

# Administration For Children and Families (ACF) Public Access Plan

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## Background and Purpose

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is an Operating Division (OpDiv) within the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ACF's mission is to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership, and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services. ACF strives to enable and promote innovation within ACF to improve the lives of children, youth, families, and individuals as well as advance equity by reducing structural barriers including racism and other forms of discrimination that prevent economic and social well-being.

ACF has worked to align with various federal strategies on access to data including the [Federal Data Strategy](#) and the [Foundations for Evidence Based Policymaking Act](#) ("Evidence Act") for the purposes of research, transparency, ensuring trust, and advancing society. Within HHS, ACF has contributed to the vision and implementation of an agency wide data strategy.

In 2022, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) issued an updated public access memorandum to the heads of agencies titled "[Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research](#)" ("OSTP Public Access Memo").

In response to this memo, ACF will implement the agency's first Public Access Policy on December 31, 2025. ACF has drafted a Public Access Policy that aligns with the requirements outlined in the OSTP 2022 Public Access Memo, is consistent with other federal agency public access plans, and acknowledges the sensitivities of working with human services research outputs.

ACF has long been committed to ethical practices in research, which include respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and protection for communities. In addition to these ethical practices, in research and evaluation with Native communities, ACF strives to be responsive to a history of violations and adhere to tribal cultural principles regarding data that emphasize both protection and benefit. ACF's approach is guided by the principles within the [Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation with Tribal Communities](#).

ACF will make available to the public ACF-funded peer reviewed research publications and research data derived from research funded in part or whole by ACF. All ACF data sharing activities will comply with applicable laws and regulations, to include those related to privacy and accessibility. ACF will report compliance to OSTP as required, with defined metrics around the public access of published research articles and research datasets. If there are multiple sources of funding for a single research project in a single period, ACF intends to defer to the requirements for the agency committing the most resources to the project.

ACF's Public Access Plan:

- Establishes and reaffirms ACF's commitment to transparency and public access, and compliance with the OSTP 2022 Public Access Memo
- Intends to make ACF-funded peer reviewed research publications freely accessible
- Intends to make ACF-funded research data more accessible
- Aims to increase the accessibility and reusability of scientific research funded by ACF to advance human services

# Public Access to Peer Reviewed Publications

## Definitions

*ACF-funded authors:* ACF research grant or research contract recipients whose work is subject to the ACF Public Access Plan requirements

*Agency funded research:* research funded by a Federal agency using Congressionally appropriated research funds

*Author accepted manuscript<sup>1</sup>:* author's final manuscript of a peer-reviewed paper accepted for journal publication, including all modifications from the peer-review process. This is not the same as the final published article, which is defined as a publisher's authoritative copy of the paper including all modifications from the publishing peer-review process, copyediting, stylistic edits, and formatting changes. However, the content included in both the final peer-reviewed manuscript and the final published article, including all findings, tables, and figures should be identical.

*Final Version of Record<sup>2</sup>:* a publisher's authoritative copy of the published work, including all modifications from the publishing peer-review process, copyediting, and formatting or layout. For purposes of this plan, the version of record shall be deemed the final publication.

*Scientific Research<sup>3</sup>:* is the systematic study of a subject directed toward a fuller scientific knowledge or understanding of the subject and may include both basic and applied research studies.

## Scope

ACF's requirements for public access will apply to any peer reviewed research publication funded in whole or in part by ACF. As ACF does not conduct intramural research, these requirements will apply strictly to ACF-funded research contracts and grants.

These requirements will be applied prospectively and not retrospectively.

## Requirements

ACF will partner with and use PubMed Central (PMC), hosted at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as the agency public access repository for access to research publications.

Grantees and contractors who publish research articles in peer reviewed journals will be required to deposit the most permissible version of their manuscript in PMC. This may be the Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) if the article is not published open-access, or the Final Version of Record if published in an open access journal. ACF-funded authors must ensure that a copy of their work can be posted to PMC in accordance with the policy.

If ACF-funded authors publish in a closed access journal they will need to manually deposit the most permissible version of their manuscript through the National Institutes of Health Manuscript Submission System (NIHMS) <http://www.nihms.nih.gov/>. These activities must be done upon acceptance of the manuscript for publication at the journal for the article to appear in PMC.

If ACF-funded authors choose to publish their manuscript in an open access journal, their published article will automatically appear in PMC. The complete PMC journal list is available at

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/journals>. Reasonable costs may be written into the grant or contract for ACF coverage of article processing charges (APCs), to publish in open access journals.

By using PMC as ACF's public access repository, the following requirements will be met:

#### *Long Term Preservation and Access*

PMC ensures long term access and preservation of housed manuscripts and metadata without charge. Persistent identifiers may be assigned through the process that may help with discoverability, linkage, and interoperability including persistent identifiers for the Funder (ACF), Institution (where the research took place), and the Author.

#### *Accessibility and Equity of Peer Reviewed Publications*

PMC employs machine readable formats of articles which allows for text and data mining. PMC also enables metadata and published content to be freely available to the public. PMC meets Section 508 accessibility requirements, and all content is accessible to assisted devices.

#### *Reuse Rights and Attribution*

Under this policy, metadata and the content of published articles are required to be publicly and freely available. ACF-funded Authors will be required, through relevant grant and contract agreements, to openly license federally funded peer reviewed publications.

ACF-funded research is subject to the Federal Purpose License (45 CFR 75.322(b)<sup>4</sup>). ACF, an HHS awarding agency, reserves a royalty-free, nonexclusive and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the work for federal purposes, and to authorize others to do so. ACF-funded Authors should avoid signing any agreements with publishers that do not allow for a version of the manuscript to be deposited to PMC, in accordance with the ACF Public Access Policy.

## Compliance

ACF will update compliance terms for all new research contracts and grants issued after January 1, 2025. ACF-funded research grantees and contractors will be required to report any peer reviewed manuscripts accepted for publication in their annual and final reports (grantees) and through agreed upon mechanisms in ACF research contracts, noting compliance with the ACF Public Access Policy. Compliance will be assessed by research grantees and contractors reporting their publication DOI and PubMed Central ID (PMCID).

Failure to submit required reports and required fields on peer reviewed manuscripts on the report, within the time allowed, may result in suspension or termination of an active grant, withholding a non-competing continuation award, or other enforcement actions, including withholding of payments or converting to the reimbursement method of payment.

## Public Access to Research Data

### Definitions

*Data management plan*<sup>5</sup>: A plan describing the data management, preservation, and sharing of research data and accompanying metadata. Plans include elements such as descriptions of the data to be produced in the proposed study, any standards to be used for collected data and metadata, mechanisms for providing access to and sharing of the data (including provisions for protection of privacy, confidentiality, security, intellectual property, or other rights), provisions for reuse and redistribution, and plans for archiving and long-term preservation of the data, or explaining why long-term preservation and access cannot be justified.

*Dataset metadata*<sup>6</sup>: data that provide additional information intended to make research data interpretable and reusable.

*Data publication*: publicly accessible dataset, published in a data repository with complete metadata. A published dataset can be cited in the scientific literature and, following the practice used by most publishers of scholarly journals, has a persistent and unique identifier associated with it.

*Data repository*<sup>7</sup>: An organized storage location that makes data findable, accessible, and preserved.

*Digital object identifier (DOI)*: DOIs for data and publications allow for citation and long-term identification.

*Persistent identifier (PID)*<sup>8</sup>: A digital identifier that is globally unique, persistent, machine resolvable and processable, and has an associated metadata schema, such as the DOI.

*Research data*<sup>9</sup>: the recorded factual material commonly accepted in the scientific community as necessary to validate research findings, but not any of the following: preliminary analyses, drafts of scientific papers, plans for future research, peer reviews, or communications with colleagues. This “recorded” material excludes physical objects (e.g., laboratory samples). Research data also do not include: Trade secrets, commercial information, materials necessary to be held confidential by a researcher until they are published, or similar information which is protected under law; and Personnel and medical information and similar information the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy, such as information that could be used to identify a particular person in a research study (2 CFR 200.315).

### Scope

ACF’s requirements for public access will apply to any research data derived from ACF grants or contract funds. As ACF does not conduct intramural research, these requirements will apply strictly to externally funded research contracts and grants.

Research data produced by ACF grants and contracts will be required to be published in a repository regardless of having a companion peer reviewed publication.

Sensitive data that cannot be made publicly available and proprietary data with legal restrictions are excluded from this plan.

These requirements will be applied prospectively and not retrospectively.

## Requirements

Research data produced by ACF grants and contracts will be required to be made publicly available by publication in a data repository, when permissible, by either a) the time of article publication if underlying a peer reviewed manuscript or b) the end of the grant or contract period.

ACF research grantees and contractors will be required to submit a Data Management Plan (DMP) prior to start of their research study. This DMP, amongst other intentions, will establish researcher responsibilities in complying with the ACF Public Access Policy. Researchers will be expected to: a) state what data will be produced, where it will be published, and in what accessible formats or b) state what data will be produced and justify or delineate why the data cannot be publicly shared. This plan should address study participants' consent process where applicable. The DMP should also designate the ways in which the research being conducted will be compliant with all applicable state, tribal, and federal laws around data privacy, security, and access.

Research data that can be made publicly accessible will be required to be published in a compliant data repository. Researchers may choose the best fit for their data (unless directed to use a specific repository as agreed upon in the grant or contract), taking into consideration that repositories must: allow for free access to the data, meet the desirable characteristics outlined in the OSTP "[Desirable Characteristics of Data Repositories for Federally Funded Research](#)", assign a DOI for each published dataset, and meet Section 508 accessibility standards.

Researchers should consider Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable (FAIR) metadata and repositories that assign PIDs for various assets of the metadata including Author, Institution, and Funder. When data are published, researchers should acknowledge best practices for integrity and ethics. Researchers may consider academic library and institutional services for supporting the data publication process.

Published research data underlying a peer reviewed manuscript must be published by the time of article publication, and researchers should link the article and dataset with their DOIs in the metadata of each output.

When data are permissible to be made publicly available but are not associated with a peer reviewed article, data need to be published by the end of the grant or contract period.

Data curation, publication, and preservation costs should be written in to grants and contract budgets as justifiable costs.

To ensure proper reuse and attribution of publicly available data, ACF requires authors to dedicate published research data needed to validate and verify conclusions of research studies to the worldwide public domain.

It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that data are only published and made publicly available that meet all disclosure requirements, including all legal and ethical restrictions and applicable laws.

## Compliance

ACF will update compliance terms for all new research contracts and grants issued after January 1, 2025. ACF research grantees and contractors will be required to report any public dataset DOIs in their annual and final reports (for grants) and through agreed upon mechanisms for contracts, noting compliance with the ACF Public Access Policy. ACF will require DMP for funded research grants and contracts. Recipients of these awards will be required to submit the DMP to ACF at the initiation of the grant or contract or on a timeline approved by ACF. Compliance will be designated by ACF receiving all relevant dataset DOIs (annually) and the DMP (start of project).

Failure to submit required reports including the DMP and data DOI within the time allowed may result in suspension or termination of an active grant, withholding a non-competing continuation award, or other enforcement actions, including withholding of payments or converting to the reimbursement method of payment.

## Implementation Timeline

Communicate new public access requirements to relevant stakeholders across ACF	Ongoing
ACF incorporates terms and conditions on compliance with requirements for public access to peer reviewed manuscripts and scientific data into applicable sponsored grants and contracts	October 1, 2025
ACF communicates terms and conditions on public access to peer reviewed manuscripts and scientific data to applicable recipients of new awards for grants and contracts	October 1, 2025
ACF Public Access Policy effective	December 31, 2025
Updated ACF Public Access Policy, inclusive of scientific and research integrity published	December 31, 2026
ACF incorporates terms and conditions on compliance with requirements for scientific and research integrity into applicable sponsored grants and contracts	October 1, 2027
ACF communicates terms and conditions on scientific and research integrity to applicable recipients of new awards for grants and contracts	October 1, 2027
Updated ACF Public Access Policy, inclusive of scientific and research integrity effective	December 31, 2027