Process Pathfinder for Research Security Professionals

Facilitation Guide

NSF SECURE Center

Part of the SECURE Center Process Pathfinder for Research Security
Safeguarding the Entire Community in the U.S. Research Ecosystem

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Introduction

The SECURE Center has developed the Process Pathfinder as a means of helping those in research security understand their needs as individuals, departments and initiatives. The methods are interactive in nature, and meant for either digital or analog application with your research security team.

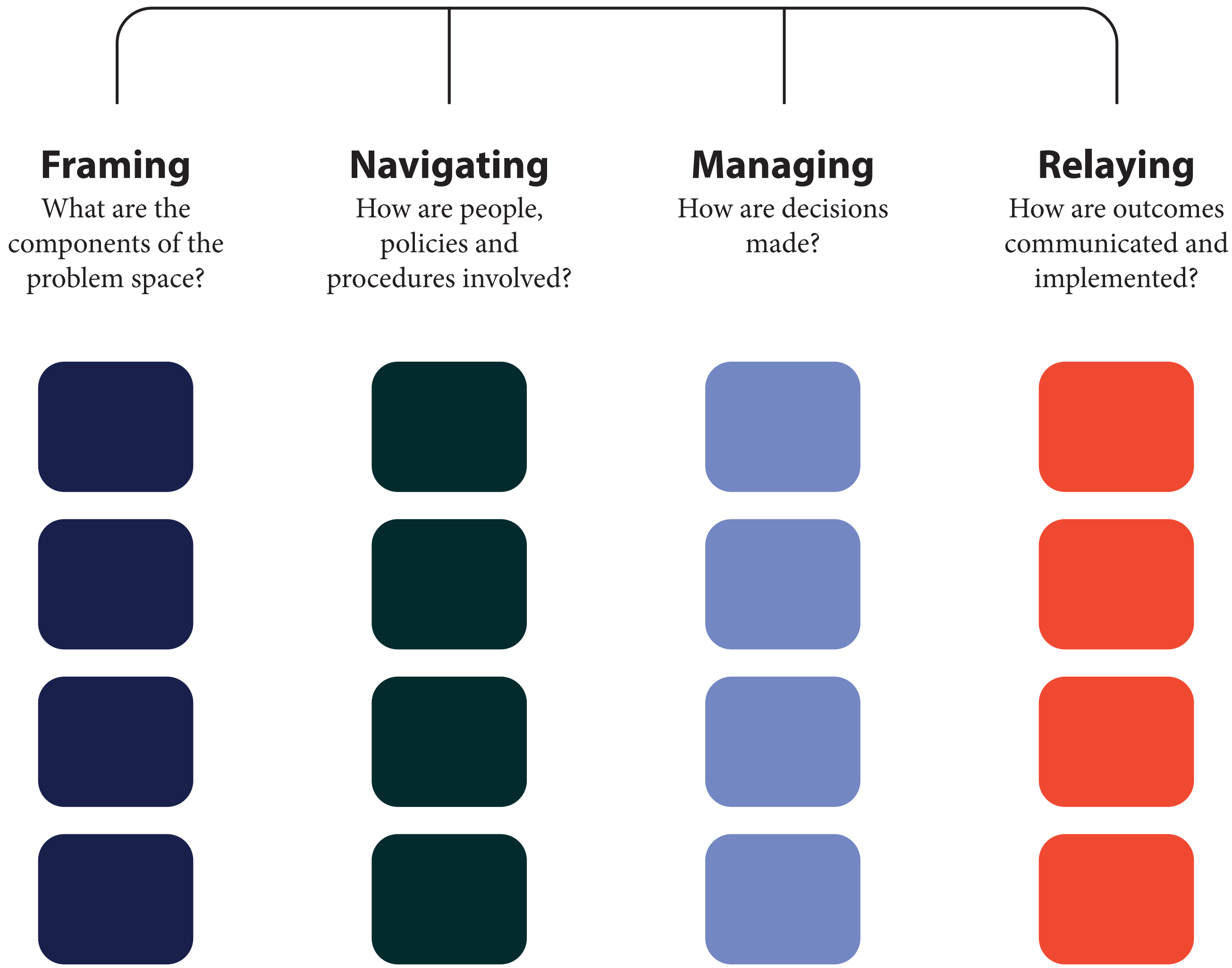
Whether established or emerging as a function, research security functions overlap those of your entire research organization, its ongoing needs and its diversity. This Process Pathfinder is designed to help you think through the complexities your organization may encounter.

Each method is a way for research organizations to talk through the practical and ethical considerations of a research security scenario and its surrounding context, identifying points of human interaction, procedural handoff or collaboration between departments and individuals.

Each exercise is different, and each affords stakeholders the opportunity to understand how to better their operations as complex scenarios unfold, ensuring key insights do not fall through the cracks.

Use multiple methods for a more comprehensive view of your problem space.

4 Modes to Address the Needs of the People inside of a Problem Space in Research Security



01 Why is Facilitation Important?

Organizational design research shows us that the points of hand off or points where responsibility is transferred from one person to the next are the most likely moments for an organization's internal processes to go awry. By documenting these moments using a systematic series of formats, institutions gain clarity as to how those points of interaction might be better managed.

02 Who Should Be Involved?

Generally, we recommend this exercise be led by a Research Security Officer or other individual overseeing the research security program for your institution, or an individual with a knowledge of research security and who is well-versed in organizational design principles and group facilitation.

The individual leading the exercise should recruit key stakeholders from across the institution, and those who are closely related to the research security space such as: general counsel, information technology, travel or visa office, lab safety, faculty affairs, sponsored programs, campus police, other compliance units, and any other departments that might contribute to research security as a function within your organization.

You may not need everyone's input on every case, but this is also a great way to ensure these individuals are aware of the breadth of your program and the types of incidents that might be indicative of a research security event.

03 Where and When Should this Work Be Done?

You can conduct this session online or in person. We recommend that you pick one or the other, hybrid is more challenging to navigate when collecting relevant insights.

An institution can provide this tabletop whenever they wish to, but we recommend setting a cadence, perhaps annually or biannually. Changing the scenarios out will ensure the exercise feels fresh.

04 How is it Accomplished?

Roles

Timelines

Facilitation Tips

What to Ask

Post-Event Follow Up

Roles

Identify roles and responsibilities for yourself and your team:

- **Notetaker / Archivist:** this person will take notes and if you are doing an in-person event, document all the paper materials in photographs, transfer written notes to text, and ensure all the outcomes discussed are well documented.
- **Time keeper:** this person should be focused solely on the time and ensuring transitions are crisp.
- **Host / Facilitator:** This person will introduce and set the stage for the event.

If your group is larger than 10 people, you should consider break out groups with a host and a notetaker for each discussion group.

Timelines

60 days out

Select a theme and scenarios (e.g., travel).

- This will allow you to prioritize who is most important for the tabletop exercise.
- Select scenarios from the SECURE Center SVE or write your own.

Identify your critical stakeholders.

- Who do you need to have at the event to make this a meaningful event?
- If this will be larger than 10 people, we recommend utilizing breakout groups and have the teams report out at the end.

Set a date and time.

- Determine if you will be in person or online.
- We recommend setting aside 90-120 minutes for the exercise.

30 days out

Decide what visual activities will be most suited to your environment and familiarize yourself with the methods you will be utilizing.

- **In person.** Set up the facilitation activities on large pieces of paper and tape them to the wall and have people use post-its to add their insights. You can even assign colors to certain stakeholders so you can easily visualize their insights throughout and hone in on those.
- **Online**. Consider using powerpoint, Zoom whiteboards, or collaboration software such as Mural or Miro.
- Craft your agenda.

A few days before the event

- Circulate the agenda, overview deck, and scenarios to participants.
- Ensure you have all the required supplies to run your interactive activities.
- Confirm the roles and responsibilities for hosts, timekeepers, and archivists.

The day of the event

- Have a great time connecting with colleagues and talking through the scenarios.
- Document, document, document.
- Leave time at the end to talk about the gaps you identified and how you might want to mitigate those gaps. (See next page).

Facilitation Tips

Run through the scenarios with a colleague and practice the method's visualization technique.

Also consider how you want to stage the scenarios. Do you want to read a few lines and then stop for discussion and commentary, or read them all at once?

Have a few ready-made questions available to keep the conversation moving. (See below).

What to Ask

Participant engagement may vary from group to group. Keep the momentum going by asking **"what then?"** styles of questions. There may be lulls in participation or moments of great activity. They key is to keep each participant in tune with the goal of the facilitation.

You may identify areas that need additional attention. Consider asking:

- Why is this part of the process or interaction not functioning as intended? Is there a lack of guidance, clarity, process, or utility between individual and departmental actions and roles?
- Play the hypothetical and ask, "Assuming we had unlimited resources, how would we improve the process?" or, "Assuming we cannot add more resources, what can be done to improve the process?"

Post-Event Follow Up

Post-event

Prepare a post-event work-up with a summary of the discussion and any follow-up steps for participants that they might employ in their day-to-day operations.

Your discussion will hopefully surface areas to celebrate and opportunities for further advancement of your program.

Document what works well

- Be sure to ask the follow up question: why does that work well?
- What resources and staff are important to the function of this task?
- How much time/effort does it take to maintain this process/step?
- Are there small, simple ways to improve this task further?

Having this level of clarity will allow for prioritization of improvements and allocation of staff time. This also is a great way to highlight for leadership where the program is succeeding.

Document what needs additional attention

Small Incremental Improvements

- Identify improvements that require no additional funding and low/moderate investment in time to establish. Example: setting up a form to do intake rather than using email or moving from an excel file to a Teams List that can automate process flow.

Large Incremental Improvements

- Identify improvements that require more considerable investments in time and resources.
- Consider how you want to navigate weaving these into other departmental or institutional goals.
- Observe these in your write up and provide narrative on how you might achieve them or what assistance you may need.

Set clear deliverable dates for these incremental improvements.

Having this level of clarity will allow for prioritization of improvements and allocation of staff time. You may not be able to identify the best path forward for all of the items that arose during the exercise, but surfacing these needs will ensure their potential gaps are seen from multiple perspectives, and any potential solutions formed from multiple areas of expertise.

Future Sessions

When you start your next year's facilitation, you can look at the prior report and update people on the status of each item. This allows you to highlight improvements and advocate for gaps that still have not been addressed.

It also reminds people of the last exercise and the impact that their investment of time and participation has made on future outcomes.

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