

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE**  
**Office of Research Integrity & Outreach**

<b>Procedure #:</b>	RCR-103
<b>Date Adopted:</b>	November 20, 2013
<b>Last Updated:</b>	Dec 30, 2025
<b>Prepared By:</b>	Associate Provost for Research
<b>Reviewed By:</b>	Provost, Federal Office of Research Integrity, Institutional Review Board University of Southern Maine Human Resources
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Anti-Retaliation Policy for Reporting of Misconduct in Research</b>

1. **Purpose:** The standard operating procedures (SOP) for submitting Retaliation complaints as well as the process for resolving the complaints.
2. **Scope:** This SOP applies to instances of possible Retaliation against Whistleblowers and or complainants that make allegations of research misconduct covered by the University of Southern Maine (USM) [Research Misconduct Policy](#).
3. **Responsibility:**
  - 3.1. USM has designated the USM Research Integrity Officer (RIO) to establish and implement this SOP. The RIO also serves as a liaison between USM and the sponsoring agency and will prepare and submit all reports to the research sponsor.
  - 3.2. The RIO shall be free of any real or apparent conflicts of interest in any particular case.
  - 3.3. If involvement of the RIO in a particular case creates a real or apparent conflict of interest with the USM's obligation to protect good faith Whistleblowers, and the conflict cannot be satisfactorily resolved for that case, the Provost shall appoint a substitute RIO who has no conflict of interest.
4. **Definitions:**
  - 4.1. **“Adverse action”** means any action taken by a member of USM which negatively affects the terms or conditions of the Whistleblower's status at the University, including but not limited to his or her employment, academic matriculation, awarding of degree, or USM relationship established by grant, contract, or cooperative agreement. An adverse action can be directed toward any Institutional Member at USM, including the respondent as well as complainant.
  - 4.2. **“Allegation”** means a disclosure of possible Research Misconduct through any means of communication and brought directly to the attention of the Research Integrity Officer (RIO) or to any University Official.

- 4.3. **“Conflict of Interest”** means any personal, professional, or financial relationship that influences or reasonably would be perceived to influence the impartial performance of a duty assigned under these Procedures by any of the following: a member of an Inquiry Panel, Investigative Committee, or a Review Panel, witnesses, the Responsible Administrator, the RIO, the Provost or the President.
- 4.4. **“Day”** means calendar day unless otherwise specified. If a deadline falls on a Saturday, Sunday or Federal holiday, the deadline will be extended to the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday.
- 4.5. **“Deciding Official (DO)”** means the University’s Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. This person will not be the same as the Research Integrity Officer. In circumstances where the DO has a conflict of interest, the Provost may assign another Institutional Member to act as the DO.
- 4.6. **“Good Faith”** as applied to a Complainant or witness, means having a reasonable belief in the truth of one’s Allegation or testimony based on the information known to the Complainant or witness at the time. An Allegation or cooperation with a Misconduct Proceeding is not in Good Faith if with knowledge of reckless disregard for information that would negate the Allegation or testimony. Good Faith as applied to an Institutional Member or committee member, means cooperating with the Misconduct Proceeding by impartially carrying out the duties assigned under these Procedures for the purpose of helping USM meet its responsibilities for research integrity. An individual does not act in Good Faith if their acts or omissions during the Misconduct Proceedings are dishonest or influenced by Conflicts of Interest. .
- 4.7. **“Institutional Member”** means an individual (or individuals) who is employed by, is an agent of, or is affiliated by contract or agreement with an institution. Institutional Members may include, but are not limited to, officials, tenured and untenured faculty, teaching and support staff, researchers, research coordinators, technicians, postdoctoral and other fellows, students, volunteers, subject matter experts, consultants, attorneys, or employees or agents of contractors, subcontractors, or sub-awardees.
- 4.8. **“Research Misconduct”** means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion. A finding of Research Misconduct requires 1) that there be a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant Research community; and 2) the misconduct be committed Intentionally, Knowingly, or Recklessly; and 3) the Allegation be proved by a Preponderance of the Evidence.
- 4.9. **“RIO”** means the University’s Research Integrity Officer. The RIO for USM currently is Ross Hickey, Associate Provost for Research Integrity.
- 4.10. **“Retaliation”** means an adverse action taken against a whistleblower or other individual who has, in good faith, participated in a Misconduct Proceeding (as

Complainant, witness, Review Panel member, Inquiry Panel member, Investigative Committee member, Counsel, Advisor, Responsible Administrator, or RIO) or otherwise cooperated in the review of an allegation, where there is a clear causal link between the participation or cooperation and the adverse action. The context in which an adverse action has occurred, including its materiality, is a relevant and important factor to be taken into account in determining whether it constitutes Retaliation.

- 4.11. **“Whistleblower”** means an individual who makes a Good Faith Allegation of Research Misconduct or demonstrates intent to make a Good Faith allegation (or what is perceived to be an allegation) while an Institutional Member of USM when the alleged research misconduct occurred.

**5. Applicable Documents:**

- 5.1. **42 CFR 50 and 93 applies to all HHS research.**
- 5.2. Title 42, Part 50, Subpart A of the Code of Federal Regulations - 42 CFR 50, Subpart A
- 5.3. Federal Sentencing Guidelines – Chapter 8 Part B – Remedying Harm from Criminal Conduct, and Effective Compliance & Ethics
- 5.4. America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Act - 42 U.S.C. §1862 et seq. (2007)

**6. Procedure:**

**6.1 Filing complaints:**

- 6.1.1. A Whistleblower who wishes to receive the procedural protections described by this SOP shall file his or her written Retaliation complaint with the RIO within **180 days** from the date the Whistleblower became aware or should have become aware of the alleged adverse action. USM shall review and resolve all Whistleblower Retaliation complaints and should do so within **180 days** after receipt of the complaint. If the Whistleblower fails to receive a response from USM to the complaint in accordance with this SOP within **10 days**, the Whistleblower may file the Retaliation complaint directly with any sponsoring agency.
- 6.1.2. The Retaliation complaint must include a description of the Whistleblower's research misconduct allegation and the asserted adverse action, or threat thereof, against the Whistleblower, by USM or its Institutional Members in response to the allegation. If the Retaliation complaint is incomplete, the RIO shall describe to the Whistleblower what additional information is needed in order to meet the minimum requirements of a complaint under this SOP.

**6.2. Responding to complaints:**

- 6.2.1. Upon receipt of a Whistleblower Retaliation complaint, the RIO shall notify the Whistleblower of receipt within **ten (10) days** after receipt. The notice shall also inform the Whistleblower of the process USM proposes to follow in resolving the Retaliation complaint and the necessary actions by the Whistleblower required under that process.
- 6.2.2. The Whistleblower may raise any concerns about the proposed process with the RIO and USM may modify the process in response to the Whistleblower's concerns.
- 6.2.3. The Whistleblower has **five (5) days** from the date of receipt of the initial notification in section **6.2.1** to:
  - 6.2.3.1. Accept the proposed process, although the Whistleblower may also submit documentation for the official record about any concerns he or she may have about the proposed process; or
  - 6.2.3.2. Not accept the proposed process. If the Whistleblower rejects the proposed process, he or she may pursue other remedies as provided by law.
- 6.2.4. USM shall notify the sponsoring agency of any Whistleblower Retaliation complaint it receives within **ten (10) days** after receipt of the complaint.

### **6.3. Interim Protection:**

- 6.3.1. At any time before the merits of a Whistleblower Retaliation complaint have been fully resolved, the Whistleblower may submit a written request to the RIO to take interim actions to protect the Whistleblower against an existing adverse action or credible threat of an adverse action by USM or a Institutional Members. This shall be a separate written request and is not considered part of the initial request under section 6.1.
- 6.3.2. Based on the available evidence, the RIO shall make a determination of whether to provide interim protections and shall advise the Whistleblower of his or her decision in writing. Documentation underlying the decision whether to provide interim protections shall become part of the record of the complaint. When the Whistleblower Retaliation complaint is fully resolved, any temporary measure taken to protect the Whistleblower shall be discontinued or replaced with permanent remedies.

### **6.4. Resolution of complaints:**

#### **6.4.1. General**

- 6.4.1.1. The process should be completed within **180 days** of the date the complaint is filed, unless the Whistleblower agrees to an extension of time. USM shall promptly report the final outcome of either process or any settlement to the sponsoring agency.

6.4.1.2. If the Whistleblower declines USM's proposed process according to these guidelines, he or she may pursue any other legal rights available to the Whistleblower for resolution of the Retaliation complaint.

**6.4.2. Investigation**

6.4.2.1. USM shall conduct an investigation of the Whistleblower Retaliation complaint according to this SOP and implement appropriate administrative remedies consistent with the investigation's finding and University decision thereon.

6.4.2.2. An investigation of Whistleblower Retaliation shall be timely, objective, thorough, and competent. The investigation should be conducted by a panel of at least three (3) individuals appointed by the Provost. The members of the investigation panel shall have no personal or professional relationship or other conflict of interest with the Whistleblower or the alleged individual retaliator(s), and shall be qualified to conduct a thorough and competent investigation.

6.4.2.3. The investigation shall include the collection and examination of all relevant evidence, including interviews with the Whistleblower, the alleged retaliator(s), and any other individual who can provide relevant and material information regarding the claimed Retaliation.

6.4.2.4. USM shall fully cooperate with the investigation and use all available administrative means to secure testimony, documents, and other materials relevant to the investigation.

6.4.2.5. The confidentiality of all participants in the investigation shall be maintained to the maximum extent possible throughout the investigation.

6.4.2.6. To encourage and protect Whistleblowers, it is USM policy that no reference to good-faith reporting of USM-related research misconduct shall be made in personnel files, letters of recommendation, performance appraisals, or any other permanent evaluative documents without the concurrence of the Whistleblower.

6.4.2.7. The panel members shall evaluate and respond objectively to any concerns raised by the Whistleblower about the process, including concerns regarding the selection of the Inquiry Panel member, an Investigative Committee member, or a Review Panel member, the Responsible Administrator, or the RIO, which are raised prior to resolution of the complaint.

6.4.2.8. The conclusions of the investigation shall be documented in a written report and made available to the Whistleblower. The report shall include

findings of fact, a list of witnesses interviewed, an analysis of the evidence, and a detailed description of the investigative process.

6.4.2.9. The Provost shall be the Deciding Official. The Provost shall make a final USM determination as to whether Retaliation occurred. This decision shall be based on the report, the record of the investigation, and a preponderance of evidence standard.

6.4.2.10. If there is a determination that Retaliation has occurred, the Provost shall determine what remedies are appropriate to satisfy USM's obligation to protect Whistleblowers. The Provost shall, in consultation with the Whistleblower, make reasonable and practical efforts to protect the position and reputation of the Whistleblower. These efforts shall be:

- 6.4.2.10.a. reasonable and practical under the circumstances;
- 6.4.2.10.b. proportionate to the risk to the individual's position and reputation; and
- 6.4.2.10.c. consistent with applicable funder expectations, if the Research which was the subject of the Allegation was supported by a federal funding source.
- 6.4.2.10.d. In addition, the Provost may provide protection against further Retaliation by monitoring or disciplining the retaliator.

6.4.2.11. USM shall promptly notify the sponsoring agency of its conclusions and remedies, if any, and forward the underlying investigation report to the sponsor.

6.4.2.12. USM recognizes that the sponsoring agency may, at its own discretion, review the report to determine whether the University has substantially followed the process described herein.

6.4.2.13. USM compliance with this process does not bar the Whistleblower from seeking redress against USM's decision under state law, or as otherwise provided.

## **6.5. Settlement:**

6.5.1. In lieu of the option described above, USM and the Whistleblower may, at any time after the Retaliation complaint is made, enter into any binding settlement agreement, which finally resolves the Retaliation complaint. If both parties agree, the RIO shall facilitate negotiation of such settlements. If such an agreement is reached, USM and the Whistleblower shall sign a statement indicating that the Retaliation complaint has been resolved. USM shall within **30 days** send a copy of the signed statement to the sponsoring agency. The settlement may not restrict the Whistleblower from cooperating with any investigation of an allegation of research misconduct.

6.5.2. USM compliance. At any time a sponsoring agency may review USM's compliance with these guidelines to the extent that USM relies on these guidelines for regulatory compliance. USM and its Institutional Members shall cooperate with any such review and provide the sponsoring agency access to all relevant records.

**6.6. Notice of USM policy:**

6.6.1. USM shall provide to all its members notice of its Anti-Retaliation Policy for Reporting of Misconduct in Research through the Office of Research Integrity and Outreach (ORIO) website. The notice shall include the requirement set forth regarding a Whistleblower's deadline for filing a Retaliation complaint.