

Guiding principles for Science Media Centres

The following principles identify Science Media Centres (SMCs):

The mission of an SMC

To inform public debate and discussion on the major issues of the day by injecting evidence based science into headline news.

How SMCs make a difference

SMCs:

- ❖ Encourage critical and accurate reporting of science in the mainstream media by helping journalists understand and more effectively report on complex or controversial issues.
- ❖ Help the media, and ultimately the public, to access the best science more easily.
- ❖ Encourage, train and facilitate more scientists to engage with the media.
- ❖ Assist media officers to promote their research in an accurate and responsible manner.

How SMCs operate

SMCs are not-for-profit independent organizations that work collaboratively with each other and with the media and scientific institutions within their own countries.

SMCs work proactively, providing credible expertise and commentary on breaking news and providing context to complex or controversial issues.

The SMC ethos

The philosophy of all SMCs includes:

- ❖ Championing evidence-based science in media reporting
- ❖ Encouraging and supporting research scientists and organizations to engage openly and proactively about their work even when it is complex and controversial.
- ❖ That the media will “do” science better when scientists “do” the media better.
- ❖ We acknowledge that debate is fundamental to a healthy society and that science has an important role to play in informing debate with evidence.

Independence

The unique feature of all SMCs is that they are independent of any one institution. An SMC can be hosted by another institution but maintains its operational independence through, for example, independent governance and strict rules to ensure editorial independence from funders.

SMCs do not have any specific agenda other than to promote the reporting of evidence-based science. It is not the role of an SMC to 'take sides' or advocate for specific disciplines or issues.

We recommend that all SMCs have either:

(1) a capped funding arrangement whereby no donor can fund the centre more than 10% of its operating budget. This not only ensures that no one donor can dominate and set the agenda for the centre, it also provides a buffer so that any donor that is unhappy with the work of the centre can leave without it significantly impacting on its financial survival; or

(2) a legally binding agreement between the centre and its host institution that ensures independent governance. If the capped funding model is not followed, the onus is on the centre to show that it can work completely independently of its funding sources. A constitution that ensures the centre's independence is essential.