

Ovarian Cancer Action

Declaration & Conflict of Interest Policy for Research Funding

Why do we have this policy?

The purpose of this document is to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest arising and to protect the charity and those who work for it from any perception, real or otherwise, that the external interests and affiliations of its committee members might interfere with their ability to work towards the furtherance of the charity's.

Ovarian Cancer Action has a conflict of interest policy to ensure we are a transparent research funder. This means that members of our Scientific Advisory Board and external peer reviewers who are part of the research funding decision making process can provide support to the charity without bias or inappropriate influence.

What is a conflict of interest

Scientific Advisory Board members and peer reviewers must declare any of the follow conflicts of interest to the research team

- They are a principal applicant or co-applicant on an application being reviewed.
- If an application being reviewed is from the same University of Institution as the board member/peer reviewer, even if they have no contact with the applicant.
- They work closely with one of the applicants on an application being reviewed.
- They are supervising a student associated with the application.
- Equity interests (if worth £10,000 or more, or more than 1% of the total issued capital) in enterprises with involvement in pharmaceuticals, healthcare, biotech or related areas, or in any other enterprise that may have a real or perceived interest in the work of the charity. Third party investments (e.g. ISAs) should be held exempt from this.
- Panel members (including trustees who serve on panels) should also adhere to the spirit of this document and declare any other interests which they feel may be a source of conflict, or which might be perceived to conflict, with the interests of the charity. This includes interests held by the panel members' spouse or children.

Declaring a conflict of interest

Any persons covered by this policy must declare any disclosable external interest (mentioned above) on their appointment to the charity and/or when asked to peer review. A register of interests will be kept up to date by the charity.

Managing conflicts of interest

Where a panel member is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member will not receive documents pertaining to the application, learn the identity of its referees or receive its referees' reports. He or she must retire from the meeting when the application is assessed. Details of discussion of that application will be deleted from any papers the member receives. This should also apply to trustees who serve as panel members and are applicants in the grant round.

Where the chair of the panel is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and should not be involved in that round of meetings. A vice chair will chair the meeting to prevent any undue influence.

Panel members who could be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant (e.g. they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the proposal under discussion) or have collaborated or published with the proposal applicant within the past three years, or work in the same institution, should declare an interest and may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for that application, or may be allowed to stay, but not vote on the application.

Discussion of proposals

Details of applications, meeting papers and related correspondence and the names of external referees are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside the review process.

Discussions of a proposal between members of a funding committee which occur outside a committee meeting should be declared to the chair of the committee.

If a committee member (including serving trustees) is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application, he or she may provide advice, but must report this to the committee chair and secretariat. They may subsequently be asked by the chair to absent themselves from a discussion of the application concerned.

Resolution of conflicts of interest

The Charity recognises that the majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for the charity or to sit on its committees

In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within the charity. Where such a situation relates to a member of a funding committee/panel, the matter will be discussed by the chair of the committee together with a committee staff member or secretary. In cases where agreement cannot be reached through this means, the case will be referred to the committee as a whole, whose decision should be taken as final.

Members of funding committees are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to individual funding decisions to the committee secretariat before the meeting wherein they will be discussed, or during the meeting as soon as the existence of a conflict becomes apparent.

In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to the committee secretariat. The secretariat shall discuss the matter with the individual as necessary and report to the Chair, who will decide on a course of action.

If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of a funding panel, then he or she should raise the matter with the chair of the panel

Updating the policy

The charity will endeavour to review this policy, if necessary, every two years, in consultation with the board of Trustees.