

ACU Funders Forum 2014

Background Note

Managing Research Information in African Universities

For current purposes, **Research Information** is the term used to describe the administrative information surrounding the research activities of an institution. This usually encompasses publications, projects, grants and professional activities. Research information management systems help organisations make informed decisions about their research

Several factors have combined to increase the importance of research information management by universities – These include...

- The increasing plethora and scale of research related data being produced
- The growing range of media and milieu for research related information
- The now iterative links between research performance and funding, and stronger accountability for funding once granted
- The demand from funders for more robust uptake (and evidence of uptake) of research from their funded programmes.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Research Management (RM) systems have developed without a coordinated approach¹. However, the factors listed above, as well as increasing collaboration, regulation and complexity in the research area, require that university research information management systems must be flexible – and that they must also adopt metrics that would be recognisable by 'users of information' outside that particular institution. Thus there is now a growing international movement towards the development and adoption of a common 'data dictionary' for research information and of persistent identifiers of research and researchers.

The last decade has seen progress towards better RM in African Universities – including the creation of new offices and regional research management associations². However robust information systems are vital if this progress to be sustained. African Universities must continue to keep pace with international developments in emerging areas of RM (in this case research information management) - and develop systems that reflect their local, as well as funders' requirements.

The 2014 *Funders Forum* will address the topic '**Managing Research Information**'. The programme, which has been developed from a 'pre-event' survey of funders and university participants, comprises three main elements:

1. **Identifying the right projects and research teams** – what information is required to avoid duplicating funders' efforts and ensuring that the right projects are funded?
2. **Managing and reporting on research projects** - what information is required for better planning and reporting on projects?
3. **Sharing and disseminating project outcomes** – what information is required (and in what formats) to assess research impact, to assess funder impact and to ensure better uptake of research?

Participants will be drawn from leading African universities and research funders. In addition, representatives from CASRAI³ and ORCID⁴ will provide an overview of current developments in Research Information Management, describing moves toward the standardisation and harmonisation of research information and the adoption of a common data dictionary that will streamline the sharing of information about researchers, research projects and research reporting. As in previous years, the event will have a strongly practical focus, aiming to identify a set of specific action points to take forward.

The *Funders Forum* is organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, with support from the Wellcome Trust.

¹ Research Information Management. Developing tools to inform the management of research and translating existing good practice (2010)

² Research management in African universities: from awareness raising to developing structures by John Kirkland and Patrice Ajai-Ajagbe (2013)

³ CASRAI (The Consortia Advancing Standards in Research Administration Information) is a not-for-profit standards development organization. it provides a forum and the mechanisms required to standardize the data that researchers, their institutions and their funders must produce, store, exchange and process throughout the life-cycle of research activity. CASRAI envisions research teams maintaining a single authoritative file on their activities and being able to quickly produce any documents needed by funders and institutions from this single source file.

⁴ ORCID is an open, non-profit, community-based effort to provide a registry of unique researcher identifiers and a transparent method of linking research activities and outputs to these identifiers.