

Guidance for Journals Developing or Revising Policies on Conflict of Interest, Disclosure, or Competing Financial Interests

This document is a framework of discussion questions that journal editors, publishers, and policymakers can use when developing, reviewing, or revising their policies on conflicts of interest. It was developed by the participants of the Retreat on Conflict of Interest and Scientific Publication, held by the Council of Science Editors on October 29-31, 2004, with funding support from the Greenwall Foundation, the American Heart Association, and the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

We believe that scientific journals in every discipline and every country should have some form of conflict of interest policy. However, we recognize that conflicts of interest present in a variety of forms and operate at different levels of importance among different journals and scientific disciplines. Thus, this document is not itself a policy, and it is not intended to be a prescription for a single, universally applicable policy.

We expect that journal editors and publishers will use this document in different ways. Some may choose to address all of these questions in their policies, while others may select only those questions that seem the most important and appropriate to their scientific discipline.

The questions pertain to 4 groups of people whose participation is essential to scientific publication: scientific authors, journal editors and editorial staff, peer reviewers, and editorial board members.

In addition to financial and non-financial conflicts of interest, the questions also pertain to external sources of funding and support, the role of the funding source, and access to and sharing of research data and materials.

Section VII below provides links to some existing conflict of interest policies in use by scientific societies and journals. These are provided as examples.

I. Questions relevant to policy on conflicts of interest for authors

- 1. Does the journal have a conflict of interest policy for authors?**
 - a. Does the policy state when it was developed?
 - b. Does the policy state who developed it (the editors, the publisher, the scientific society?)
 - c. Does the policy state when it was last reviewed and/or updated?
 - d. Does the policy cover members of the author's immediate family?

- 2. Does the policy include a definition of conflict of interest?**
 - a. Does it define conflict of interest as any interest that may raise the perception of conflict of interest, or as bias?

- 3. Does the policy address financial interests?**
 - a. Does it quantify relevant financial interests (e.g., a threshold amount of money, a duration of time, or proximity of time)?
 - b. Are examples provided?

- c. Does the policy address non-financial types of interests?
 - d. Does it address current or former personal or professional relationships?
 - e. Does it address ideological interests?
 - f. Does it address unpaid management or decision-making positions such as membership on a board of directors?
 - g. Are examples provided?
- 4. Does the policy address non-financial types of interests?**
- a. Does it address current or former personal or professional relationships?
 - b. Does it address ideological interests?
 - c. Does it address unpaid management or decision-making positions such as membership on a board of directors?
 - d. Are examples provided?
- 5. If the policy refers to “relevant” or “important” interests, does it provide some guidance about how to interpret these terms?**
- 6. Does the policy discuss disclosure?**
- a. Are disclosures revealed to journal editors and editorial staff?
 - b. Are disclosures revealed to peer reviewers? All disclosures, or selected ones?
 - c. Are disclosures published for the reader? All disclosures, or selected ones? Is publication in print, online, or both? Will published disclosures be the same in print as online?
 - d. Are disclosures made available to the news media? All disclosures, or selected ones?
 - e. Are disclosures checked in any way, such as by confirmation with the author’s university, institution, employer, or funder, or by Internet search?
- 7. Will disclosure have any bearing on the manuscript’s chances of acceptance?**
- 8. Does the policy apply to all articles, or just some types, such as research articles, treatment guidelines, letters, book reviews, news articles, etc.? Does the same level of disclosure apply to all types of articles?**
- 9. Does the policy ban authors with disclosed interests from writing articles?**
- a. All articles, or specific types (research articles, reviews, book reviews, news pieces, etc.)?
- 10. Does the policy specify any option other than disclosures or bans?**
- 11. Does the policy apply to each author equally, or are there special requirements for the principal investigator or lead author?**
- 12. Must each author disclose conflicts of interest, or can one author answer conflict of interest questions for all authors?**

- 13. If the authors have no conflicts, must they file a statement attesting that they have no relevant conflicts to disclose?**
 - a. Are declarations of “no conflicts to disclose” published?
 - b. Are declarations of “no conflicts” checked in any way?

- 14. Can authors elect not to respond to the request for information about conflicts of interest?**
 - a. Will this have any bearing on the manuscript’s chances of acceptance?
 - b. If authors decline, is such information published?

- 15. Is compliance with the policy:**
 - a. voluntary and encouraged?
 - b. required?

- 16. Does the policy inform authors when disclosure is expected?**
 - a. At manuscript submission?
 - b. During manuscript revision?
 - c. At acceptance?
 - d. Before publication?
 - e. Does the policy specify what will happen if disclosures are not made at the appropriate time? are reminders sent during the manuscript preparation process?
 - f. If disclosures are made at submission, are they updated before publication?

- 17. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?**
 - a. Publish a correction?
 - b. Publish a retraction?
 - c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For what period of time?
 - d. Report to the author’s university, institution, employer, or funder?

- 18. How is the policy communicated to authors?**
 - a. Full policy provided in instructions for authors?
 - b. Abbreviated policy provided in instructions for authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
 - c. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
 - d. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
 - e. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form? How detailed is the form? Is the form available for viewing before submission, or must a potential author enter the online submission system to see it? Can the form be submitted online, or should it be printed out, signed by hand, and mailed in?

II. Questions relevant to policy on sources of funding

- 1. Does the journal have a policy that authors declare all sources of support (eg, commercial, government, and private funders)? Does the policy discuss both**

funding and non-monetary support such as in-kind donations (material, equipment, etc.)?

- 2. Does the journal have a policy requesting authors to describe the role of the funding source in the work to be published?**
 - a. Are examples provided (eg, supplied materials, supplied funding, performed statistical analysis, approved manuscript before publication, etc.)?
 - b. Is the description to be included in the manuscript, or in a cover letter or separate form? (submitted at manuscript submission; during manuscript revision; at acceptance, or before publication?)
- 3. Is compliance with this policy:**
 - a. voluntary and encouraged?
 - b. required?
- 4. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?**
 - a. Publish a correction?
 - b. Publish a retraction?
 - c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For what period of time?
 - d. Report to the author's university, institution, employer, or funder?
- 5. How is the policy communicated to authors?**
 - a. Full policy provided in instructions for authors?
 - b. Abbreviated policy provided in instructions for authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
 - c. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
 - d. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
 - e. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form?

III. Questions relevant to policy on access to data

- 1. Does the journal have a policy about access to data or materials?**
 - a. Must authors declare whether they had full access to the data reported in the article?
 - b. Must authors declare whether data will be made publicly available through datasharing, repositories, registries, etc.?
 - c. Must authors declare whether data or materials will be shared?
- 2. Is compliance with this policy:**
 - a. voluntary and encouraged?
 - b. required?
- 3. What does the journal do if authors do not comply with the policy?**
 - a. Publish a correction?
 - b. Publish a retraction?

- c. Prohibit the author from publishing again with that journal? For what period of time?
- d. Report to the author's university, institution, employer, or funder?

4. How is the policy communicated to authors?

- a. Full policy provided with instructions for authors?
 - b. Abbreviated policy provided to authors, with full policy available elsewhere?
- b. Policy described in decision letters or disposition letters to authors?
- c. Policy discussed in journal editorial?
- d. Policy operationalized in the form of an author disclosure form?

IV. Questions relevant to policy on conflicts of interest of editors and editorial staff

1. Does the journal have a conflict of interest policy for editors? Is it applicable to scientific editors, managing editors, manuscript editors, etc.?

- a. Does the policy state when it was developed?
- b. Does the policy state who developed it (the editors, the publisher, the scientific society)?
- c. Does the policy state when it was last reviewed?

2. Is it a policy of disclosure? ban on certain types of interests? recusal from certain types of editing responsibilities? or a mixture?

3. Does the policy include a definition of conflict of interest?

- a. Does it define conflict of interest as any interest that may raise the perception of conflict of interest, or as bias?

4. Does the policy address financial interests?

- a. Does it quantify relevant financial interests (e.g., a threshold amount of money, a duration of time, or proximity of time)?
- b. Are examples provided?

5. Does the policy address non-financial types of interests?

- a. Does it address current or former personal or professional relationships?
- b. Does it address ideological interests?
- c. Does it address unpaid management or decision-making positions such as membership on a board of directors?
- d. Are examples provided?

6. If the policy refers to "relevant" or "important" interests, does it provide some guidance about how to interpret these terms?

7. Does the policy explicitly prohibit the editor from using information in unpublished manuscripts for personal, financial, or professional gain?

8. Is compliance with this policy:

- a. voluntary and encouraged?
- b. required?

9. How is the policy communicated to editors?

10. How is the policy communicated to authors?

11. What does the journal do if editors do not comply with the policy?

V. Questions relevant to policy on conflicts of interest of peer reviewers

All of the questions under editors and editorial staff, as well as the following:

- 12. Does the policy provide guidance for a peer reviewer who is in direct professional competition with the author of an article under review? Does it encourage or require peer reviewers to recuse themselves from reviewing when they have such a conflict?**

VI. Questions relevant to policy on conflicts of interest of editorial board members

All of the questions under editors and editorial staff, as well as the following:

- 12. Does the policy provide guidance for an editorial board member who is in direct professional competition with the author of an article under review? Does it encourage or require editorial board members to recuse themselves from editorial decision making when they have such a conflict?**
- 13. Are conflict of interest statements from editorial board members publicly available (on the journal's Web site or in the print journal)?**

VII. Examples of policies on conflict of interest

Council of Science Editors editorial policies

http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/services/draft_approved.cfm

American Chemical Society Journals' Ethical Guidelines for authors, editors, and peer reviewers

<http://pubs.acs.org/instruct/ethic.html>

American Physical Society ethical guidelines for publication

http://www.aps.org/statements/02_2.cfm

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors policy on publication ethics
<http://www.icmje.org/sponsor.htm>

Committee on Publication Ethics
<http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/>

World Association of Medical Editors
www.WAME.org

This document was initially drafted by Jessica Ancker, Annette Flanagin, and Margaret Perkins and then discussed and expanded by the participants of the Retreat on Conflict of Interest and Scientific Publication, held by the Council of Science Editors on October 29-31, 2004. The document was then reviewed and revised and was approved by the following in February 2005.

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