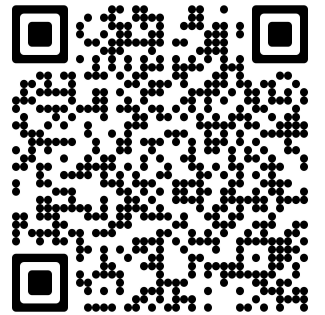


ARMA Research Evaluation SIG Drop-In Session: Randomisation in funding allocation

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06 October 2025
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tomstafford.github.io

AFIRE: Accelerator for Funder Experimentation

Forum

Sharing work by funders, for funders

Capacity building

Sprints on AI/ML in reviewer selection

Experiments

**Distributed Peer Review, Partial
Randomisation, Desk Rejection, and more!**

The history of Partial Randomisation



“Details aside, the basic principle is clear; instead of dodging the fact that chance plays a big part in awarding money, the system will sanctify chance as the determining factor. After a few years, let's look back and evaluate the science that came out of this system.”

Greenberg, D. S. (1998). [Chance and grants.](#) *The Lancet*, 351(9103), 686.

Partial Randomisation Trials Catalogue

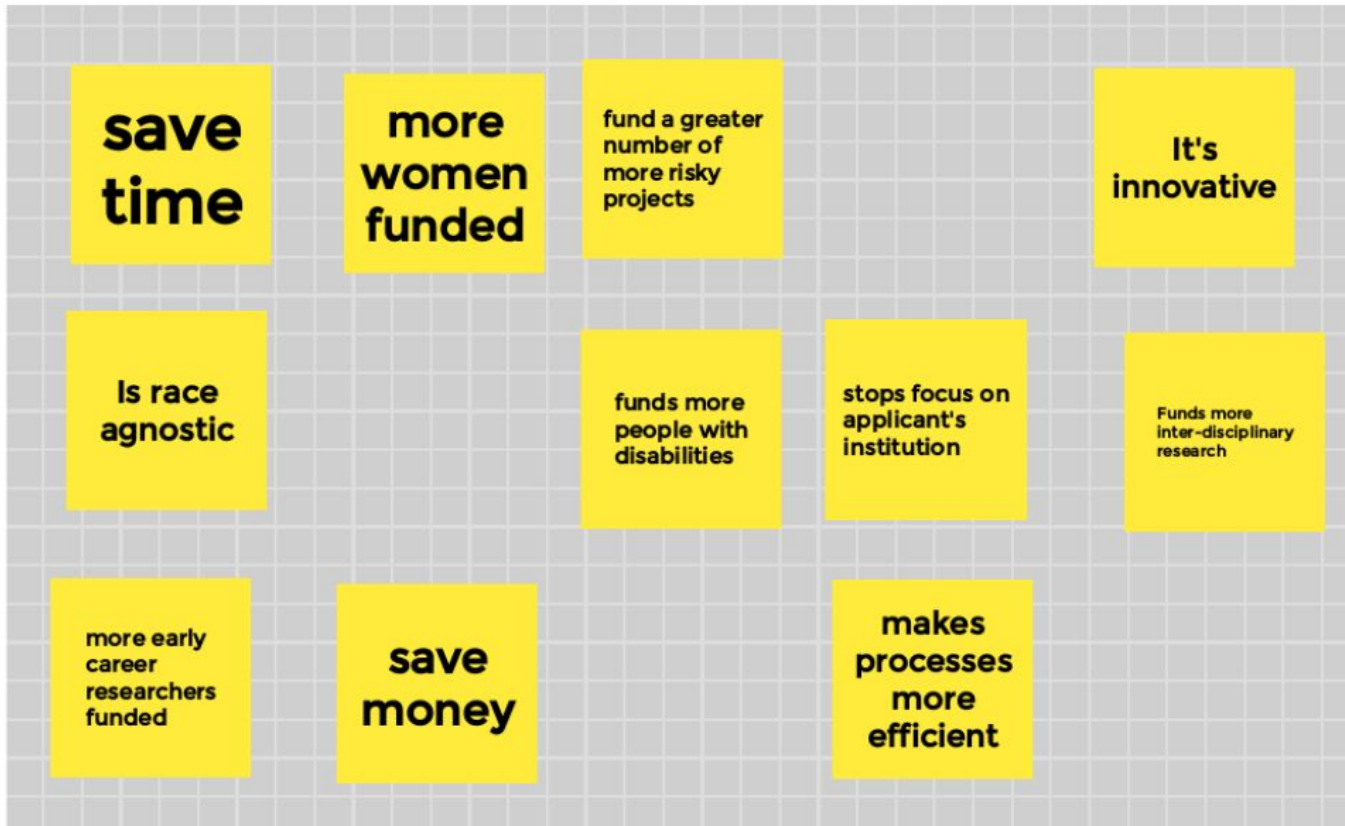
Funder	Dates
Health Research Council of New Zealand	2013-
VolkswagenStiftung	2017-2020
Austrian Science Fund (FWF)	2019-
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)	2018-
Novo Nordisk Fonden	2022-2025
British Academy	2022-2025
UKRI / NERC	2022-
Wellcome	2023-
Nesta	2019-2020
University of Leeds	2023
UMC Utrecht/Ministry of OCW	2023

bit.ly/PRtrials



Funder Attitudes

Figure 3: Example Jamboard prepared for elicitation exercise



Woods, H. B., & Wilsdon, J. (2021). [Why draw lots? Funder motivations for using partial randomisation to allocate research grants](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.17102495.v2). *Research on Research Institute*.
<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.17102495.v2>.

Feasibility of RCTs

Wellcome Open Research

Wellcome Open Research 2024, 8:309 Last update







REVIEW

REVISED Where next for partial randomisation of research

funding? The feasibility of RCTs and alternatives

[version 2; peer review: 3 approved]

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Table 2. Target outcome, unit of analysis and sample availability for one funding call.

Target outcome	applicant diversity, beliefs about partial randomisation	proposal novelty, ambition/risk	reviewer burden, review consistency	project productivity, diversity characteristics of awardees, awardee reaction to award by partial randomisation
Unit of analysis	APPLICANTS	APPLICATIONS	REVIEWS	AWARDS
Sample available	number of investigators	number of applications	number of applications x reviews per application	number of applications x proportion funded
Illustrative numbers assuming 100 applications, 3 investigators, 4 reviews per applications, and a 10% success rate	300	100	400	10

These slides:

[Where next for partial randomisation of research funding? The feasibility of RCTs and alternatives](#)

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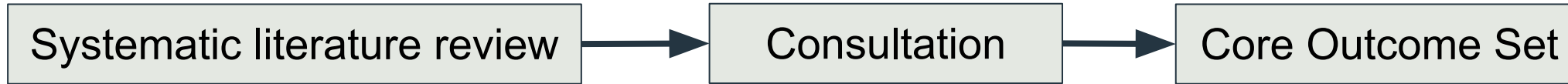
Our definition of experiment

Principled: a research design that allows inference about what causes what (before/after, shadow experiments, true experiment/RCT)

Planned: primary outcome measure and analysis plan declared in advance

Public: a commitment to sharing the results regardless of outcome

Core Outcome Set



*Identified candidate
outcomes, loci & measures*

*Survey &
feedback,
delphi studies*

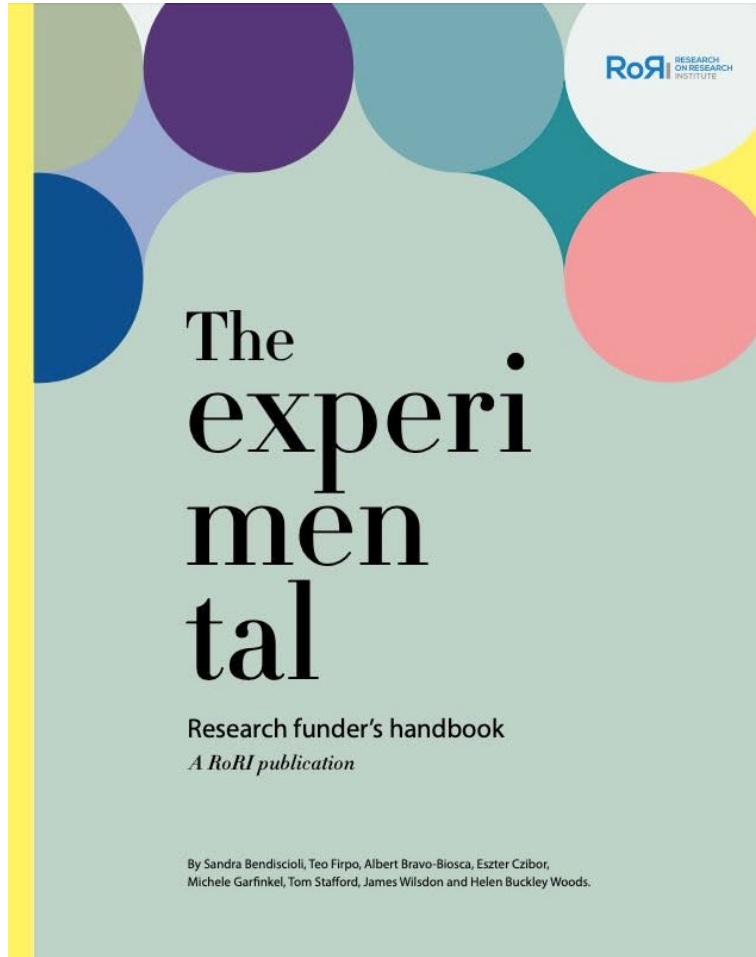
*Standardised
measures and
reporting
guidelines*

Application volume
Project innovation / conservatism
Project quality
Equality, diversity and inclusion
Efficiency, for applicants
Efficiency, for reviewers
Applicant attitudes
Perception of awardees
etc...

These slides:

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Get in touch!



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The experimental research funder's handbook (Revised edition, June 2022, ISBN 978-1-7397102-0-0).

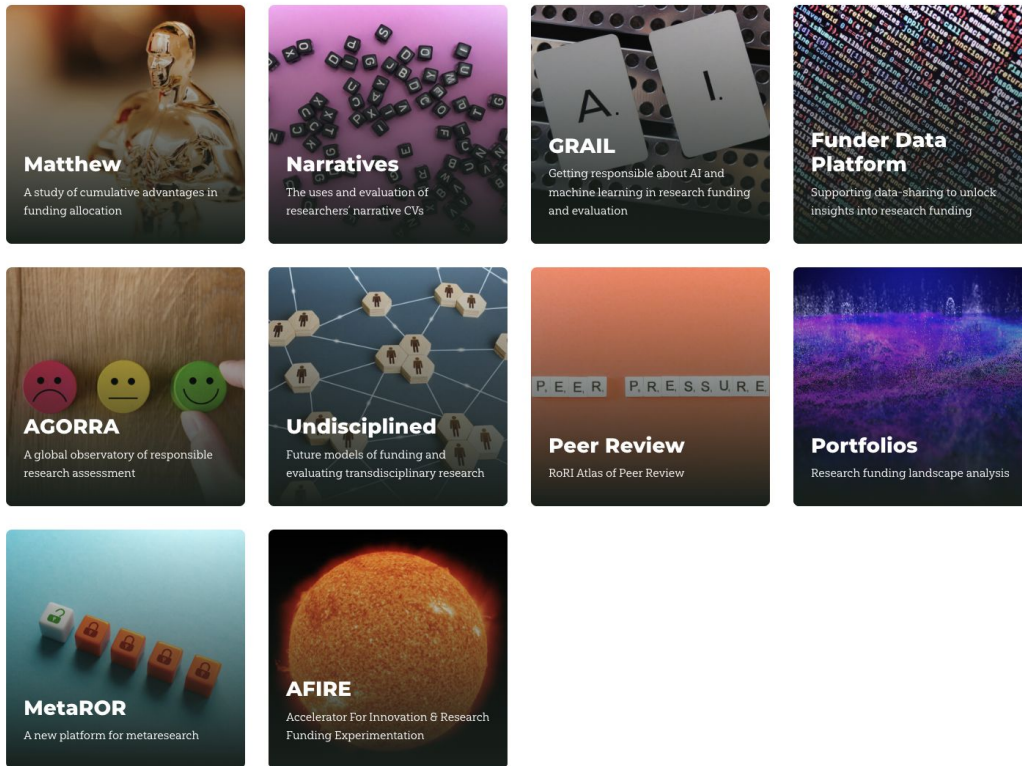
<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.19459328.v2>

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END
(reserve slides
follow)

10 codesigned projects



18 Core Partners

