



## Openness and Transparency in Animal Research

Research with nonhuman animals contributes to scientific and medical progress that benefits humans, society, animals, and the natural environment. Thus, informed decisions about animal studies are critically important and carry broad consequences for global public health. Public support for these studies is often dependent upon assurances from the research community that animals are treated humanely. This is understandable because a strong commitment to the ethical treatment of animals is also shared by the research community itself. Furthermore, it is reflected in our system of animal welfare standards, federal oversight, and public transparency. Therefore, leaders and members of research institutions, scientific societies, and advocacy groups, as well as other stakeholders, have key responsibilities to communicate information and engage in public dialogue about how studies involving animals are conducted and why animal studies remain an essential component of productive, highly effective research. In the U.S., many institutions, scientists, and organizations are committed to transparency and have developed effective strategies for public communication and engagement concerning animal research. However, these efforts are uneven and there are currently no agreed-upon standards for public communication, nor organized venues for benchmarking or sharing approaches for effective communication about animal research.

In an effort to address the urgent need for expanded outreach and communications, a group of U.S. stakeholders agreed to collaborate in the development of a broad set of principles during the 5<sup>th</sup> Basel Declaration Conference held in San Francisco on February 14/15, 2018. These principles would represent specific actions that institutions would jointly agree upon in order to increase openness and facilitate public understanding about animal research. A U.S. Animal Research Openness Agreement (USAROA) would build upon the past successes of those already conducting effective outreach. Specific agreement details must be developed collaboratively and reflect the input and concerns of a broad group of stakeholders in order to include a critical mass of signatories. With these goals in mind, those taking part in the initial steps:

- Agreed to the concept of a U.S. Animal Research Openness Agreement.
- Outlined broad principles of a draft agreement. These principles are:
  - “We will continue to enhance our communications about our research that uses animals.”
  - “We will be clear about how, why, and under what circumstances we use animals in research.”
  - “We will proactively provide opportunities for the public to learn about research with animals.”
- Identified a potential group of initial signatories.

Participants also identified initial steps for developing an agreement:

1. The formation of a working group that reflects the diversity of signatory candidates/stakeholders in the U.S.
2. The creation of an initial draft of an agreement.
3. The development of a comprehensive process to obtain and incorporate feedback from potential signatories.

When completed, the U.S. Openness Agreement will affirm that its signatories will work towards a meaningful public dialogue concerning animal research through practical steps and measurable objectives. We believe a shared agreement can be formed across U.S. institutions to engage in proactive and reactive communications about all aspects of research. By doing so, the USAROA will facilitate sharing information, but will also provide a stronger foundation for advancing public understanding of the role animal research plays in scientific and medical progress.

San Francisco, February 15, 2018