

# DEFENDING SCIENCE:

## A Roadmap for Action



In this moment of uncertainty, the independence of the biomedical research community has been tested. Organizations may find themselves navigating shifts in focus, mission, and resources as they respond to an increasingly centralized and politicized policy environment. Recently, the U.S. nonprofit research sector has faced an unprecedented volume of changes that reflect broader trends in government overreach and the external redirection of scientific priorities.

Steady leadership is essential to continue the vital mission of maximizing biomedical research to improve human health. We've already seen courageous actions from the scientific community. Here are just a few examples from the past year:

- NIH employees came together to sign the [Bethesda Declaration](#) (nearly 33,000 signatures, including 69 Nobel laureates). When they faced retaliation, nonprofits like Stand up for Science and volunteer attorney networks provided support.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) **revised existing statements on vaccines' connection to autism** in late 2025, now claiming the link cannot be ruled out. The Autism Science Foundation issued statements refuting updates from the CDC reaffirming that extensive, evidence-based research shows vaccines do not cause autism and emphasizing the importance of clear, science-driven public health messaging.
- Organizations like the Vaccine Integrity Project **offered clear, evidence-based guidance** when federal communication faltered.
- The American Association for Cancer Research **established the Rally for Medical Research Hill Day** in 2013 to address declining National Institutes of Health funding, and it remains a vital advocacy effort urging Congress to sustain robust investment in lifesaving medical research.

Health Research Alliance members are uniquely positioned to help shape the path forward for health research by moving from observation to action. By using collective expertise, advocacy, and collaboration to inform policies, we can ensure the research ecosystem remains governed by merit and objective inquiry rather than shifting political mandates. Here are a few ways you and your organization can join the fight to defend scientific integrity, protect your organization's mission, and create a safe and equitable environment for the broader research community.

# 1.

## Strengthen the Foundation

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Supporting the broader research community begins with ensuring your own organization, data, and networks are well prepared and grounded in the current moment.

**Audit Your Digital Security:** Check out the [Democracy Protection Network's](#) readiness & resilience building resources, enable two-factor authentication, and protect sensitive organizational data from surveillance.

**Know the Playbook:** Understanding the tactics used to disrupt the scientific enterprise is the best defense against scientific interference and an important tool for maintaining science. [Request training materials](#), including presentation templates and web explainers on the [Authoritarian Playbook](#) from Protect Democracy, to share with your colleagues and organizations.

**Navigate Funding Volatility:** Use [OpenOMB](#) to track federal budget execution in real-time. Developing this financial foresight helps you anticipate when the White House or OMB might attempt to freeze, hold, or complicate the release of funds related to your work and scientific areas of interest.

# 2.

## Lead from the Top

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Institutions have a unique “shielding” power that individuals acting alone may lack. Position your organization to take action on behalf of its employees or members if they face criticism or retaliation from external forces.

**Executive Briefings:** Arrange a leadership briefing on Key Inflection Points in Healthcare & Science and 2026 Election Threats. [Protect Democracy](#) can host these sessions to help your Board of Directors or leadership team anticipate and navigate political interference.

**Don't Obey in Advance:** Commit to seeking legal counsel before complying with unusual or potentially unlawful federal requests (such as demands to purge data, cease specific research, or hand over personnel files). Protect Democracy can help train your staff on non-cooperation if needed. For more information on how to train your organization in responding to sudden changes or requests from federal agencies, reach out to [the Protect Democracy team](#).

**Issue Public Organization Statement:** Don't wait for a crisis. Issue a clear organizational statement, or press release, affirming support for scientific integrity and expressing concern about political interference that undermines evidence-based research or public safety. Coordination with other health coalitions amplifies the impact and provides safety in numbers. Protect Democracy can help provide examples or support on statement drafting. Don't hesitate to [reach out](#) for support.

# 3.

## Manage the Narrative

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If the public doesn't understand the cost of attacks on research and science, they won't join the fight to stop it.

**Anticipate the Narrative:** Develop proactive, “neutralizing” talking points and identify key validators (such as local clinicians or researchers) who are ready to go on record immediately. When public figures make misleading or false claims about science or threaten funding, having pre-drafted press releases and experts ready for rapid response ensures the truth leads the news cycle.

**Localize the Impact:** Draft an op-ed or Letter to the Editor for your local newspaper. Don't just talk about “science”, talk about the specific impact of funding cuts on local jobs, patient care, and community health. Be sure to highlight or amplify content from supporters and stakeholders to expand your reach.

**Join Collective Voices:** Add your name (or your organization's name) to sign-on letters that challenge illegal impoundments or the sidelining of career scientists.

**Humanize the Data:** Use tools like Storytap to record 60-second videos of researchers or patients explaining how federal research programs have saved lives and share them through your communication channels and on social media.

# 4.

## Coordinate the Defense

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Science and democracy are mutually reinforcing; neither can survive without the integrity of the other. Use these levers to protect science funding and health research.

**Legislative Advocacy:** Utilize the action centers provided by relevant associations like the Association of American Medical Colleges ([AAMC](#)), American Association for the Advancement of Science ([AAAS](#)), or the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network ([ACS CAN](#)), to flood congressional offices with data-backed resistance to funding freezes.

**Join the Legal Resistance:** Be prepared to move from the lab to the courtroom. Identify opportunities to sign onto Amicus Briefs or join “Friend of the Court” filings that challenge the sidelining of career scientists or the illegal redirection of research funds. Using your expertise to provide a “Statement of Interest” in legal challenges is a powerful way to hold the line.

**Fortify the Democratic Process:** Science depends on stable governance. Sign up for poll worker or observer training, join broader democracy coalitions, and be prepared to speak up about potential election interference to ensure the integrity of the elections that determine science policy.

This toolkit was created in collaboration with the Health Research Alliance and Protect Democracy to educate HRA members on how to take organizational and individual action to protect biomedical research nonprofits, funders, and communities. The distribution of this publication is not intended for audiences outside of the HRA community.



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The [Health Research Alliance](#) (HRA), a collaborative member organization of nonprofit research funders, is committed to maximizing the impact of biomedical research to improve human health.

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[Protect Democracy](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit group working to prevent American democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.

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