



NICHS Conflict of Interest Policy

Research 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy relates to all members of our Scientific Research Committee, external referees, applicants and NICHS staff involved in the grant review process.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that those involved in funding decisions do so in an independent and objective manner, and do not have conflicts of interest that might see them benefit personally or academically from a funding decision.
- 1.3 This policy is based on the standard conflicts of interest policy of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC).

2. Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 NICHS Scientific Research Committee members operate according to a terms of reference which lays out how members should behave, including declaring conflicts of interests.
- 2.2 A conflict of interest for the purposes of the NICHS SRC grant process shall be deemed to exist if any of the following circumstances occur: (a) a committee member has a working relationship with an applicant, (b) a committee member is a supervisor in a project before the Committee, (c) a committee member has, or has had, a personal relationship with the applicant, (d) any other circumstance considered relevant by the Committee Member. Declared interests will be kept up to date by NICHS.

3. Discussion of Proposals

Code of conduct for scientific advisors, external peer reviewers, applicants and NICHS staff involved in the grant review process.

- 3.1 Details of research applications, Scientific Research Committee meeting papers, and the identity of external peer reviewers are strictly confidential and must be kept secure and not disseminated to or discussed with others outside the review process.
- 3.2 Scientific Research Committee members and external peer reviewers can expect that their comments will be treated in confidence. Applicants can expect that NICHS will not disclose details of their applications to those outside the review process.
- 3.3 It is our policy to let external peer reviewers know the final outcome of applications they have reviewed after we have communicated decisions to applicants. Peer reviewers agree to treat all details of applications and their outcomes as confidential.

- 3.4 Applicants should not, under any circumstances, directly approach members of the Scientific Research Committee in connection with their (or another's) research application.
- 3.5 Scientific Research Committee members should refuse any requests for information or feedback from applicants on how a particular judgement was reached.

4. Managing Conflicts of Interests

- 4.1 When a member of the Scientific Research Committee is connected with an application (i.e. an applicant or co-applicant), he or she must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member does not learn the identity of its peer reviewers, and does not score the application. 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.
- 4.2 Where the chair of the committee is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and will be asked to withdraw from the meeting for that application but not vote on the application. A deputy chair will chair the meeting to prevent any undue influence.
- 4.3 Committee 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 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.

5. Resolution of conflicts of interest

- 5.1 NICHS recognises that the majority of conflicts arising will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long term restrictions.
- 5.2 In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue with their position within the Scientific Research Committee. Where such a situation relates to a member of the committee, the matter will be discussed by the Chairperson together with a NICHS staff member.
- 5.3 Committee members are expected to declare conflicts of interest before the meeting where the item will be discussed, or during the meeting as soon as a conflict becomes apparent. If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of the committee, then he or she should raise the matter with the Chairperson of the Scientific Research Committee.