

Basics of Conflicts of Interest:

An Introduction for Responsible Conduct of Research Training

As researchers, we have a primary interest in preserving the integrity and objectivity of our research.

Why? Because our colleagues, other scientists in our field, and the public relies on our research output to be impartial, objective, and accurate. If our research is funded, we are beholden to our sponsor to conduct it ethically and responsibly

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Sometimes we have secondary interests that could affect our objectivity. Examples of secondary interests include:

- Financial benefits (owning stock in the company that sponsors your research, income from an invention you patented that you are currently testing as part of your research).
- Relational interests (a family member has ownership in a company you are contracting as part of your sponsored research).
- Personal interests (your political or moral beliefs create a potential for bias in your research methodology or data analysis).
- Other outside interests (you are asked to speak or consult for payment or are offered a gift by an entity that does business or wants to do business with your employer; you are asked to conduct research with restrictions on publication or public dissemination by the sponsor).
- Secondary interests cannot always be avoided but they can be managed.

Remember, having a potential conflict of interest is pretty common. RCR obligates you to acknowledge it and take steps, if needed, to manage it.

Think back on your primary interest and your obligations to others as a researcher. What is the right thing to do when you recognize the potential for a secondary interest to affect your objectivity?

Integrity requires Transparency. And Transparency = Disclosure.

It is your obligation and responsibility to disclose potential or actual conflicts, and let your institution or organization determine how to proceed.

Some institutions have a financial threshold for a formal disclosure:

For example, the NIH requires any interest valued at over \$10k to be disclosed to them when they sponsor your research.

Appalachian State, as a part of the UNC System, requires disclosure at all levels and offers various ways to do it. You should learn the policy at your future institution or employer.

We encourage early and proactive disclosure.

If you feel that you may have a situation that raises the potential for a conflict of interest, talk to your PI.

If you feel that someone on your research team has a potential conflict, and you cannot talk to your PI about it, you have options: Department Chair, a faculty unrelated to the project, or Research Protections.

For more information, and to access more resources, visit our webpage at

<https://researchprotections.apstate.edu/coi>