

Viewpoint: Are organizations claimed as “partners” with tort industry-funded Heartland Study aware of the scam? Here’s an ‘open letter’ challenge

Multiple science communicators and scientists have composed a letter to various universities and government organizations that have been linked to the [Heartland Health Research Alliance](#). HHRA is a front that delivers studies-on-order on the dangers of chemicals for clients, including large organic companies tied to litigator groups and individual tort lawyers who provide much of the funding for its “Heartland Study”. Most of the money is hidden from scrutiny by pass-throughs from donor funds, traditionally money as ‘dark money’ funding. Here is [one of many reports](#) that Genetic Literacy Project has done on the Heartland Study. [su_divider top=”no”]

TO: Boston College, George Mason University, George Washington University, Gunderson Health Systems, Indiana University College of Medicine, Kings College London, Simon Fraiser University, University of Iowa Health, The Centre de Toxicologie du Québec, Minister of Health and Social Services, and U.S. Centers for Disease Control

We are writing to express concern regarding [recent reports](#) regarding public representations of your institution’s “partnership” role participating in human subject matter research and related projects coordinated and funded by the Heartland Health Research Alliance.[1] According to several reports, the so-called Heartland Study is a front group financed by class action litigators and organic food industry marketing interests who plan to profit from their activities.

The Heartland Study has listed your organization as a formal partner in this scheme for both fundraising and public relations purposes to enhance their credibility. The Heartland Study founder and executive director Charles Benbrook has a [well-documented](#) history of offering “pay to play” research with pre-determined outcomes for his consulting clients in the organic food marketing and mass tort litigation industries. In fact, he [was terminated](#) from his most recent academic appointment after failing to disclose conflicts of interest and funding sources for his work.

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In addition, Heartland’s founding board members include representatives from class action litigators and organic industry marketers directly involved in lawsuits and campaigns linked to the so-called study’s predetermined plans to correlate negative child and maternal health outcomes with GMO and herbicide exposure. Conveniently, these board members and Heartland funders are also Benbrook’s business partners and clients who, according to various public court documents, have paid him and his family members hundreds of thousands of dollars for these services while also providing the seed and ongoing operational financing for the Heartland Study.

To date, several articles have been published by researchers using their positions with your named institutions while being paid by Heartland [without fully disclosing their affiliations](#) with this group, funding they received from Heartland donors, or the funders' ties to competing interests. Further, several Heartland-funded researchers are involved in this research without disclosing these conflicted funding sources and competing interests to the human subjects they are enlisting to participate.

These types of activities are potential serious violations of academic ethics and compliance standards and are an affront to best practices and requirements for human subject matter research.

We ask that you respond to our concerns explaining your relationship to the Heartland Study and agree to disclose all funding your institution and employees have received from this group – including any pass-through donors working as Heartland “fiscal sponsors” such as the Franciscan Health Foundation.

Notes:

[1] Not to be confused with the Heartland Institute – a completely separate, unrelated entity.

[Read the original post here](#)