

Conflicts of Interest (COIs) in Research

WHAT IS A COI?

"Circumstances that create a risk that professional judgments or actions regarding a primary interest will be unduly influenced by a secondary interest." (Institute of Medicine 2009)

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF A COI?

- Being paid as a consultant by a company that produces treatments for a disease you study
 - Peer reviewing the work of a close colleague
- Enrolling your own students or patients into a research study

In each case, decisions about a primary interest—generating rigorous data, providing fair peer review, or protecting human subjects—could be biased by personal interests or competing roles.

IS IT WRONG TO HAVE A COI?

No. Sometimes COIs are impossible to avoid. Sometimes the relationships that create COIs are beneficial to many different stakeholders. But, they do introduce a risk of biased decision-making.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A COI?

1

Disclose

Publishers, education providers, and institutions often require disclosure of financial conflicts of interest and roles that might introduce bias.



2

Follow a Management Plan

A conflict of interest committee may provide a management plan, which could include divesting, disclosure to diverse parties, recusal from select roles, or increased oversight.



3

Use Compensating Strategies

Any kind of COI can introduce unconscious bias into decision-making. Reduce the risk of bias by consulting the opinion of others and using the SMART decision-making strategies. <http://integrityprogram.org/smart>



To learn more, visit the website of your institution's conflict of interest committee.