



HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
Office of the Provost

Dear Colleagues,

Collaboration across institutions and across national boundaries is at the core of the research enterprise and Harvard's mission, and our offices are dedicated to supporting and enabling such collaboration. In certain forms, and under certain circumstances, however, collaboration can also carry some risk. One potentially problematic type of international collaboration is that furnished via so-called "talent programs" – and as invitations to such programs arrive in our inboxes on a fairly regular basis, and each looks different, we wanted to share some background information about foreign talent recruitment programs in general.

Recruitment of talent from other institutions is, of course, nothing new. Indeed, it happens at Harvard all the time, with every new hire we make. But recruitment of faculty via schemes funded (directly or indirectly) by foreign governments that are designed to bring US-based researchers to local universities present unique concerns and deserve particular consideration.

Many of you will have received invitations from universities, institutes, foundations, or other organizations abroad offering visiting appointments, often handsomely remunerated and with well-equipped labs, in exchange for teaching and mentoring local students or perhaps accepting graduate students and postdoctoral fellows into your labs in the U.S.

Federal law presently does not prohibit participation in such programs, which come with both benefits and costs. One of the most important things to bear in mind with regard to entering into any such arrangement, however, is that participation should be disclosed to Harvard in a timely fashion and, where necessary, by Harvard to our research funders to ensure compliance with funder requirements and regulatory mandates. Disclosure will also help Harvard assist you in identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest and commitment. Outside professional relationships such as these should not be kept secret, especially as federal funding agencies have begun to ask specifically if grant applicants have any affiliation with foreign talent-recruitment programs.

It is also important to note that some talent-program applications are styled as employment contracts between the researcher and the host institution, which preclude the researcher from applying for certain US funding opportunities. Equally notably, some versions of these contracts included terms prohibiting the researcher from disclosing the relationship to anyone, including their home institutions. Such terms are, of course, problematic, and their existence is part of the reason we strongly encourage any researcher or faculty member considering entering into such a program to consult with their School or the OVP to ensure that they do not inadvertently jeopardize their existing or prospective sponsored funding at Harvard.

We are all in favor of developing and facilitating the research connections and collaborations that will permit you to do the best science possible, wherever those ties may take you. In the process, our goal is to help researchers understand the risks that may arise so that we can support you in pursuing your careers in ways that are thoughtful, open, and transparent. We hope that you will feel free to reach out to any of us if you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

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