



University of Colorado **Boulder**

July 13, 2026

The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

RE: Proposed Rule on Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance, Docket No. OMB-2026-0034

Dear Director Vought:

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) proposed *Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance*. CU Boulder supports OMB's stated objectives of strengthening stewardship of taxpayer resources, improving transparency and accountability, and ensuring that federal financial assistance is administered efficiently and effectively. However, following a comprehensive review of the proposed regulation and a systematic survey of its key research constituencies—faculty and principal investigators, research administrators, research leaders, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and research staff—CU Boulder is concerned that the regulation as drafted would undermine these objectives rather than advance them.

CU Boulder is Colorado's flagship public research university and one of only 38 U.S. public research institutions in the Association of American Universities. Home to five Nobel Laureates since 1989 and the only university to have sent space instruments to every planet in the solar system, the University has delivered a strong return on federal and state investment since its founding in 1876. Federal investments in university research have generated extraordinary public returns through scientific discovery, technological innovation, workforce development, improved public health, enhanced national security, and economic competitiveness – outcomes made possible by a research enterprise that is transparent, merit-based, collaborative, and sufficiently stable to support long-term scientific investigation.

The University's concern is cumulative. While many of the proposed revisions appear administrative when considered individually, faculty, principal investigators, research administrators, research leaders, postdoctoral researchers, research staff, and students consistently identified the same overarching issue: taken together, the changes would reduce the stability, predictability, and transparency that allow federally funded research to succeed, introducing uncertainty at every stage of the research lifecycle, including proposal development, merit review, award administration, scientific communication, international collaboration, and workforce development, and would diminish the long-term return on federal research investments.

The University therefore respectfully recommends the following targeted modifications, organized around seven priority areas, which would address these concerns while advancing OMB's stated objectives.

- I. **Preserving the Stability and Competitiveness of the U.S. Research Enterprise.** Evaluate the proposed revisions not only provision-by-provision but also for their cumulative effect on the federal research enterprise, which would increase uncertainty across the research lifecycle affecting graduate education, workforce development, long-term research planning, institutional competitiveness, and stewardship of prior federal investments.
- II. **Merit Review and Award Decisions.** Preserve independent expert peer review, applying transparent and consistent criteria, as the primary basis for evaluating research proposals. Clarify that Administration priorities appropriately inform program direction, not the evaluation of individual awards. Remove the preference for institutions with lower indirect cost rates, which conflicts with §§ [200.414(c)(1)] and [200.306].
- III. **Award Administration, Research Continuity, and Award Termination.** Preserve the stability and predictability necessary for long-term research, graduate education, and responsible institutional stewardship while maintaining appropriate agency oversight. Clarify discretionary termination authority, the conditions under which it may be exercised, and the procedural protections governing awarded projects.
- IV. **Scientific Communication, Publication, and Dissemination of Research Results.** Recognize publication, conferences, professional engagement, and dissemination of research findings as integral components of federally funded research. Restore these as allowable costs consistent with existing federal public access policies and long-standing federal research practice.
- V. **International Research Collaboration and Research Security.** Align research security requirements with existing federal frameworks, including the National Security Presidential Memorandum-33 (NSPM-33), and narrowly tailor restrictions to clearly identified risks, recognizing that international collaborations are foundational to scientific advancement. Provide clearer definitions and greater harmonization across agencies to reduce administrative burden and strengthen both security and U.S. research competitiveness.
- VI. **Administrative Burden, Award Administration, and Institutional Implementation.** Improve accountability through risk-based oversight rather than uniform administrative requirements applied to all recipients and avoid new requirements that increase recipient burden without corresponding improvements in stewardship, financial accountability, or program integrity.
- VII. **National Policy Conditions and Regulatory Clarity.** Define the proposed national policy conditions in objective, operationally implementable language that promotes consistent implementation across federal agencies while preserving rigorous scientific inquiry, evidence-based research, and compliance with existing statutory and regulatory requirements.

Detailed Comments and Requested Revisions

Across these seven areas, CU Boulder recommends revisions that better align the proposed regulations with OMB's stated goals of stewardship, transparency, accountability, and efficient administration. Throughout these comments, the University seeks not to preserve existing practices for their own sake but to preserve those elements of the federal research enterprise that have demonstrably contributed to scientific excellence, responsible stewardship of federal resources, and long-term public benefit.

I. Preserving the Stability and Competitiveness of the U.S. Research Enterprise

Relevant Proposed Sections: The proposed regulation evaluated as an integrated whole.

Requested Revision

CU Boulder recommends that OMB evaluate the proposed regulation not only on a provision-by-provision basis, but also for its cumulative effect on the stability, predictability, and competitiveness of the U.S. research enterprise. Specifically, OMB should revise the proposed regulation to:

- Preserve stable, transparent, and merit-based processes throughout the research lifecycle, from proposal development and merit review through award administration, research performance, dissemination of results, and award closeout.
- Ensure that provisions intended to strengthen accountability do not unintentionally increase uncertainty, reduce scientific collaboration, discourage innovation, or diminish the long-term return on federal research investments.
- Consider the combined effects of the proposed revisions on graduate education, workforce development, institutional research capacity, and the nation's long-term scientific and economic competitiveness.

Why Revision Is Needed

Throughout the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, OMB explains that the revisions are intended to improve stewardship of taxpayer resources, strengthen accountability, increase transparency, and promote more effective administration of federal financial assistance.

CU Boulder strongly supports these objectives.

However, when evaluated collectively rather than individually, several proposed revisions introduce additional uncertainty at nearly every stage of the federally funded research lifecycle: proposal review, award administration, research continuity, scientific communication, international collaboration, workforce development, and institutional planning. Together the proposed revisions may unintentionally reduce the effectiveness of federally funded research.

The University believes these cumulative effects warrant explicit consideration because the success of the federal research enterprise depends not only upon accountability for individual awards but also upon maintaining a stable environment in which institutions can responsibly invest in people, facilities, partnerships, and long-term scientific programs.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

Feedback from the University's campus constituencies revealed remarkable consistency regarding this overarching issue. Across research leadership, researchers, research administrators, and the research workforce, respondents consistently identified increasing uncertainty as the central concern underlying the proposed regulation.

Researchers and research leadership emphasized that scientific discovery depends upon stable funding environments, transparent merit review, long-term collaboration, and the ability to pursue innovative research whose significance may not become fully apparent for many years. Respondents noted that scientific breakthroughs frequently result from sustained investments in investigator-initiated research rather than short-term projects aligned with changing priorities. They also emphasized that nationally recognized research programs frequently require decades of sustained investment in specialized facilities, interdisciplinary collaborations, and graduate education, making long-term stability essential to continued scientific leadership.

Research administrators emphasized that stability is equally important from an operational perspective. Universities make long-term commitments involving personnel, financial systems, research infrastructure, shared instrumentation, grants and contracts management processes, compliance programs, and institutional investment based upon expectations that federal awards will be administered through transparent and predictable processes. Respondents noted that uncertainty itself increases administrative burden because institutions must devote additional resources to contingency planning, legal review, policy interpretation, workforce planning, and institutional risk management.

All stakeholders identified workforce development as one of the proposed regulation's most significant cross-cutting impacts. Graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and research staff depend upon stable research environments that support long-term projects, publication of research findings, conference participation, international collaboration, and predictable funding. Respondents expressed concern that increasing uncertainty across multiple aspects of federally funded research may discourage talented researchers from pursuing academic careers while reducing the attractiveness of the U.S. research enterprise to future scientific leaders.

Illustrative Operational Examples

The University's constituencies identified numerous examples demonstrating how the combined effects of the proposed regulation extend beyond any individual provision. Researchers conducting research in quantum information science, Artificial Intelligence, atmospheric and Earth system sciences emphasized that international collaborative observational programs require decades of sustained investment before yielding their greatest scientific value. Changes affecting proposal evaluation, international collaboration, award continuation, and workforce stability collectively threaten these long-term scientific investments while reducing the return on prior federal support.

Faculty developing science and engineering learning resources for students with disabilities described how these nationally significant research efforts depend upon stable funding to support sustained

software development, accessibility testing, and long-term collaboration among educators, developers, and researchers. Respondents noted that recent funding disruptions have already delayed efforts to improve accessibility despite continuing federal accessibility requirements.

Researchers conducting prevention science similarly emphasized that successful partnerships with schools, health systems, and community organizations require predictable award administration, transparent proposal evaluation, stable funding, and the ability to communicate research findings broadly. The cumulative effects of increased uncertainty across these areas may reduce both research effectiveness and community impact.

Research administrators representing large interdisciplinary centers observed that uncertainty surrounding proposal review, award continuation, publication, and collaboration has already increased institutional contingency planning efforts, diverting time and resources away from research activities and toward managing evolving funding risks.

Why the Requested Revision Better Advances OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revision most directly advances the return on taxpayer investment in research. Federal research awards support complex scientific enterprises involving people, facilities, equipment, partnerships, data, and infrastructure that frequently require many years to develop. A research environment stable enough to support long-term investment – while maintaining appropriate oversight of federal resources – protects the value of federal dollars already committed and maximizes the scientific and public return on new investments.

Accordingly, CU Boulder encourages OMB to evaluate the proposed regulation as an integrated whole and to revise those provisions that, collectively, may reduce the stability, predictability, and competitiveness that have historically enabled the United States to maintain global leadership in research and innovation.

II. Merit Review and Award Decisions

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.202, 200.205, and 200.206]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends revising proposed §§ [200.202, 200.205, and 200.206] to:

- Clarify the proposed requirement that discretionary awards “demonstrably advance the President's policy priorities,” specifying that Administration priorities inform agency strategic planning, funding opportunity development, and program direction and not the technical evaluation of individual research proposals.
- Preserve scientific merit, as determined through independent expert technical peer review, as the primary basis for evaluating individual research proposals, including scientific quality, technical merit, innovation, feasibility, and potential public benefit.
- Maintain transparent, consistently applied proposal evaluation criteria throughout the review process.

- Clarify the respective roles of expert peer reviewers, agency officials, and senior political leadership to preserve confidence in the objectivity and integrity of federal funding decisions.
- Remove the preference for discretionary awards to institutions with lower indirect cost rates, which conflicts with §§ [200.414(c)(1) and 200.306] and introduces a non-merit factor into award evaluation.

Why Revision Is Needed

OMB explains that the proposed revisions are intended to strengthen stewardship of taxpayer resources, improve transparency and accountability, and support Gold Standard Science. CU Boulder shares these objectives.

However, proposed § [200.205] would require that discretionary awards, where applicable, “demonstrably advance the President’s policy priorities” while expanding review of individual awards by senior political appointees. As drafted, this language introduces an additional evaluation criterion that differs from the long-established practice of evaluating research proposals principally on scientific merit through independent expert review.

In practice, these revisions may reduce transparency regarding proposal evaluation, increase uncertainty for applicants, and diminish confidence that awards are based primarily upon scientific excellence. When selection processes are based on factors other than the scientific and technical merit of proposed work, there is a risk that the most promising, innovative, or societally beneficial research may not be selected for support. This could diminish the overall impact of the federal research portfolio and reduce the public benefits that result from funding the highest-quality science and scholarship.

Rather than strengthening stewardship of federal research investments, the proposed approach may discourage innovative investigator-initiated research, complicate institutional planning, and reduce the predictability necessary for universities to make responsible long-term investments in people, infrastructure, and research capacity.

Proposed § [200.205] on Indirect Cost Rate preference further states that, “[a]ll else being equal, preference for discretionary awards should be given to institutions with lower indirect cost rates.” This preference cannot be reconciled with § [200.414(c)(1)], which provides that negotiated indirect cost rates “must be accepted by all Federal agencies.” A preference that rewards applicants for undercutting their federally negotiated rates penalizes institutions for relying on the very rates the regulation requires agencies to accept. Because negotiated indirect cost rates appropriately reflect differences in research portfolios and the facilities and infrastructure required to support them, a preference for lower indirect cost rates would disproportionately disadvantage research-intensive institutions, including many R1 universities, and discourage investment in the advanced research capacity on which the federal government depends.

The preference also operates as compelled voluntary cost sharing. An institution that suppresses its indirect cost recovery to remain competitive must absorb unrecovered facilities and administrative costs with institutional funds. Section [200.306] provides that voluntary committed cost sharing is not

expected and may not be used as a factor during the merit review of applications; a preference that systematically rewards greater institutional absorption of project costs factors voluntary cost sharing into award decisions in precisely the manner § [200.306] prohibits.

Operationally, the preference incentivizes institutions to artificially lower indirect cost rates, shifting real facilities and administrative burden to institutional funds and overriding other important considerations of the researcher, the proposal, and the institution, while injecting a non-merit factor into award evaluation. The University also requests clarification regarding whether the indirect cost rates of subrecipient institutions would be included in determining preference among applicant institutions.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

Across the University's research enterprise, preservation of independent scientific merit review emerged as the strongest area of consensus.

Researchers and research leaders emphasized that scientific merit should remain the primary basis for evaluating individual research proposals, distinguishing between agencies appropriately establishing strategic research priorities and the evaluation of individual proposals according to scientific quality, technical rigor, innovation, feasibility, and potential public benefit. Respondents expressed concern that requiring proposals to demonstrate alignment with current Administration priorities introduces an evaluation criterion fundamentally different from scientific merit and may discourage investigator-initiated research, particularly high-risk, high-reward projects whose significance may not be fully understood during proposal review. Several respondents observed that many transformative advances in medicine, engineering, quantum science, atmospheric science, Earth system science, and computing emerged from basic research whose practical applications could not have been predicted when awards were initially made. They also emphasized that predictable merit review supports long-term institutional investments in faculty recruitment, research infrastructure, interdisciplinary scientific programs, specialized technical expertise, and long-term strategic planning.

Research administrators emphasized the operational importance of transparent and predictable review criteria. Institutions rely upon consistent proposal evaluation processes to advise investigators, manage proposal development, allocate institutional resources, and make long-term strategic investments. Expanded discretionary review without corresponding transparency regarding evaluation criteria would increase uncertainty while making proposal development less predictable for applicants, recipient institutions, and federal agencies alike. Respondents also stressed that institutions may see increased award modifications, rebudgeting actions, delayed award issuance, non-standard terms, inconsistent agency implementation, and added strain on research administration infrastructure, increasing administrative burden and requiring closer coordination, heightened post-award monitoring, and greater institutional oversight.

Graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, research staff, and early-career investigators identified predictable, merit-based review as fundamental to career planning and workforce development. Respondents expressed concern that increasing uncertainty regarding proposal evaluation may

discourage talented researchers from pursuing careers in federally funded research while reducing universities' ability to recruit and retain future scientific leaders.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Researchers leading internationally recognized programs in long-term environmental observation and modeling emphasized that decades-long research initiatives require predictable, merit-based funding decisions to support specialized facilities, observational networks, and scientific infrastructure that provide environmental intelligence, hazard preparedness, and operational forecasting. Respondents emphasized that interruptions to these long-term efforts diminish the value of prior federal investments because observational records cannot easily be recreated once disrupted.

Faculty conducting prevention science emphasized that long-term studies evaluating evidence-based interventions require transparent proposal evaluation and sustained federal investment to maintain partnerships with schools, health systems, and community organizations. Increased uncertainty surrounding proposal review may discourage institutions and community partners from making these long-term commitments.

Researchers developing accessible STEM educational technologies similarly described how nationally significant accessibility initiatives depend upon stable, merit-based funding that allows specialized technical expertise and educational resources to mature over multiple funding cycles. Respondents noted that recent funding disruptions have already delayed accessibility improvements despite continuing federal accessibility requirements.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance transparency and public confidence in federal funding decisions. Independent expert peer review provides an objective, technically rigorous, and openly documented framework for allocating limited federal research resources; transparent, consistently applied criteria are what make funding decisions explainable to applicants and auditable by oversight bodies.

Preserving this framework, while allowing agencies to establish strategic program priorities through appropriate programmatic mechanisms, ensures that federal investments continue to support the highest-quality science and sustains the confidence of universities, investigators, students, and research partners that awards rest upon scientific excellence rather than shifting non-merit considerations. That confidence, in turn, enables the responsible long-term investments in scientific discovery and workforce development on which the stability of the federal research enterprise depends.

III. Award Administration, Research Continuity, and Award Termination

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.208 and 200.340–343]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends revising proposed §§ [200.208 and 200.340–343] to:

- Clarify and substantially narrow the circumstances under which agencies may impose specific conditions, suspend awards, or terminate awards after they have been competitively awarded.
- Clarify that changes in Administration priorities, absent recipient noncompliance or failure to perform, should not alone constitute sufficient justification for suspending or terminating an award.
- Require documented, objective findings supporting discretionary suspension or termination decisions.
- Provide recipients with meaningful notice and an opportunity to respond or remedy identified concerns prior to discretionary termination, except where immediate action is required by law or necessary to protect public health or safety.
- Recognize the unique operational characteristics of multi-year research awards, including commitments to graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, research staff, research participants, and collaborating institutions.

Why Revision Is Needed

OMB explains that these proposed revisions are intended to provide agencies with additional flexibility to ensure that federal awards continue to advance agency priorities and serve the interests of the Federal Government throughout the period of performance.

CU Boulder agrees that federal agencies should retain appropriate authority to address fraud, waste, abuse, material noncompliance, or circumstances in which an award no longer fulfills its authorized purpose.

As drafted, however, the proposed revisions substantially expand agency discretion to modify, suspend, or terminate awards after they have been competitively awarded. This approach introduces uncertainty into a research environment that depends upon long-term planning, continuity of effort, and sustained investment in people, infrastructure, and collaborative partnerships.

Research awards are fundamentally different from procurement contracts. Scientific research frequently requires years of uninterrupted work before meaningful outcomes are achieved. Once a project is interrupted, many of its scientific, educational, institutional, and public benefits cannot simply be restored by reinstating funding at a later date.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

Across the University's research enterprise, research continuity emerged as one of the most significant operational concerns raised by the proposed regulation.

Researchers and research leaders emphasized that federally funded research depends upon long-term continuity. Many projects require years of uninterrupted laboratory work, field observations, participant recruitment, software development, equipment calibration, or longitudinal data collection before producing meaningful scientific outcomes. Likewise, federally funded centers depend upon coordinated portfolios of awards supporting shared personnel, specialized facilities, instrumentation,

graduate education, and collaborative research networks. Respondents expressed concern that expanded discretionary termination authority would increase project risk, disrupt interconnected research programs, and discourage ambitious scientific investigations whose significance frequently extends well beyond the priorities in place when awards were originally issued.

Research administrators emphasized that uncertainty itself creates substantial administrative burden. Universities make long-term commitments involving personnel, subawards, collaborative agreements, equipment, and institutional resources based upon awarded projects. If institutions cannot reasonably rely upon awarded research remaining active absent poor performance or noncompliance, they must fundamentally change how research risk is managed across the enterprise. Respondents also noted that expanded authority under § [200.208] to impose additional award conditions during project performance would reduce predictability for recipients and awarding agencies while increasing institutional risk management responsibilities.

Respondents identified workforce impacts as one of the proposed regulation's most significant consequences. Graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and research staff depend upon sustained project continuity to complete training, advance research, and establish successful careers. Respondents expressed concern that increased uncertainty regarding award continuation would make it more difficult to recruit and retain talented researchers while weakening the future scientific workforce.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Researchers conducting long-term environmental observation and modeling described programs that rely on decades of continuous data collection to improve hazard preparedness, environmental intelligence, and operational forecasting. Respondents emphasized that interruptions create permanent gaps in observational records and long-term datasets that cannot later be reconstructed, reducing both the scientific value of ongoing projects and the return on decades of prior federal investment.

Faculty conducting community-engaged and prevention science similarly emphasized that successful partnerships with schools, health systems, local governments, and community organizations depend upon confidence that federally funded projects will remain operational throughout the agreed period of performance. Unexpected award interruptions may damage relationships requiring years to establish.

Respondents described the termination of a federally funded graduate training award after students had already been recruited with expectations of multi-year support. In this instance, the institution was forced to redirect unbudgeted campus resources to honor those commitments. Respondents noted that such accommodations are not always possible; abrupt award terminations may instead leave students without expected multi-year support, disrupt graduate education and workforce development, or require institutions to divert limited resources from other research and educational priorities.

Respondents representing research centers that rely heavily on federal grant funding described uncertainty surrounding award continuation as already affecting workforce planning, hiring decisions, and institutional investment. Several observed that even the possibility of abrupt termination has increased contingency planning efforts, diverting administrative and scientific resources away from research activities.

Faculty also highlighted implications for graduate education. Doctoral students cannot reasonably commit to research programs requiring five or six years of sustained effort if awards may be suspended or terminated because of changing priorities unrelated to scientific performance or award compliance.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance stewardship of federal resources already invested. Research awards represent taxpayer commitments in progress; abrupt suspension or termination of productive projects forfeits much of that value, because interrupted observations, disbanded research teams, and severed partnerships frequently cannot be reconstituted by reinstating funding at a later date.

Maintaining clearly defined termination standards, appropriate procedural protections, and predictable award administration does not diminish accountability. It allows federally funded projects to reach successful completion – preserving workforce continuity, protecting research participants and institutional partnerships, and ensuring that resources already committed achieve their intended scientific and public benefits – while agencies retain full authority to address fraud, material noncompliance, misuse of federal funds, or genuine performance concerns.

IV. Scientific Communication, Publication, and Dissemination of Research Results

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.432, 200.450, 200.454, and 200.461]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends revising proposed §§ [200.432, 200.450, 200.454, and 200.461] to:

- Restore conference participation, publication costs, professional memberships, and scholarly communication expenses as allowable costs when they directly support the objectives of a federally funded award.
- Restore publication costs as allowable direct costs when necessary to comply with federal public access requirements and agency-specific dissemination policies.
- Preserve investigators' ability to communicate research findings through conferences that directly relate to the work of the project or grant, peer-reviewed publications, professional societies, and scientific meetings without unnecessary case-by-case approvals.
- Clarify that communicating scientific findings, including publication, conference presentations, invited testimony, and scholarly discussion, does not constitute prohibited “issue advocacy” when undertaken as part of legitimate federally funded research activities.

Why Revision Is Needed

OMB explains that conference costs are “not inherently necessary to carry out the core programmatic objectives of most Federal awards” § [200.432] and proposes to make publication costs generally unallowable because they likewise are not considered essential to award performance § [200.461].

CU Boulder respectfully disagrees with this underlying premise.

For research awards, publication, peer review, scientific conferences, professional engagement, and scholarly communication are not ancillary activities that occur after research is complete: they are integral components of the research process itself. These activities enable independent evaluation of scientific findings, accelerate scientific progress, foster collaboration, support graduate education and workforce development, and ensure that federally funded discoveries are broadly disseminated for the benefit of other researchers, industry, policymakers, educators, and the public.

CU Boulder faculty are often asked to testify before state and federal policymakers as experts in their fields. Upon invitation, University faculty have meaningfully contributed to national policy discussions on issues including hazards and emergency preparedness, space situational awareness, weather forecasting, drought management, modernizing Congress, and more. Opportunities to provide invited testimony ensure federally funded science helps inform policymaking and can yield additional public benefit.

Restricting these activities would not improve stewardship of federal resources. Rather, it would reduce the scientific and public return on federal research investments by limiting dissemination of research findings, slowing scientific exchange, increasing administrative burden through case-by-case approval requirements, and creating barriers to training the next generation of scientists and engineers.

CU Boulder is also concerned that proposed § [200.461] creates an operational inconsistency with existing federal public access policies. Federal agencies increasingly require or encourage immediate public access to federally funded research results, recognizing dissemination as a core objective of federal research investments. Making publication costs generally unallowable while maintaining public access expectations would create unnecessary implementation challenges for recipients and awarding agencies alike.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

Across the University's research enterprise, respondents consistently identified scientific communication as an essential component of responsible stewardship of federally funded research.

Researchers and research leaders emphasized that publication, conference participation, and scholarly communication are integral components of the research process rather than optional professional activities. Peer-reviewed publication provides independent validation of research findings, while scientific meetings enable investigators to exchange ideas, establish collaborations, receive technical feedback, and accelerate scientific progress. Respondents also noted that conferences often cannot be identified at the proposal stage because research findings, invitations, and collaborative opportunities

evolve throughout the life of a project. Requiring prior approval for routine scientific communication would reduce opportunities for collaboration and research advancement while increasing administrative burden for both recipients and federal agencies.

Research administrators emphasized that introducing case-by-case approval requirements for publication, conference participation, or similar routine research activities would substantially increase administrative burden for both institutions and federal agencies without meaningfully improving accountability. Respondents also questioned how institutions could reconcile the proposed allowability restrictions with existing federal public access requirements and agency expectations regarding dissemination of federally funded research.

Respondents emphasized that publication and conference participation are fundamental components of graduate education and workforce development. Peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, professional networking, and scientific feedback are essential to degree completion, career advancement, and preparation of the nation's future research workforce. Restricting these activities would directly affect students' ability to establish successful research careers.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Researchers conducting research in AI, engineering, biomedical, atmospheric, and Earth sciences said conferences frequently provide the first opportunity for independent scientific evaluation of new findings. Delaying or limiting conference participation would slow scientific exchange while reducing opportunities for collaboration across institutions and disciplines.

Multiple investigators observed that publication charges associated with open access journals frequently represent necessary research expenses rather than discretionary costs. Respondents noted that the proposed restrictions appear inconsistent with current federal public access policies that require or strongly encourage broad public dissemination of federally funded research.

University Libraries estimated that CU Boulder researchers spend approximately \$6.9 million annually on article processing charges (APCs), with roughly half of those costs currently supported through sponsored research. Respondents noted that making publication costs broadly unallowable would shift millions of dollars in annual costs to researchers and institutions while creating significant implementation challenges given existing federal public access policies. Absorbing these costs institutionally would require substantial reductions in collections or other research support services, illustrating the broader institutional impacts of the proposed revisions.

Faculty supervising doctoral students emphasized that peer-reviewed publication and conference participation are integral components of graduate education and workforce development. Limiting support for these activities would directly affect students' ability to complete degrees, compete for employment, and establish successful research careers – in academia, industry, and the federal government itself.

Researchers also emphasized that access to professional societies, scientific journals, and technical literature remains essential to maintaining awareness of current scientific developments, avoiding

unnecessary duplication of federally funded research, and ensuring that taxpayer investments build efficiently upon existing scientific knowledge.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance the public benefit generated by federal research investments. Scientific communication is the principal mechanism through which federally funded discoveries reach the researchers, industries, educators, policymakers, and members of the public who ultimately benefit from them: publication and peer review validate findings, conferences accelerate discovery and collaboration, and broad dissemination ensures that knowledge paid for by taxpayers is available well beyond the laboratory that produced it.

Restoring these long-standing costs as allowable – and maintaining consistency between allowability requirements and existing federal public access policies – would also reduce administrative complexity and promote efficient implementation across federal agencies. Preserving these components of the research enterprise strengthens, rather than weakens, responsible stewardship by maximizing the scientific and societal return on taxpayer investments in research.

V. International Research Collaboration and Research Security

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.202(e), 200.206, and 200.220]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends revising proposed §§ [200.202(e), 200.206, and 200.220] to:

- Narrow restrictions on international research collaborations to address clearly identified and evidence-based research security risks rather than broadly restricting legitimate scientific collaboration.
- Align implementation with existing federal research security frameworks, including NSPM-33, the *CHIPS and Science Act*, federal export control regulations, and existing disclosure requirements.
- Clarify the definitions of “covered foreign country,” “covered foreign entity,” and related terms to promote consistent implementation across federal agencies.
- Preserve agency flexibility to approve legitimate international scientific collaborations that advance U.S. scientific leadership while appropriately managing national security risks.

Why Revision Is Needed

OMB proposes additional requirements governing international elements of research and development awards, including restrictions involving “covered foreign countries” and “covered foreign entities.”

CU Boulder strongly supports protecting national security, strengthening research security, and ensuring appropriate oversight of international research activities.

The University recognizes that legitimate international scientific collaboration is foundational to scientific advancement. As such, the University has invested substantial institutional resources implementing NSPM-33, enhanced foreign disclosure requirements, export control regulations, conflict-of-interest reporting, and related research security programs. These efforts have significantly strengthened institutional oversight while preserving international collaborations that are essential to modern scientific research.

As drafted, however, the proposed provisions extend well beyond existing federal research security frameworks and may unintentionally restrict legitimate scientific collaborations that present little or no additional security risk. Broad restrictions may reduce scientific capability, increase administrative burden, and limit access to internationally distributed expertise, facilities, observational networks, and datasets that directly support U.S. scientific leadership.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

The University's constituencies consistently distinguished between research security, which respondents strongly supported, and broad restrictions on international scientific collaboration, which they believed may unintentionally diminish research quality without materially improving national security.

Researchers and research leaders emphasized that many contemporary scientific challenges cannot be addressed effectively without international collaboration. Research involving quantum science, artificial intelligence, atmospheric science, Earth observations, astronomy, engineering, public health, and numerous other disciplines routinely depends upon access to international field sites, specialized instrumentation, observational networks, computational resources, and scientific expertise unavailable within the United States. Respondents expressed concern that broad restrictions would require scientifically optimal research designs to be modified primarily for compliance purposes rather than scientific considerations, jeopardizing internationally recognized research programs built through decades of collaboration while diminishing the return on prior federal investment and America's ability to attract and collaborate with the world's strongest researchers.

Research administrators broadly supported strengthening research security while emphasizing the importance of implementation clarity and regulatory consistency. Institutions have already invested substantially in implementing NSPM-33 and related federal initiatives. Respondents expressed concern that additional requirements could create overlapping compliance obligations, inconsistent implementation among agencies, increased workload for pre-award and subaward offices reviewing foreign collaborations, and unnecessary administrative burden without materially improving research security. They also requested greater clarity regarding how agencies would evaluate existing and future international collaborations under the proposed language.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Researchers conducting Arctic and Antarctic science described observational programs extending across multiple countries that require shared access to field stations, research vessels, aircraft, satellite observations, and specialized scientific expertise. Respondents emphasized that these collaborations

directly support U.S. weather forecasting, environmental intelligence, hazard preparedness, and national security objectives.

Faculty conducting atmospheric and Earth system science similarly noted that understanding global environmental systems requires observations collected across multiple continents and oceans. International scientific collaboration enables the United States to leverage complementary investments made by partner nations while maintaining leadership in environmental prediction, and Earth system research.

Researchers leading internationally collaborative engineering, astronomy, and computational science initiatives described specialized facilities and scientific capabilities available only through multinational partnerships. Restricting these collaborations would reduce scientific capability while limiting opportunities for American researchers and students to participate in globally significant research programs.

Several respondents also highlighted workforce implications. International collaboration frequently serves as an important pathway for recruiting exceptional graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and faculty members who ultimately strengthen the U.S. scientific workforce and contribute to American research leadership.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance the effectiveness of federal research investments and the competitiveness of the U.S. research enterprise. A risk-based approach aligned with existing federal research security frameworks – including NSPM-33 – allows institutions and agencies to identify and mitigate genuine security concerns while preserving the international partnerships through which the United States leverages complementary investments made by partner nations, accesses facilities, observational networks, and expertise unavailable domestically, and recruits exceptional scientific talent.

Narrowly tailored, consistently defined requirements strengthen security and competitiveness simultaneously: they promote consistency across agencies, reduce duplicative compliance requirements, concentrate institutional resources on higher-risk activities, and protect decades of collaborative scientific infrastructure that sustains America's position as the global leader in research and innovation.

VI. Administrative Burden, Award Administration, and Institutional Implementation

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.303, 200.305, and 200.329–333]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends revising proposed §§ [200.303, 200.305, and 200.329–333] to:

- Apply enhanced administrative and financial oversight using a risk-based approach that targets recipients or activities presenting demonstrably higher risk rather than broadly expanding administrative requirements for all recipients.

- Revise proposed § [200.305(c)] to eliminate the requirement for written justification supporting routine payment requests or apply such requirements only where recipient-specific risk justifies additional oversight.
- Preserve the use of fixed amount subawards where appropriate.
- Clarify that institutional affiliates, research foundations, hospitals, and similarly integrated organizational relationships are not automatically treated as traditional subrecipients under § [200.331].
- Ensure that expanded subrecipient monitoring requirements remain proportionate to institutional risk and avoid unnecessary duplication of existing oversight requirements.

Why Revision Is Needed

Throughout the proposed regulation, OMB emphasizes reducing waste, improving stewardship of federal resources, strengthening accountability, and increasing administrative efficiency.

CU Boulder strongly supports these objectives.

However, several proposed administrative provisions would significantly expand institutional compliance responsibilities without clear evidence that they would produce corresponding improvements in stewardship or financial accountability. Taken together, these changes would require substantial additional administrative infrastructure, documentation, coordination, and review while diverting institutional resources from research administration, financial oversight, and support for investigators and students.

The requirement to implement all OMB amendments immediately upon their effective date limits the institution's ability to rely on agency-specific exceptions or phased implementation timelines. As a result, institutions must rapidly adopt policies, procedures, and systems with little transition time. Operationally, it challenges the university's ability to ensure timely and consistent alignment across units.

Many of the proposed requirements apply uniformly to all recipients regardless of demonstrated institutional risk. The University believes that a risk-based approach would better align with OMB's stated objectives by concentrating oversight where additional monitoring is most likely to improve accountability.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

The University's research administrators identified these provisions as among the most operationally significant changes contained in the proposed regulation.

Internal Controls § [200.303]

Implementation would require significant coordination among research administration, human resources, payroll, information technology, export controls, and institutional compliance offices while affecting thousands of federally funded employees, graduate assistants, postdoctoral researchers, and research staff already subject to existing federal employment verification requirements.

Respondents viewed this as a substantial institutional undertaking whose administrative costs appear disproportionate to any demonstrated benefit for grant administration.

Payment Requirements § [200.305]

Respondents identified the proposed requirement to provide written justification supporting routine federal payment requests as one of the most significant operational changes in the proposed regulation. This would increase the administrative burden placed on researchers, who would need to provide updates and justifications for each individual payment.

Large research universities routinely process thousands of payment transactions supporting hundreds of active federal awards. Requiring individualized written justification for routine payment requests would substantially increase administrative workload without changing the underlying allowability standards, documentation requirements, or internal control systems already governing those expenditures.

Several respondents questioned whether federal agencies possess sufficient staffing to review this additional documentation without introducing delays into routine payment processing.

Subrecipient Monitoring and Fixed Amount Awards §§ [200.329–333]

Research administrators strongly supported appropriate subrecipient oversight while expressing concern that several proposed revisions would substantially increase administrative burden without materially strengthening existing accountability mechanisms.

Respondents emphasized that the proposed treatment of institutional affiliates as subrecipients would fundamentally alter long-standing institutional business relationships involving research foundations, affiliated organizations, hospitals, and similar entities that frequently operate as integrated components of a single research enterprise rather than as traditional subrecipient organizations. There may also be a particularly adverse impact on relationships with industry subrecipients, for whom fixed-price awards often provide a more streamlined approach to pricing, administration, and award processing.

Similarly, respondents identified elimination of fixed amount subawards as a significant concern.

Research administrators said that the impact on pass-through award structures will cause additional administrative burden as subrecipients must track and report actual costs. The elimination of fixed amount awards will increase invoicing volume, transaction-level review, and subrecipient monitoring, with greater risk of billing delays under cost-reimbursable structures.

Fixed amount subawards frequently provide an efficient mechanism for administering well-defined collaborative research activities while reducing invoicing, documentation, and financial review requirements for both pass-through entities and collaborating institutions.

Replacing these arrangements with traditional cost-reimbursement structures would increase administrative effort for all participating organizations without necessarily improving accountability. The increased use of cost-reimbursable awards is expected to result in greater financial scrutiny and

heightened compliance requirements, increasing administrative burden and oversight expectations for sponsored programs.

Lastly, respondents questioned what constitutes “significantly damag[ing] the reputation of the pass-through entity” as it relates to the actions of subrecipient organizations.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Research administrators described numerous collaborative research arrangements involving institutional affiliates and long-standing partner organizations that currently operate effectively under existing Uniform Guidance provisions. Reclassifying these relationships as traditional subrecipient arrangements would require additional risk assessments, monitoring activities, documentation, approvals, and reporting without materially changing institutional oversight practices.

Respondents also described fixed amount subawards as an important administrative tool supporting efficient management of defined collaborative activities involving universities, research institutes, and community organizations. Eliminating this option would increase documentation and financial management requirements for projects already subject to robust institutional oversight.

One campus program supporting approximately 120 researchers over a five-year award described conference travel as essential to participant engagement, collaboration, and research advancement, with travel needs evolving throughout the life of the award. Requiring advance approval for all future conference participation would substantially reduce opportunities for collaboration and research advancement while increasing administrative burden for both recipients and federal agencies.

Across all administrative provisions, respondents observed that uncertainty surrounding implementation has already increased institutional planning efforts as offices evaluate staffing, systems, policy revisions, and compliance infrastructure that may become necessary should the proposed rule be finalized.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance efficient administration. Uniform requirements applied to all recipients consume administrative resources without regard to risk; a risk-based approach concentrates oversight where additional monitoring is most likely to improve accountability, strengthens scrutiny of demonstrably higher-risk activities, and eliminates duplicative compliance costs for recipients already operating under mature financial management and compliance systems.

These efficiency gains accrue on both sides of the award relationship: recipient institutions devote more time and resources to supporting high-quality federally funded research rather than implementing duplicative administrative processes, and federal agencies avoid reviewing documentation that adds volume without adding accountability.

VII. National Policy Conditions and Regulatory Clarity

Relevant Proposed Sections: §§ [200.218 and 200.300]

Requested Revisions

CU Boulder recommends substantially revising proposed §§ [200.218 and 200.300] to:

- Clarify the scope and application of the proposed national policy conditions using objective, operationally implementable language.
- Clearly distinguish lawful scientific research, education, clinical activities, and federally required compliance activities from prohibited uses of federal financial assistance.
- Ensure that implementation of these provisions does not conflict with existing federal statutes, agency regulations, or federally required research activities.
- Clarify that rigorous scientific inquiry, publication of research findings, and evidence-based analyses involving demographic, clinical, educational, environmental, or other population characteristics remain permissible when conducted in accordance with applicable federal law and agency requirements.
- Provide sufficient implementation guidance to promote consistent interpretation across federal agencies and recipient institutions.

Why Revision Is Needed

OMB proposes new government-wide policy conditions governing the use of federal financial assistance, including restrictions relating to disparate impact, diversity, equity, and inclusion activities, gender ideology, and other specified policy areas.

CU Boulder understands and supports OMB's objective of ensuring that recipients comply with applicable federal law.

However, several provisions rely upon terminology that remains insufficiently defined for consistent implementation across the federal research enterprise. As drafted, these provisions create uncertainty regarding how recipients should distinguish between prohibited activities and legitimate scientific research, education, clinical care, outreach, and federally required compliance activities.

The University believes that greater regulatory clarity would improve implementation while reducing unnecessary administrative burden and promoting more consistent application across federal agencies.

CU Boulder Operational Perspective

The University's constituencies identified regulatory clarity, rather than regulatory content alone, as the principal concern associated with these provisions.

Researchers and research leaders emphasized that rigorous scientific research frequently requires examining differences among populations to understand disease, educational outcomes, engineering

performance, environmental impacts, public health interventions, and numerous other scientific questions. Respondents expressed concern that broadly worded restrictions may unintentionally discourage otherwise permissible scientific inquiry by creating uncertainty regarding allowable research methodologies. They further noted that evaluating variation across populations is often essential to determining whether federally funded interventions are effective and scientifically valid, particularly in community-engaged prevention science, public health, and education research, where such analyses are fundamental to rigorous program evaluation rather than ideological activities.

Research administrators emphasized the implementation challenges associated with broadly framed policy conditions relying upon undefined or evolving terminology. Universities will be responsible for interpreting these provisions across thousands of federally funded activities involving research, education, training, outreach, procurement, human resources, and clinical operations. Respondents expressed concern that greater ambiguity would increase legal review, policy interpretation, internal guidance development, proposal revisions, and case-by-case compliance determinations while encouraging more conservative research planning, reducing international engagement, and increasing institutional administrative burden. They also requested greater transparency regarding agency-specific expectations to promote consistent implementation across federal agencies.

Illustrative Operational Examples

Researchers conducting prevention science described ongoing efforts to determine “what works, for whom, and under what circumstances.” Respondents emphasized that evaluating differences among populations is fundamental to improving evidence-based interventions and maximizing the effectiveness of federally funded prevention programs.

Faculty developing science and engineering learning resources for students with disabilities similarly noted that such research frequently requires evaluating educational outcomes among learners with differing functional abilities to improve instructional effectiveness and satisfy existing federal accessibility requirements. Greater regulatory clarity would help ensure that such research continues without unnecessary uncertainty regarding compliance.

Several investigators also described increasing requests for institutional legal and compliance review arising from uncertainty surrounding evolving federal policy. Respondents observed that ambiguity itself has increased administrative workload while encouraging increasingly narrow interpretations of allowable research activities.

Why the Requested Revisions Better Advance OMB's Objectives

Among OMB's stated objectives, the requested revisions most directly advance accountability. Institutions can be held accountable only to standards they can interpret consistently: objective, operationally implementable language gives recipients clear requirements to satisfy, gives agencies uniform standards to enforce, and gives oversight bodies a fixed benchmark against which compliance can be measured.

Greater regulatory clarity would also reduce unnecessary administrative burden, improve consistency among federal agencies, and preserve the ability of federally funded researchers to conduct rigorous,

evidence-based scientific inquiry in full compliance with applicable federal law. Providing greater certainty regarding allowable research activities ultimately strengthens both stewardship and scientific excellence by enabling institutions to devote resources to high-quality research rather than resolving avoidable regulatory ambiguity.

Conclusion

The University of Colorado Boulder appreciates OMB's commitment to strengthening stewardship of federal resources and recognizes the importance of periodically reviewing the Uniform Guidance to ensure that federal financial assistance is administered responsibly, transparently, and efficiently.

The University shares OMB's stated objectives of improving accountability, promoting transparency, reducing waste, and ensuring that federal financial assistance effectively advances the public interest. We believe these objectives are best achieved through regulations that are clear, operationally practical, consistently implemented, and supportive of the long-term success of federally funded research.

Based on extensive feedback across the University's research enterprise, CU Boulder respectfully recommends that OMB revise several provisions of the proposed regulation to better achieve these shared objectives.

Specifically, the University recommends that OMB:

- Evaluate the proposed regulation as an integrated whole, considering its cumulative effect on the stability, predictability, and competitiveness of the U.S. research enterprise.
- Preserve independent expert peer review as the primary basis for evaluating scientific research proposals and remove the preference for institutions with lower indirect cost rates, which conflicts with §§ [200.414(c)(1) and 200.306].
- Maintain stable and predictable award administration practices that support long-term research continuity while preserving appropriate agency oversight.
- Preserve publication, conference participation, professional engagement, and scientific communication as integral components of federally funded research.
- Align international collaboration provisions with existing federal research security frameworks and narrowly tailor restrictions to clearly identified security risks.
- Focus administrative oversight on areas presenting meaningful financial or compliance risk while avoiding unnecessary administrative burden for recipients operating under mature compliance systems.
- Clarify national policy provisions to promote consistent implementation while preserving rigorous scientific inquiry and evidence-based research.

Taken together, these revisions would better support OMB's stated goals of accountability, transparency, stewardship, and efficient administration while preserving the strengths of the federal

research enterprise that have enabled the United States to remain the world's leader in scientific discovery and innovation.

Federal research investments produce their greatest value when they support scientifically rigorous research, encourage innovation, foster collaboration, train the next generation of researchers, and enable discoveries to be communicated broadly for the benefit of society. The University believes the requested revisions would strengthen the proposed regulation by preserving these foundational characteristics while advancing OMB's objectives for responsible administration of federal financial assistance.

The University of Colorado Boulder appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments and looks forward to continued collaboration with OMB and federal research agencies to ensure that the final regulation promotes both responsible stewardship of federal resources and continued excellence in the nation's research enterprise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Schwartz", with a stylized, cursive script.

Justin Schwartz
Chancellor, University of Colorado Boulder

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Massimo Ruzzene", with a stylized, cursive script.

Massimo Ruzzene
Senior Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, University of Colorado Boulder