



Conflict of Interest Policy for Children with Cancer UK Expert Reviewers

Purpose and definitions

This guidance policy applies to all individuals serving as Peer Reviewers for Children with Cancer UK.

This includes:

- External peer reviewers (wider research or clinical community)
- Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) and its constituent members
- Other scientific advisors involved in funding assessment

A conflict of interest is defined as any financial, personal, professional or institutional interest or connection of any individual peer reviewer which may, if undeclared, expose Children with Cancer UK or the recommendations of its funding committees open to accusations of bias and inappropriate influence in peer review or assessment, funding recommendations or scientific advice to Children with Cancer UK.

Children with Cancer UK recognises that in highly specialised research fields some conflicts may be unavoidable. Conflicts of interest will therefore be managed proportionately and appropriately to preserve the integrity, independence and credibility of the review process.

The below is not an exhaustive list; other conflicts of interest not listed here may arise. Children with Cancer UK asks potential reviewers to use their judgement and declare a conflict of interest they feel may impact their ability to fairly and comprehensively review given a grant application. If you are unsure whether a relationship constitutes a conflict, you must disclose it to the Children with Cancer UK Research Team, who will advise on the appropriate course of action.

Conflicts of interest resulting in automatic exclusion from reviewing a grant application

You must not review a grant application if any of the following situations apply:

- **Financial or Business Interest:** You have a direct or indirect financial interest in the application, including as a business partner of any applicant involved in the proposal.
- **Named Involvement:** You are named on the application as a Lead Applicant, Co-Investigator, Collaborator, or in any other research role. This is regardless of the extent of your involvement, including providing a letter of support.
- **Institutional conflict:** You are currently based at the same institution as the Lead Applicant, or were affiliated with that institution within the past 12 months, even if you do not personally know the applicant.

- **Collaboration conflict:** You have collaborated with the Lead Applicant in the past three years in a substantive way, such as providing intellectual input into a research project or clinical trial. Co-authorship is typically taken as evidence of collaboration. Exceptions may apply if the publication includes a large number of contributing authors without substantial joint work.
- **Supervisory Relationships:** You have a current or past supervisory relationship (within the last five years) with the Lead Applicant.

Conflicts of interest resulting in exclusion at Children with Cancer UK's discretion

- **Competition conflict:** Anyone with a competitive interest in a grant application that may result in strong decision bias during the time of completion of their review. This could be that they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the proposal under discussion.
- **Any other matter** that would reasonably be expected to give rise to or be viewed as a conflict of interest (whether academic, scientific, financial or personal}. In this situation the individual concerned should declare the matter to the secretariat before the meeting or as soon as the potential conflict becomes apparent at the meeting.

Identification and resolution of conflicts of interest

- When any SAP member or external individual is invited or assigned to review an application, they are asked to declare whether they have a conflict of interest.
- If a conflict is identified, the reviewer concerned should declare this to Children with Cancer UK's research team as soon as possible. The reviewer will usually be excluded from reviewing that particular grant application but may review another application for the same round on which they are not conflicted.

Additional requirements around identification and resolution of conflicts of interest for SAP members

Where a SAP member is a Lead Applicant:

- They must declare the interest and withdraw from all discussion and assessment of that application.
- They must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of discussion of the application.
- They must not participate in any ranking discussion at the end of the meeting.

Where a SAP member has any other conflict of interest:

- They must declare the interest to the Chair and/or Children with Cancer UK Research Team as soon as possible.

- They must not participate in the discussion, scoring, ranking or funding recommendation relating to that application; they will normally withdraw from the meeting for the duration of discussion of the application.
- At the discretion of the Chair and secretariat, they may:
 - be excluded from receiving papers, referee reports or other documentation relating to the application; or
 - remain for parts of the discussion where the conflict is considered minor or manageable, but must abstain from scoring and decision-making.
- Institutional conflicts involving SAP members may, in some circumstances, be managed proportionately at the discretion of the Chair and secretariat, taking into account the nature of the conflict, the expertise required and the need to maintain appropriate panel quorum and independence.

Where the Chair is involved in an application as a Lead, Co-applicant or Collaborator:

- They 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.

Discussion of applications outside meetings

- Where SAP members feel it necessary to discuss an application prior to the meeting this should be declared to the Chair.
- If a committee member (including serving trustees) is approached by an applicant for advice on an application the individual may provide such advice but must disclose this fact to the secretariat. The individual may be excluded from all or part of the meeting at which the application is considered.

Raising concerns about the conflicts of interest of others

An individual who is concerned about another individual's potential or actual conflicts of interest should raise the matter as set out below.

- Issues concerning a SAP member should be raised with the Chair or secretariat.
- Issues about Children with Cancer UK staff should be raised with the Chair.
- Issues about the Chair should be raised with the Board of Trustees.