

Research grant review

Conflicts of interest policy

Policy statement and purpose

This policy is intended to:

- identify and minimise actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest when individuals are providing expertise and advice to CCLG: The Children & Young People's Cancer Association that influences application review, funding decisions and post award monitoring;
- assist all individuals involved and the charity in managing any conflicts of interest that do arise.

A conflict of interest is any situation in which personal or professional interests, or loyalties owed to another person or body, could, or could be seen to, unduly influence or affect CCLG's decision making. These can include: financial interests that apply to a person, someone close to them or an affiliated body; non-financial interests, such as reputational gain; and, loyalties arising from a personal connection or duty to another person or organisation.

As an organisation reliant on continuing public support and one that seeks to act in the best interests of patients, it is important to identify and manage potential conflicts of interests to ensure that CCLG makes high quality funding decisions that are, and that are seen to be, fair, objective and free from bias. By doing this, we also aim to protect the reputation of CCLG and those involved in funding decision making.

Scope

This policy applies to any individual who provides advice and assistance to CCLG in connection with any application for charitable funding for scientific or clinical research, or who is otherwise involved in CCLG's grant funding or post award monitoring processes. It covers external peer reviewers, all members of CCLG's Research Advisory Groups, lived experience representatives, CCLG staff and Trustees, and any other individuals as appropriate.

Examples of conflicts of interest for scientific reviewers

- **Financial conflict:** anyone who has a direct or indirect financial interest with a grant application submitted to CCLG.
- **Applicant and co-applicant(s) conflict:** anyone listed as main applicant or co-applicant on a grant application submitted to CCLG. Anyone listed as a collaborator on a grant application submitted to CCLG.
- **Collaborator(s) conflict:** anyone listed as a collaborator or having recently collaborated with the listed main applicant and/or co-applicant(s) in any given grant application submitted to CCLG. If an external reviewer has published work with the main and/or co-applicant within the last five years, this may also be considered a conflict. However, we recognise that the children and young people's cancer research community is relatively small and highly collaborative, so in this situation it will be up to the reviewer to determine whether a conflict exists.
- **Same institution conflict:** anyone working in the same institution as the main applicant or co-applicant(s) listed on a grant application submitted to CCLG at the time they are requested to peer review the application. Anyone working in the same institution as a collaborator on an

application is **not considered conflicted** due to the relatively small and highly collaborative nature of the children and young people's cancer research community.

- **Competition conflict:** anyone who has competitive interest with a grant application submitted to CCLG that may result in a strong decision bias during the time of the completion of their review.

Examples of conflicts of interest for lay reviewers

- **Financial conflict:** anyone who has a financial or commercial interest in a grant application submitted to CCLG
- **Involvement conflict:** anyone who was involved in developing any given application, for instance as a member of a patient panel
- **Patient conflict:** where a lead or co-applicant on any given application was involved in the treatment of a given reviewer, or their friend/family member

This is not an exhaustive list; other conflicts of interest not listed here may arise. CCLG asks potential peer and lay 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.

Identification and resolution of conflicts of interest: external and lay reviewers

It is up to the reviewer to decide whether a conflict of interest could exist, and if so, to declare the conflict. Consideration must be given to how things could appear to others and, in all cases, individuals should err on the side of caution, declaring an interest if there is any possibility that a conflict of interest may exist.

If a conflict is identified, the reviewer concerned should declare this to CCLG's research team as soon as possible. They may be excluded from reviewing that particular grant application, but may review another application for the same round on which they are not conflicted.

Discussion of proposals

Details of applications, meeting papers and related correspondence, and the names of external reviewers, are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside of 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 is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application, they may provide advice, but must report this to the committee chair and CCLG research team. They may subsequently be asked by the chair to absent themselves from a discussion of the application concerned.

Managing conflicts of interest: panel members

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.

Resolution of conflicts of interest

CCLG 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 CCLG 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 CCLG. 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.

Reviewing this policy

CCLG will endeavour to review this policy, if necessary, every three years.