 3 to 5 institutional leaders for this informal discussion.

Examples of topics for discussion:

- Clearer authorship guidance,
- Supervisor training programmes,
- Research integrity advisors or support networks,
- Improved data management support,
- Training and support in statistics and research methods,
- More qualitative research assessment criteria,
- Better communication of existing support resources and structures, e.g. codes of conduct, guidelines, the name and contact of RIOs or people responsible for research integrity
- Further discussions session on research integrity issues

[Examples of follow-up actions](#) resulting from leadership discussions in the host institutes of EMBO Fora included the integration of research integrity training into graduate and doctoral curricula, the development of Codes of Conduct, and the establishment of working groups to address challenges.

Structure

The total length of a forum is **one day and a half**: a day of talks and discussions with researchers, followed the next morning by a meeting with institutional leaders lasting up to two hours.

The forum should combine presentations, discussion, and opportunities for reflection. While the exact programme can be adapted to local needs and priorities, a typical forum includes a mixture of:

- expert presentations,
- interactive discussions,
- dedicated time for participants to reflect on their own experiences and institutional context.

Recommended general forum structure

Morning: presentations of core modules

- Welcome and opening remarks from institutional leadership
- Introduction to the aims and scope of the forum
- An icebreaker tour de table for participants to introduce their names and career level and function
- Presentations on key topics
- Questions and discussion

Midday: lunch

Having a lunch dedicated to the group of participants allows more interactions further questions and discussions. This could be done at the local canteen.

Afternoon: presentation of other modules

- Additional topics covered
- Final general discussion, closing reflections, and identification of next steps

The agenda below illustrates an example of an EMBO Forum programme. The specific topics, timing, and format can be adapted according to institutional needs and available speakers.

Time	Event
10:00 - 10:10	Welcome address by institutional leader
10:10 - 10:20	Introduction
10:20 - 10:30	Tour de table
10:30 - 11:30	Research integrity: what is it and why should we care?
11:30 - 12:30	Transparency and integrity in publishing
12:30 - 13:15	Lunch
13:15 - 14:15	Data management and open science
14:15 - 14:45	Emerging policy issues in research assessment
14:45 - 15:00	Coffee break
15:00 - 15:30	Supervisors' responsibilities
15:30 - 16:00	General discussion

3. Interactive presentations and case studies

A forum typically combines the following key elements:

- **Interactive presentations**
- **Discussions of real cases of misconduct**
- **A final general discussion**

Together, these approaches help participants connect research integrity principles to the realities of daily research practice.

Interactive presentations

Designed to stimulate discussion and reflection, interactive presentations were one of the defining features of the EMBO Fora.

Forum participants can be encouraged to consider:

- their awareness of key research integrity issues,
- their day-to-day research practices,
- the training, supervision, and support structures available within their institutions.

Examples of questions that facilitators may ask participants include:

- Do you know where to find the institution's Code of Conduct?
- Do you know whom to contact about research integrity issues at your institution?
- Does your laboratory or institution have an authorship policy?
- Do you use electronic laboratory notebooks? What could be advantages of using them?
- Are you familiar with websites such as PubPeer or Retractions Watch?

Example questions are suggested throughout the notes of the downloadable slide decks.

Presenting real cases of misconduct

Including real examples of misconduct cases can further strengthen discussions by demonstrating how such situations can occur in real research environments.

These examples can help participants better understand the complexity of misconduct cases, their consequences, and the importance of institutional support and preventive measures.

Descriptions of misconduct cases are included in certain slide decks, including “Research integrity: what it is and why should you care”, “Supervisors: with great power comes great responsibility”, and “Navigating conflicts of interest in science”.

4. Maintaining an open environment for discussion

Facilitators play a central role in creating an open atmosphere for discussion that can allow participants to express themselves freely.

At the beginning of the forum, it is important to establish clear expectations by:

- emphasizing respectful dialogue,
- encouraging openness and honesty,
- ensuring confidentiality (no sharing of discussions, included on social media),
- clarifying that uncertainty and disagreement are normal, and
- acknowledging the complexity and nuance of many integrity-related situations.

In the EMBO Fora, discussions did not frame responsible research conduct as a moral state, but as a set of **skills** that are developed through training, supervision and mentoring and which must be supported by appropriate institutional- and system-level policies.

The conversation was therefore not only about individual responsibility, but rather focused on research culture, systemic pressures, institutional barriers, and shared responsibilities within the research environment.

Participants should feel comfortable discussing mistakes, uncertainties, conflicting incentives, and structural challenges without fear of judgement. Maintaining this open environment is essential for meaningful reflection and productive discussion.

5. Forum organisation

Obtaining **institutional leadership** support at an early stage is critical.

Visible support from leadership signals institutional commitment to research integrity and helps ensure that discussions during the forum can lead to meaningful follow-up actions and policy development. It also helps connect individual awareness of good research practices with broader institutional responsibilities and structures.

Institutional leaders could:

- Open the event
- Attend follow-up meetings
- Support the implementation of recommendations

At the same time, it is recommended that institutional leaders are not present during the discussions to help participants feel comfortable to speak freely about challenges, uncertainties, and institutional barriers.

A small but committed **organising team** is essential for planning, delivering, and following up on the forum. The table below provides suggestions on how to structure the team. Depending on the size of the event and available resources, some roles may be combined.

Role	Responsibilities
Project lead (e.g. RIO, senior researcher, dean of studies)	• Defines the forum programme; • Recruits speakers and facilitators; • Coordinates the organising team; • Liaises with institutional leadership; • Connects discussions to institutional policies and practices; • Contributes to follow-up discussions; • Supports implementation of recommendations.
Operational coordinator (e.g. administrator, RIO, event organizer)	• Manages registration, participant communication, event promotion, venue arrangements, catering if needed, and other logistical aspects.
Facilitator (e.g. researcher, research policy officer, RIO)	• Introduces topics/presents slides; • Moderates discussions; • Encourages participation; • Helps maintain an open and respectful discussion environment
Rapporteur or note-taker	• Documents key discussion points; • Collects feedback; • Supports preparation of summaries for the second day discussions.

6. Logistics checklist

Registration

We recommend setting up a registration system to support event planning and encourage participant commitment. Depending on the size of the event, registration can be managed through an email-based registration process, an online form, or an institutional event management platform or intranet system.

Registration information may include:

- name and contact details,
- career stage,
- department or institutional affiliation,
- motivation for attending,
- dietary or accessibility requirements, and
- consent for receiving follow-up communications or evaluation surveys.

If the forum is oversubscribed, organisers may wish to prioritise participants according to the objectives of the event. In line with the EMBO Fora model, priority may be given to early- and mid-career researchers, particularly senior postdoctoral researchers and newly appointed group leaders.

The EMBO Fora were free of charge. However, organisers may wish to consider mechanisms to encourage attendance and minimise no-shows, such as requiring participants to confirm their attendance shortly before the event or charging a small registration fee.

Preparing participant materials

We recommend sending preparatory materials to participants in advance of the forum, to help them understand the objectives of the event and familiarize themselves with key topics and resources. Providing materials in advance can also help participants prepare for discussions and encourage more active engagement during the forum.

Recommended materials include:

- the forum agenda,
- a list of [external resources](#)
- practical information about the venue and schedule, and
- expectations regarding respectful and confidential participation.

Selecting a room

The room setup should support interaction and discussion. Depending on the number of participants, this could be a seminar room or conference room. We do not recommend an amphitheatre-style format.

The room should include:

- projection facilities and audio equipment
- accessibility accommodations where required.

A separate room should also be booked for the follow-up meeting with senior staff and institutional representatives on the morning of Day 2.

Catering

Providing catering helps create informal opportunities for discussion and networking between participants and speakers.

Depending on the available budget, during the workshop it is recommended to provide:

- two coffee breaks
- one buffet lunch. Alternatively, tables at the local canteen could be reserved.

Dietary requirements and accessibility needs should be collected during registration and communicated to catering providers in advance.

Common challenges and solutions

Organisers may encounter a number of practical challenges when planning and delivering a forum. The table below outlines some common issues and possible approaches for addressing them.

Challenge	Possible solution
Low registration	Engage institutional leaders and department heads to promote the forum, clearly communicate its relevance to participants, and advertise the event well in advance.
Low engagement	Incorporate interactive elements throughout the programme and connect discussions to participants' day-to-day research experiences. Actively ask questions during the event.
Reluctance to speak honestly	Establish clear discussion norms, emphasize confidentiality, and create an environment where uncertainty, disagreement, and questions are welcomed.
Perception that integrity training is an extra	Clearly communicate the importance and relevance of research integrity to everyday research practice, research quality, and professional development during promotion

	of the event and at the start of the forum.
More senior researchers dominate discussion	Direct questions at all participants.
Lack of institutional follow-up	Engage institutional leadership from the outset.
Workshop fatigue	Keep sessions interactive and relevant, have regular breaks, finish the forum not later than 16:00.

Suggested planning timeline

Time before programmed forum date	To-do
6-12 months	Secure institutional support, identify organizers, and confirm date
6 months	Define the programme, select topics, invite speakers and facilitators
4-6 months	Finalize logistics and venue arrangements
2-4 months	Open registration and promote event
1-2 months	Coordinate with speakers and facilitators; review presentations, and discussion formats
2-4 weeks before	Hold a briefing meeting with speakers and facilitators to align objectives, discussion approaches, and key messages
2 weeks before	Share preparatory reading materials and practical information with registered participants
1 week before	Prepare participant materials (e.g. badges, agenda)
1-3 days after	Send feedback survey, thank speakers
12 months after	Monitor progress on follow-up actions and implementation of recommendations

7. After the forum

Evaluation of the Forum

Evaluation is an important part of the forum process. It helps organisers assess participants' experiences, identify opportunities for improvement, and understand whether the forum has influenced participants' awareness, attitudes, or approaches to responsible research. Evaluation can also help identify institutional challenges that may warrant further discussion or action.

A simple post-event survey can provide valuable feedback.

Examples of post-event survey questions

- Which sessions did you find most useful, and why?
- Did the forum change your understanding of any research integrity or responsible research issues?
- What institutional challenges, barriers, or opportunities were highlighted during the discussions?
- Do you feel more confident discussing or addressing research integrity issues in your work?
- What actions or follow-up activities would you recommend?
- What topics would you like to see covered in future forums?

Continuing the impact of the forum

The forum should be viewed as the beginning of an ongoing conversation rather than a one-off event. Its impact can be strengthened through continued dialogue, follow-up activities, and institutional commitment to addressing the issues identified during discussions.

Possible follow-up activities

- Sharing outcomes and recommendations with participants,
- Incorporating findings into institutional policies and training programmes,
- Establishing working groups or action plans to address priority issues,
- Creating opportunities for continued discussion within departments or research groups, and
- Repeating the forum on a regular basis.