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## NIH says scientists should share

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Like parents irritated that their children aren't sharing expensive toys in a sandbox, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is encouraging scientists to be more openhanded with mouse resources they create with public funds. A [draft policy](#) that popped up on the NIH's website last week stops short of requiring NIH-funded researchers to share mouse strains with others, but its failure to include a plan to do so in future research proposals may cause the shutoff of public funds to less than generous scientists.

Professional societies, including the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), scrambled to alert their members to the draft policy, which the NIH says is merely an extension of standard policies on research materials.

FASEB at first couldn't decide whether to send the policy to its animal care committee or to the panel that reviews technology transfer issues, spokesperson Howard Garrison said. Technology transfer won out. "We've done a lot of thinking about data sharing in the past, and we are very much in favor of openness," Garrison said. "But we are moving here into a new area of application, and we're not sure how it's going to play out."

"Mice are research tools, and at first glance, we don't see anything that we're particularly concerned about," said Stephen Heinig, AAMC senior staff associate. "We would be interested in finding out about the motivation."

No particular case or trend triggered the promulgation of the policy, said James Battey, director of the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, who co-chaired the NIH's drafting process.

"This has actually been percolating at NIH for a long time, as a special case of our general policy on data sharing," Battey said. "The guiding principle here is that if the American taxpayer has provided the support to generate the resource once, it's not fair to ask them to pay to generate it a second time."

For example, in a Frequently Asked Questions and Answers attached to the draft policy, the agency writes that it "recognizes that the investigators who generated the mouse resources have a legitimate interest in benefiting from their investment of time and effort. However, unnecessary delay of publication and prolonged exclusive use of the mice are not in the best interests of the research community or the public health."

Comments are due in 60 days on the policy. In its final form, it will apply to NIH in-house researchers as well as to those in extramural centers.

The draft policy suggests that researchers who want money from the NIH should plan to deposit mice and mouse data with one of two public repositories, [Jackson Laboratories](#), in Bar Harbor, Maine, or the [Mutant Mouse Regional Resource Centers](#), a consortium supported by the National Center for Research Resources.

Scientists could choose to respond to requests for genetically modified mice themselves, but considerations of time and money are likely to argue against that. Costs at Jackson Laboratories in some cases can run as high as \$200 to \$300 per mouse, as neither keeping mice with suppressed immune systems alive and shipping them safely nor making sure a steady supply of sterile mice is available is easy, said Joyce Peterson, a Jackson spokesperson.

The facility has been providing mice and mouse data at cost to scientists for decades. Business took off in the past 10 years as genetic modification technology and fast computers made the mouse the animal of choice for researchers.

Batthey suggested that researchers add the cost of complying with the new policy into the calculations for grants. "The NIH cannot be guilty of unfunded mandates," he said. "We have to be ready to meet the financial needs connected to the sharing policy."

## References

1. NIH Statement on Sharing and Distributing Mouse Resources, [<http://www.nih.gov/science/models/mouse/sharing/1.html>]
2. Jackson Laboratories, [<http://www.jax.org/>]
3. Mutant Mouse Regional Resource Centers, [<http://www.mmrrc.org>]