

**March 31, 2023**

## **New funding reduces online security risks for Dalhousie researchers**

Canadian universities are facing an increasing number of online security threats that can compromise their research, innovation, collaborations, and partnerships, domestically and internationally. While an open and collaborative research enterprise leads to transformative discoveries, it risks knowledge theft, interference or the unwanted transfer of data across borders.

To equip Canadian research institutions and their research teams with the tools and knowledge to secure their research, the Government of Canada has implemented dedicated research security funding through the Research Support Fund (RSF). The funding stems from an investment of \$125 million over five years that started in 2022-23.

Grants Dalhousie receives will help the university build its capacity to identify, assess and mitigate potential risks associated with research security. We talked to Jody Couch, Dalhousie's chief information officer and associate vice president for the university's Information Technology Services to learn more.

### **Why is Dalhousie making new investments through grants from the Research Support Fund to improve digital research security?**

The threat landscape facing research universities in Canada has increased significantly over the last few years. As the COVID pandemic occurred across the country, the requirement for Dalhousie community members to engage in remote work, teaching, and research became a critical requirement. The global nature of higher education's work and the need to connect and collaborate with colleagues all over the world means that the university must remain open enough to engage globally while securing the borders of the institution against those who look to do harm.

### **How can our efforts better protect research data?**

Information security is an ever-changing field that takes dedicated experts to develop the most effective programs to support research activity. When researchers work together with security professionals, they are able to make plans to limit risk with the least impact possible while still allowing for collaboration with peers and access to needed resources. Setting up a secure environment at the beginning allows researchers to focus on their research while maintaining the integrity of their data.

### **Can you describe the investments Dalhousie is making to conduct open-source due diligence searches?**

This year Dalhousie is investing in new security personnel who specialize in threat assessment with an in-depth view of the open-source intelligence security landscape. We are also acquiring a curated threat intelligence portal from one of the world's leading information security firms, which is available to our team of security experts. This will allow researchers to consult with Dal experts in the field of open-source intelligence gathering for their research projects, to help identify risks and potential threats in their research environments and partnerships. In addition, we are investing in new networking equipment that will create a more secure environment for researcher activities across the university.

### **Should our research community anticipate any changes to the way they conduct their research?**

While some things may change with updates to the network, better storage options, or increased security, the intent is to limit impact to researchers. Many of the technology changes underway on campus will allow for a better computing environment and should be a positive change. In addition, the level of support provided for consulting around security planning will increase on campus allowing for more effective security operations with less effort from individual researchers.

### **How are we working to balance increased security with the external collaboration needed for transformative discoveries?**

The global nature of research at Dalhousie offers opportunities for researchers to join with others outside the institution to contribute to answering life's big questions, but it also requires a level of openness to our technology resources that can cause security challenges. The focus of the information security program to support research on campus is to standardize and limit risk wherever possible, while at the same time offering tools and education to researchers so they can freely collaborate with their colleagues all over the world.

### **Research Support Fund**

Established in 2003, the Research Support Fund (RSF) helps Canadian universities and colleges, along with their affiliated health research institutes and research hospitals, with the indirect costs associated with federally funded research. In 2022-23, the RSF/IPG is providing \$10,296,988 to support the indirect costs of research at Dalhousie and affiliate hospitals.