Scientific Acknowledgement of Core Laboratories

The journal Biotechniques is now requiring authors to declare the core facilities that contribute to the research results reported in manuscripts before they can be accepted for publication. That is according to a December editorial in the journal that draws attention to the issues related to giving scientific attribution to core facilities.

“In the end, attribution should be given to everyone involved in generating data, interpreting results, or funding a research study,” the editorial states. “Leaving out key players does nothing to further the scientific process.”

The editorial points out that core facility scientists are often not recognized, neither as authors nor in the formal Acknowledgements section of the paper, for providing technical support. This lack of attribution has several detrimental consequences, according to the editorial, including the distortion of metrics that bear on grant funding decisions. “This is critical information that helps funding agencies understand the extent and impact of core facility usage,” the editorial explains.

Steps Taken at the Health Science Center

It is noteworthy that attribution of core facility contributions has a direct bearing on major grants here at the UT Health Science Center, including the Cancer Therapy and Research Center’s (CTRC) designation as an NCI Cancer Center and the Institute for Integration of Medicine & Science Clinical & Translational Science Award (IIMS / CTSA).

“For the IIMS this is especially relevant to our TTR (Translational Technology Resources) and Pilot Project funding programs,” says Robert Clark, M.D., the Director of the IIMS. While the IIMS website has clear instructions for manuscript citations, Clark is considering implementing new procedures that explicitly notify award recipients of their citation obligations.

The CTRC has similar needs, because one aspect of renewing its NCI designation depends on its ability to demonstrate how the investment in research cores is promoting high-impact cancer research. Research papers that cite the support of the CTRC’s shared resources provide reliable and valuable metrics in that review process.

“Many investigators we work with are happy to put in the attribution to the flow core and the cancer center grant, but we often see reports that used the core without attribution," said Benjamin Daniel, Director of the Flow Cytometry Core. "While we are a fee-for-service facility, the actual cost of running the facility is greatly offset by institutional and cancer center resources," Daniel explained.

"With increasing pressure on University Core Research Facilities (UCRF) to provide justification for their institutional support, it is troubling to hear reports that Core Directors continue to battle with a lack of attribution. While financial data can be mined for current and past core usage, the contribution of core facilities to grant submissions and awards is a critical metric that is often missing,” said Mark Nijland, Ph.D., Assistant Vice President for Research.

Daniel observed that a common theme now in universities nationwide is the consolidation of cores and outsourcing of core services. "It is more important than ever before for core funding and the survival of cores, in general, that our investigators show the funding entities how important we are to their research by acknowledging core contributions," Daniel said.

The University Core Research Facility (UCRF) Committee, chaired by Dr Randolph Glickman, Ph.D., (Department of Ophthalmology), has been working with the Office of Sponsored Programs on one method to bridge the gap. The Certificate of Proposal (COP) used in all grant submissions now includes a section that captures intended use of Research Cores.