This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page is designed to help authors to understand the rationale for, and comply with, the MIS Quarterly’s Instructions for Authors regarding research transparency. Further details behind the journal’s research transparency initiative are provided in the June 2021 Editorial.

If you have further questions about the transparency policies, please contact the MIS Quarterly review coordinator (misqrevu@umn.edu). On a periodic basis, the FAQ page will be updated. If changes are made to the policy over time, these changes will be reflected in the FAQ too.

Question: **Will every paper submitted to MIS Quarterly need to have transparency materials?**

- Answer:
  - While it is not necessary for every paper to include transparency materials, we expect most will include them. This is because research papers are the product of a complex set of judgments and activities, many of which can be made more transparent. While we cannot make every judgment and activity transparent, the goal is to make transparent those aspects that will help readers the most and thereby improve the paper’s impact.

Question: **What is the minimum level of adherence with the research transparency policy?** For instance, if non-disclosure agreements prevent me from sharing my data, can I be excused from having to provide any transparency materials?

- Answer:
  - We expect all papers to demonstrate efforts to improve research transparency, whether in the body of a paper and/or in the transparency materials. While some authors may be restricted from providing certain transparency materials due to constraints such as Non-Disclosure Agreements, we expect that authors will make up for these constraints in other areas. For example, if authors are restricted in data sharing due to NDAs, they may provide transparency in code, tests, or other areas.
  - We expect authors to focus on providing the appropriate degree of transparency, not the minimum. Focusing on the appropriate degree also means that authors should only provide information that will help specific transparency purposes. Just as we do not want authors to provide less information than required, we also do not want authors to overload readers with unnecessary information. The aim is to provide materials that will help readers and thereby increase the paper’s impact.

Question: **When I submit my paper to MIS Quarterly where and how do I specify what transparency materials will be provided?**

- Answer:
  - Upon first-round submission, the submission system will ask the authors to indicate what type of materials they will provide for transparency when the paper reaches the minor revision stage. The authors should also use their cover letter to specify what types of information they will be providing if the paper gets to the minor revision stage. See examples of possible transparency materials in the June 2021 editorial.
Question: Where do you draw the line between what's necessary to include in the paper vis-a-vis the transparency materials?

- Answer:
  - Material that is central to a paper’s contribution should be included in the main body of the paper to the level of depth required for reviewers to assess its credibility. How this is judged will depend on the particular topic and paper and will be negotiated between the paper’s author and senior editor.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial states that transparency materials will not be subject to peer-review and only need to be provided after the minor revision stage. What if I actually want to provide transparency materials in earlier rounds (e.g., via a URL to an external repository)?

- Answer:
  - Given that the materials are not subject to peer-review, they should not be included in the paper at any round. Including them in the paper would create an ambiguous situation for reviewers because they may feel that they are responsible for checking the material (because the link is there) even though they do not need to.
  - Instead, if the authors want to provide this earlier, they can make transparency materials available to the editors by providing a link to an external repository in the cover letter of their submission (this will therefore be available only to the editors but not the reviewers).

Question: Even though authors are not allowed to provide links to transparency materials in their papers during the early rounds, can authors indicate in the paper that they are happy to provide such material (e.g., via a footnote saying that more information can be provided in the transparency materials)?

- Answer:
  - Yes, and this could be helpful. This is akin to the old tradition of adding a footnote saying “xxx available upon request from the author” (where xxx could be anything, such as data, materials, code, further discussions, etc.) that authors would sometimes include in a complex or difficult part of a paper, often when space limitations constrained a full explanation, to provide readers with more confidence in the work. For instance, if an author is aware that questions could be raised about some part of the paper, and if the author would be willing to provide transparency materials related to that aspect later, he/she can add a footnote or parenthetical statement along the lines of “xxx can be made available in transparency materials in later rounds if applicable.”

Question: Even though the transparency materials are not subject to review, what if I would like the reviewers’ feedback on my transparency materials and what if the reviewers would like to provide feedback too? Can there be exceptions to allow us to mutually help the paper?

- Answer:
  - Given that the transparency materials are not subject to review, the general rule is that reviewers will not be provided with these materials at any stage.
  - There may be cases where transparency materials could benefit from having input from one or more of the reviewers and where authors are keen to receive this benefit. We will therefore allow the authors and Senior Editor to negotiate after the minor revision stage if
they wish one or more reviewers to see the transparency materials. The Senior Editor and Transparency Editor can provide the link to these materials to a reviewer and allow the reviewer to comment on the materials. However, such comments will not be part of the formal review. Also, we do not expect this to occur frequently. The general rule is that transparency materials are not subject to review and reviewers will not receive them.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial gave examples of practices that authors might follow for different research genres. Some examples seemed more specific and detailed than others. Does this imply that the costs of adhering to the new policies will vary unequally across genres?

- Answer:
  - No. One of the principles we will follow in this initiative (as explained in the Editorial) is to ‘do no harm,’ which in the case of this example, means that we do not seek to make the transparency requirements any easier or harder for any particular type of research. We believe that the cost or effort to engage in preparing research transparency materials should be roughly equal for all research subcommunities in our field. As stated in the Editorial, one of the roles of the Research Transparency Editors is to provide advice to the Editor-in-Chief on how to improve processes and practices over time. This will be one of the issues that they assess and provide advice on, to ensure that we do not have significant differences across different genres in the field.

Question: Given that the policy offers flexibility to the authors, are there any benefits of providing more transparency materials rather than less?

- Answer:
  - A short research transparency declaration will be added on the paper’s first page to explain how transparency was addressed and where additional content is located, if any, and links to outside material will be included. Readers will therefore readily be able to determine the extent of transparency materials available with the paper and may use this information to determine which papers to build on in their own work. In future, it is also possible that search engines might leverage this information to highlight papers that provide specific information. The journal will also highlight specific papers each year that have done this very well as a way to further highlight and celebrate the efforts of researchers who are doing this, and research transparency will be considered as one of the dimensions for selecting our ‘Best Paper’ awards.

Question: Could this new policy lead researchers to send their papers to other journals rather than bear the extra cost of adhering to the policy?

- Answer:
  - The new policy will help researchers to enhance the impact of their paper because more transparent papers are more useful for readers. Furthermore, our policy emphasizes flexibility and the need to cater for developments in different fields. As a result, we expect this policy will enhance the MIS Quarterly’s position as an excellent choice for authors wanting high-impact publications and we encourage authors to submit their most impactful work to us.

Question: Even if the policy makes sense, it is almost impossible to get through the review process at top journals. Isn’t this just adding another barrier?
We see this as a facilitator of good science, not a barrier. There will be a cost to prepare the transparency materials but we believe these costs will be marginal compared to the significance of the payoffs. We have also deferred the costs until later stages of the review process when authors are more confident that the paper will be published.

**Question:** While the June 2021 Editorial states that data sharing is not mandatory, will this become mandatory at the *MIS Quarterly* over time? Forcing data sharing could harm researchers’ ability to obtain secondary data, threaten industry collaborations, and lead to privacy violations.

- **Answer:**
  - We agree. We have no intention of forcing data sharing. We need to respect a host of constraints that researchers may face (e.g., related to confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and contractual agreements).

**Question:** The June 2021 Editorial mentions the need for authors to declare conflicts of interest associated with their study (e.g., due to financial, social, or economic interests). What if reviewers or editors also have conflicts of interest with the study? For instance, what if an author’s study shows evidence that is critical of a particular policy or organization but a reviewer or editor has a financial interest associated with that policy or organization?

- **Answer:**
  - The conflict of interest policy extends to authors, reviewers, and editors.

**Question:** Research transparency may be a worthy goal, but so too are other characteristics of research, such as contributions to theory, the importance of a topic, and so on. Will this initiative on research transparency lead to a hyper-focus on methodological issues and transparency at the cost of other areas of the paper? For example, will it lead to longer sections of papers on methodological aspects and less space for theory, literature, and discussion?

- **Answer:**
  - Our initiatives on research transparency do not imply reducing our attention to other areas. Rather, the aim is to improve our research standards as a whole. Also, it is possible to cover theoretical issues in the transparency discussion too. For instance, authors might be transparent to readers about how they tried different theoretical interpretations of their data before they presented the one shown in the main body of the paper. Such transparency could help advance generativity -- by allowing readers to see other possible ways of taking the research forward.

**Question:** The role of the Transparency Editor is unclear to me. Can this person reject my paper?

- **Answer:**
  - No. The Senior Editor is the decision-making editor. Like the Associate Editor, the Transparency Editor has an advisory role. The Transparency Editor may advise the Senior Editor that the transparency materials are not in a state that can be accepted. If the Senior Editor agrees, then the paper will not be accepted. Nevertheless, while the Senior Editor will benefit from the Transparency Editor’s advice, the Senior Editor is not bound by that advice; he/she can make an independent opinion on the materials.
Question: Does the Transparency Editor simply add ‘one more person’ to the long list of people an author needs to please? This will just add to the length and complexity of the review process. Don’t we need a more streamlined review process rather than adding another layer of complexity?

Answer:
- Adding the role of the Transparency Editor should not add more time to the length of the review process. This is because the Transparency Editor can work in parallel to the Associate Editor and reviewers because he/she is assessing different material (the transparency materials).
- Improvements in transparency could actually *reduce* the length of the review process. For instance, rather than try to check-and-resolve an issue in the review process (which could add time to any given round, or could even lead to the addition of an extra round of reviews), a Senior Editor may decide that a better decision would be to accept the paper and make it available to readers with appropriate transparency material so that the community can take the paper further.

Question: If the Transparency Editor is not checking the details in the transparency materials (e.g., reproducing statistical tests), is he/she really adding value?

Answer:
- Yes, he/she will add value. The Transparency Editor’s role is to advise the Senior Editor on whether the ‘right’ transparency materials have been prepared and whether they have been presented in the ‘right’ way. Both of these areas of advice can add value.
- If we went further and gave the Transparency Editor a larger role that included reviewing or even reproducing details in the materials, this would overstep our journal’s scope of practice. Please see the June 2021 Editorial for the *MIS Quarterly’s* scope of practice. Some journals include a mechanism that allows for reviewing or checking the reproducibility of certain materials, but we do not. Different outlets can have different scopes of practice. A journal’s scope of practice may also change as expectations in a community evolve. At any given time, the scope should simply be clear.

Question: Why can’t the Senior Editor fulfill the role of the Transparency Editor? Given that the Senior Editor has worked on the paper through each round, the Senior Editor will have a better understanding of the paper than the Transparency Editor.

Answer:
- The Senior Editor will guide the work of the Transparency Editor, so the Transparency Editor will benefit from the Senior Editor’s knowledge. The new role of the Transparency Editor signals that this is a skill and focus that we will develop at the journal over time. By working as a Transparency Editor over multiple papers, Transparency Editors will gain insights for how to perform this role effectively. Transparency Editors will also be expected to keep up to date with the large and growing literature on transparency so that they can make informed judgments about what material is helpful and why. With such skills and experience, they can help complement the role of the Senior Editor. We will initially recruit Transparency Editors from the existing editorial board. Over time, we may recruit additional scholars to work solely as Transparency Editors. We believe it is an important role that deserves its own focus and attention.
Question: The June 2021 Editorial states that *MIS Quarterly* will include an indemnity clause in the transparency materials when a paper is published to state that the journal bears no responsibility for their application or use. Why is the journal adding responsibility onto authors if they are not bearing any responsibility for their use?

- Answer:
  - The *MIS Quarterly* aims to publish high-impact research. As such, we hope such research will be used widely. We are proud to have the journal's name on the papers we publish because we believe in the quality of our review process. We are not subjecting the transparency materials to peer-review, so it is important that we signal to readers that we have not reviewed them.

Question: Quantitative researchers sometimes develop their own empirical models (e.g., structural models) that are highly complex. Publishing the code for these models creates a significant opportunity cost because they could potentially use that code in many other papers. Will the *MIS Quarterly* force the researcher to release the code?

- Answer:
  - This is no different to any other contribution. If the code is part of the central contribution of the paper, then it should be made available to reviewers and editors in the full paper so that it can be assessed. If the code is a contribution, then the author will benefit from its publication (and so will society). If the code is not part of the central contribution of the paper but rather just supportive or ancillary, then the author and editor can make a judgment regarding its presentation in the transparency materials. For instance, it is possible that the author might provide pseudo-code or snippets of code, not the full code.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial covered situations when researchers are subject to non-disclosure agreements that prevent them from publishing their data. However, what if the agreement allows for an embargo period after which the data can be shared? Can the *MIS Quarterly* have dynamic transparency materials, such that the data becomes available later?

- Answer:
  - If the authors believe their data can be shared in this way, we would ask that authors use an external repository that allows the data to be released at the appropriate time. The transparency materials can then be written-up in such a way that readers are aware that additional content will be added over time (e.g., after the embargo lapses).

Question: The June 2021 Editorial stated that authors can use a range of external research repositories in which to store their transparency materials. What if authors store their materials on repositories that later prove to be unreliable (e.g., such that the links to those material no longer work after some time)?

- Answer:
  - There are a growing number of external research repositories. The Editorial provided links to lists of repositories and provided citations to papers that reviewed the capabilities of repositories. There are many highly-reliable repositories to choose from. Choosing one of these repositories will ensure persistent links to the transparency materials. We encourage authors to become familiar with the leading research repositories and we are
confident in relying on them. Just like any insourcing-outsourcing decision, we will continue to stay abreast of this issue over time.

Question: Why doesn’t the MIS Quarterly use standard reporting guidelines to determine what material should be provided by authors in the paper and in the transparency materials? There are many significant initiatives in this area (e.g., www.equator-network.org).

- Answer:
  - Although standard reporting guidelines can be useful, they can become unhelpful when a piece of research follows a different standard to the standard that happens to be endorsed by those guidelines. Given that the MIS Quarterly is an inclusive journal, standard reporting guidelines can be inappropriate. We encourage authors and editors to be aware of standard guidelines and to use them when they are appropriate.

Question: Why are qualitative interpretive papers asked to be explicit about ontological assumptions, as part of a drive to increase transparency?

- Answer:
  - There are many philosophical assumptions that can underpin research. By making one’s ontology explicit, readers are more able to understand the findings and conclusions. This is particularly important when the assumptions held by authors and readers differ. While it is difficult to make broad generalizations of an entire field, we would argue that the most dominant ontology in the field is a realist and positivist one, and while it could be argued that all research should interrogate its ontological assumptions, non-dominant paradigms often require more explanation to be understood. Understanding the intentions of the authors is an important part of being transparent. Inductive and abductive reasoning, which does not aim to test theory or generate statistical significance, is less understood and thus needs more explaining to become accessible to a wider audience.

Question: Is there an expected format whereby qualitative interpretive papers should show the role of theory in their research design?

- Answer:
  - No. There is no one right way to use theory to guide research design or data analysis. Researchers use theory in different ways, for example sometimes being explicitly directed by it, or at other times more emergent in appropriating theory. If authors are more transparent, readers will be more able to follow the author's intentions and findings. Transparency in the way theory was used to guide the research process aims to help understanding with respect to why certain decisions were taken at various points.

Question: In research involving qualitative interviews, do authors need to provide interview templates in their transparency materials if structured interview questions were not used?

- Answer:
  - The journal does not require authors to provide an interview template, or any specific type of interview template. Some studies use structured sets of questions for all (or for particular) cases, research stages, or research participants. In these cases, providing the structured interview template will help readers. In other studies, researchers may use an open-ended style of interviewing, and it may not be possible or meaningful to provide all
the exact questions. Other studies may use common types of questions oriented around predetermined or emergent themes and yet may allow variety in how questions are asked. Authors will not be required to submit a structured interview template if they did not use one. Rather, the objective is to be transparent about what (type of) questions were asked. Doing so will help readers to understand the quotes and responses and thereby help their own interpretive assessment. This can support the plausibility of the proposed findings.

Question: In qualitative fieldwork, how much extended information might be required of a field study to demonstrate transparency of the site context?

- **Answer:**
  - The transparency benefits of providing more information about a field study context can vary between papers. There is explicit interpretive flexibility for authors and editors to determine in what ways more contextual information might augment a study’s authenticity and ultimately trustworthiness. For example, in a study related to electronic health records, more background on national norms related to the role of patients in treatment decisions might be helpful as a backdrop to the study. It is imperative that information vital to the paper’s coherence be in the actual paper. However, additional information to be included in transparency materials can be helpful for authors who want to take the research further or understand how and why results may differ in other contexts.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial mentions that for research involving human subjects, authors should include the ethics approval number for that research (e.g., as provided by an Institutional Review Board or Ethical Review Board). Institutional reviews can be country-specific. What if the research design passes the requirements of one country but does not pass those of another?

- **Answer:**
  - As researchers, we should strive to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects. While IRBs are country-specific, researchers should abide by adequate standards of protection for human subjects, regardless of the standards adopted by the country they are in. This is one way of protecting themselves against objections of the review panel, which may highlight issues with the lack of protection against human subjects, regardless of whether the IRB was obtained in the country of the authors.

Question: How will the *MIS Quarterly* respond if future readers read the transparency materials for a published paper and find material errors that lead them to question a paper’s findings or contributions?

- **Answer:**
  - This can be handled by extending the normal practice used when errors are identified in a research paper. The practice depends on the severity and nature of the issue, and our goal is to support authors throughout the process. The journal’s editors will consider the issue and determine if changes need to be made. It is possible that no change is required. If a change is required, the change (correction/clarification) might be made in the transparency materials alone. A note will then be included in the transparency materials to indicate why and when the correction or clarification was made. This approach can also be extended to cases in which changes need to be made to both the paper and the transparency materials. None of these cases reflect badly on an author or
a journal, as clarifications and corrections are natural parts of science. In rare cases, the discovery may lead to serious doubts about the paper’s contribution or appropriateness. This could lead to a range of outcomes, including a paper’s retraction.

Question: How are Transparency Editors selected? Can I be assured that the Transparency Editor assigned to my paper will come from a similar paradigm and be familiar with similar research methods as my paper?

- Answer:
  - Having worked on the paper over multiple rounds, the Senior Editor will be a good judge of the appropriate Transparency Editor to assign to the paper. Likewise, as the Transparency Editors are sourced from the existing editorial board, the Transparency Editors themselves will be a good judge of their own ability to handle a paper. If authors are concerned about the appropriateness of a given Transparency Editor, they can raise these concerns with their Senior Editor, or if that proves insufficient, the Editor-in-Chief.

Question: If the Senior Editor decides that some of the transparency materials that I provide should be moved into the main paper, does this mean that the paper will undergo another round of review? Is there a possibility that my paper may be eventually rejected if the reviewers are not satisfied with this information that is subsequently included in the main paper?

- Answer:
  - We expect such situations to be rare. This is because the authors and Senior Editor will be in communication throughout the review process regarding the material to include in the transparency materials. Given that authors will be aware of the materials they should be providing, and aware of the issues that might be present in those materials, we will expect authors to have addressed any major issues in them before the paper reaches the final rounds (or at least not be surprised if issues are raised about them).
  - If authors are required to move materials from the transparency materials into the body of the paper, we see four scenarios:
    I. The additional material is deemed acceptable. No extra work is required.
    II. The additional material is deemed unacceptable but it can be salvaged. This could lead to another round of review to allow the author to make the required improvements, after which the paper is accepted.
    III. The additional material is found to be unacceptable and unsalvageable, but the paper still has other contributions. In such a case, the Senior Editor may seek to scale down the paper to a Research Note and accept the paper on that basis.
    IV. The additional material is found to be unacceptable and unsalvageable, and these issues go to the heart of the paper’s contribution. In this worst-case scenario, the paper may need to be rejected. Any rejection in this scenario would be made in consultation with the Editor-in-Chief.
  - We see all of these outcomes positively because the goal is to help authors to publish their best research. Even if the paper is rejected, the authors will have advice they can use to take the research to another journal.

Question: I am hesitant to share my IP or code in transparency documents prior to acceptance, as there may be a chance that the review team may use this IP or code for their own studies. How will the MIS Quarterly address this risk?
Our policy addresses this risk in two ways. First, the transparency materials are requested only when the paper is invited for a minor revision. At this point, there is a clear trajectory towards publication. With a shorter timeline from the provision of the materials to the publication of the paper, this should assuage the above concern. Second, the transparency materials are not subject to review, but will be accessed by the Senior Editor, Associate Editor and Transparency Editors, all of whom are under strict obligation of protecting the ideas and IP of authors.

Question: What kind of changes to my paper’s transparency materials may I be asked to make?

- Answer:
  - As noted in the June 2021 editorial, authors may be asked by the SE to provide additional transparency materials for the submitted paper to achieve the transparency goals for the manuscript. Further, transparency materials may have to be revised to ensure that they are presented and organized in a high-quality manner.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial mentioned a future initiative that will focus on the transparency of the review process. Is the *MIS Quarterly* moving away from the blind review process?

- Answer:
  - No, we are not moving away from the blind review process. We will trial initiatives in the future to test the value of opening up parts of the review process. The exact initiatives and how and when we test them has not yet been worked out. See the March 2021 Editorial for details.

Question: The June 2021 Editorial mentioned not including registered reports or pre-registrations in the scope of this initiative and that they would be deferred to the future. What if I want to engage in these initiatives now?

- Answer:
  - We need to define these terms. Following the Open Science Foundation, we define a pre-registration as a predefined protocol covering study design, methods, and analysis that is prepared and registered before the study is carried out. A registered report goes one step further and involves submitting a pre-defined proposal to a journal and the journal could then make a conditional decision on the proposal (e.g., giving it a conditional acceptance) regardless of the results that emerge from the data collection.
  - We are happy to receive papers that take advantage of pre-registrations and for the Senior Editor to be made aware of this in the paper’s cover letter. In these cases, the registration should be anonymous so that if reviewers come across the registration, the anonymity of the review process is not breached. Also, the registered materials will not be part of the review process. The reviewers can be told that the paper had been pre-registered but the pre-registration materials are not made available to them. In contrast to pre-registrations, we cannot currently process registered reports because we have not yet created our internal processes for handling them. We will be trialing initiatives for doing so in the coming years. We will be eager for authors to engage in those trials.