

Media release: ASSAf helps to demystify POPIA for researchers

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) is proud to announce the launch of its POPIA Voluntary Compliance Framework for Research, which was endorsed by the ASSAf Council on 14 May 2025. It is compulsory for all researchers to comply with POPIA. This voluntary framework provides practical guidance for researchers and research institutions to understand and implement the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), 4 of 2013, in their research activities.

Why a Research-Specific Framework?

Over the past four years, researchers across disciplines have faced unique challenges in interpreting and applying POPIA to their work. These challenges have highlighted the need for sector-specific clarity on data processing practices in research settings. ASSAf responded by convening a working group of experts and engaging widely with the research community to develop a user-friendly, practical resource tailored to the needs of South Africa's research sector. The framework is grounded in real-world experience, informed by diverse stakeholder input, and aligned with ethical standards and legal requirements.

While POPIA's primary aim is to protect the privacy of individuals, the ASSAf framework includes provisions that can facilitate responsible data sharing and ease participation in contexts such as open science, cross-continental collaboration, and compliance with international frameworks. Improving South Africa's data protection credibility helps make it a trusted partner in global data ecosystems.

Key features of the framework:

- Voluntary adoption: Institutions and researchers are encouraged to adopt and use the framework as a guide to support compliance with POPIA.
- Practical tools: Includes checklists and simplified guidelines to support compliance.
- Community-driven: Encourages continued dialogue with the research sector to refine and adapt best practices.

The framework aims to promote uniform and ethical data practices across both the public and private research sectors. It also seeks to uphold transparency, accountability, and the rights of research participants, in line with South Africa's data protection legislation.

ASSAf remains committed to supporting the research community in navigating data protection compliance and will continue to engage with the Information Regulator and other key stakeholders to ensure that the framework evolves with the sector's needs.

Access the POPIA Compliance Framework for Research here:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/assaf.2025/113>