

# Correspondence

## Collaborate equitably in ancient DNA research and beyond

The expansion of ancient-DNA research has seen a few well-funded genetics groups hoarding archaeological material from all over the world, so comprehensive ethical guidelines are timely (see S. Alpaslan-Roodenberg *et al. Nature* **599**, 41–46; 2021). But well-intended proposals for researchers from prestigious institutions to engage with local stakeholders will need radical reinforcement if contributing researchers in lower-income regions are to be recognized as equal collaborators.

Any ancient-DNA research group pursuing a historical problem in a region where research capacity is underdeveloped should start by seeking partners among local geneticists, archaeologists and anthropologists, instead of directly importing material. On-site participation by local research groups must be prioritized at all stages, including data analysis and manuscript preparation. Wealthier partners should be willing to modify their research agendas, scaling them down or extending deadlines as necessary to accommodate local researchers.

Correcting asymmetric collaboration practices will allow sustainable expansion of research on ancient DNA, as well as in other fields such as ecology and geology, in which local resources are similarly exploited.

**Mehmet Somel\*** Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

msomel@metu.edu.tr

\*On behalf of 4 correspondents.

See [go.nature.com/3xpwmzpz](https://go.nature.com/3xpwmzpz).

## Ancient-DNA researchers write their own rules

We challenge the global guidelines proposed for ethical DNA research on human ancestors (S. Alpaslan-Roodenberg *et al. Nature* **599**, 41–46; 2021). In our view, they fail to engage with long-standing critiques from marginalized voices (D. Harry *Chi. Kent L. Rev.* **84**, 147–196; 2009) or to advance pre-existing research principles (J. K. Wagner *et al. Am. J. Hum. Genet.* **107**, 183–195; 2020).

Instead, they perpetuate exclusions that necessitated better ancient-DNA ethics in the first place. For example, they prioritize data collection and advocate open data, positioning the researchers, not descendant communities, as arbiters of data access. Unmediated data use could bring them benefits such as professional advancement that would constitute a conflict of interest. We contend that this should limit their authority to make decisions on behalf of those communities.

Ethical integrity in ancient-DNA research entails shifting the status quo around who governs and who benefits from it. Centring those doing the work and decentering those whom the work affects concentrates power with those who currently control the research process. We should therefore question any guidelines that do not meet or exceed more stringent ethical standards to minimize harm and maximize benefits to communities.

**Krystal S. Tsosie\*** Native BioData Consortium, Eagle Butte, South Dakota, USA.  
krystal@nativebio.org

\*On behalf of 6 correspondents.

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## Climate researchers: consider standing for office – I did

With the COP26 climate summit receding in the rear-view mirror, in many regions it is the decisions made by local councils that are crucial to meeting national carbon-reduction targets. That's why, five years ago, after a career as an environmental-systems researcher, I decided to devote more time to politics in my home town.

The green politics group I helped to start now has elected councillors – of which I am one – in 12 seats across three tiers of my local government. Our presence has given scientific credibility to the arguments for town and district action on climate. This has allowed progressive politicians from different parties the space to act accordingly. There is now a justified and costed climate-change action plans for half an English county (Warwickshire), a town climate-change roadmap group and greater public awareness of the need for change in personal behaviour. It's been a wake-up call after years of writing scoping articles and briefing notes for policymakers to witness at first hand the financial and political constraints involved.

It's time for more councils to include the vision of climate researchers, in my view. Those who would like to engage with advocacy on climate change (see *Nature* **599**, 22–24; 2021) should also consider standing for office.

**John Dearing** University of Southampton, Southampton, UK.  
j.dearing@soton.ac.uk

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## Animal experiments: EU is pushing to find substitutes fast

The European Parliament is once again pushing to accelerate transition to a research system that does not involve testing on animals (see [go.nature.com/3hzprhj](https://go.nature.com/3hzprhj)). In September, its members called for an EU-wide action that is backed by a timetable to phase out non-essential animal experimentation as soon as possible. Meeting this challenge will require extraordinary commitment and dedicated communication by the scientific community.

Many aspects of biomedical and translational research depend on animal experiments, including vaccination, behavioural biology and transplantation surgery. To overcome researchers' reluctance to switch from animal experiments, the scientific community needs to participate in devising alternatives.

For example, human-based models, such as micro-engineered multi-organs-on-chips, could offer ways to study viral infections (P. P. Adhikary *et al. Nature Rev. Mater.* **6**, 374–376; 2021). And the Einstein Centre 3R in Berlin is using 3D models such as human organoids and those made through bioprinting to test treatments (see J. Berg *et al. Viruses* **13**, 1590; 2021) – for conditions including heart disease and neuromuscular disorders.

**Stefan Hippenstiel** Charité, Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany.  
stefan.hippenstiel@charite.de

**Christa Thöne-Reineke** Freie Universität Berlin, Germany.

**Jens Kurreck** Technische Universität Berlin, Germany.