



Malign Foreign Talent Programs

What Are the Risks?

Many countries sponsor legitimate programs with the goal of attracting top talent in targeted fields to support domestic capacity and foster global talent mobility. They offer research fellowships, scholarships, and grants to incentivize researchers to participate.

These programs may involve the recruitment of foreign students to study in Canada, or the recruitment of researchers in Canada to go study, teach, or conduct research abroad for a period of time.

However, some of these programs present risks of unwanted transfer of knowledge, data and research. Participating in them could compromise your research goals, your funding, your ability to collaborate, or your reputation.

What is a Malign Foreign Talent Program?

A Malign Foreign Talent Program is organized, managed or funded by a foreign government or state-influenced entity. It aims to acquire proprietary technology, data, intellectual property (IP) or other information to benefit the goals of a foreign state at the expense of Canadian research institutes or Canadian national security interests, through the guise of recruiting individuals to carry out research activities and/or by providing individuals with various benefits or incentives.

What Can Happen If You Participate in a Malign Foreign Talent Program?

Being in a Conflict of Interest or Conflict of Commitment

Activities undertaken as part of a Malign Foreign Talent Program may place you in a perceived or actual conflict of interest or conflict of commitment, implicating institutional policies and the Tri-Agency Framework: *Responsible Conduct of Research*. This could include:

- Accepting gifts, hospitality, support for travel or other benefits that create a reasonable perception of a conflict between your interests and your responsibilities to your employer or as a researcher;
- Using databases, results, IP or institutional resources without authorization to advance the research or interests of another organization.

Concealing Information from Individuals and Institutions

A Malign Foreign Talent Program may pressure you to intentionally obscure or withhold information about your research or your participation in the program. This might occur on a solitary basis or with others, including with collaborators or through legal means, such as through a non-disclosure agreement. Examples include:

- Concealing your participation in the program or the benefits you have received from it;
- Modifying webpage content to conceal information that might receive scrutiny or be a risk to the integrity of your research; or
- Not disclosing sources of funding, affiliations, partnerships, or publications, especially if they are in violation of other policies.

Being Compelled to Engage in Unethical Behaviour

A Malign Foreign Talent Program may ask you to act in ways that do not respect ethical research practices, like established professional norms, laws, and common principles like accountability and openness, for which there may be consequences. This could include:

- Attributing awards, patents, publications or projects exclusively to a foreign institution despite outputs having been supported by a Canadian organization;
- Misrepresenting a researcher's primary institutional affiliation when disseminating research;
- Recruiting or training others for the program regardless of merit and where the focus appears to be on facilitating knowledge or technology transfer;
- The falsification or destruction of data, findings, or other research material; or
- Engaging in plagiarism or invalid authorship of research publications.



What Are The Potential Consequences of Participating in a Malign Foreign Talent Program?

Losing Your Research or Your Intellectual Property

A Malign Foreign Talent Program may attempt to access your research to steal it or use it in ways that you would not be comfortable with. This could include:

- Asking you to sign an agreement or contract that is overly stringent or favours the other party;
- Requesting that you replicate or transfer your research to a foreign government or entity without proper approval or authorization; or
- Requesting that you provide access to research assets, facilities, networks, or other systems.

Policy Violations

Though there are no direct prohibitions on Malign Foreign Talent Programs in Canada, participating in one may place you in violation of the following policies depending on your affiliation and/or actions:

- [Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern \(STRAC\)](#);
- [Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research](#);
- Institutional policies or contracts;
- Policies in other countries, such as the *U.S. Chips and Science Act*; or
- Crimes such as fraud, espionage, tax evasion, or corruption in any jurisdiction.

What Are Potential Red Flags?

- 🚩 Incentives to relocate abroad, either permanently or for a determinate amount of time, while asking the participant to maintain their active employment at their Canadian research facility and/or to continue to seek Canadian federal research funds
- 🚩 Remuneration significantly above market value provided through concealed or unorthodox means
- 🚩 Offers of unusually prominent titles or opportunities
- 🚩 No public facing website or publicly available history on the talent program
- 🚩 Assurances that participants can undertake work or accept titles 'without telling anyone'
- 🚩 Pressures to recruit colleagues to participate in the program

What Should You Do If You Are Approached?



Speak to your
research team



Speak to your institution's
research security contact



Reach out to the Research
Security Centre

**Remember, Malign Foreign Talent Programs Use
Researchers as a Means to an End —**

If You Were Being Manipulated, Would You Know It?