



## AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION CONFLICT OF INTEREST SITUATIONS

The American Heart Association (AHA) has stringent guidelines regarding an actual or implied Conflict of Interest between applicants and peer reviewers. Our guidelines state that in a situation where a conflict either occurs or could be implied, that specific guidelines be followed. We recognize two kinds of conflicts, Primary and Secondary.

### PRIMARY CONFLICT

What is a Primary Conflict?

- The Principal Investigator is a peer review committee member
- A Collaborating Investigator is a peer review committee member
- The Peer Reviewer is a Sponsor or co-sponsor of a fellowship applicant
- The Peer Reviewer is an Advisor (Mentor or co-mentor) of an applicant
- The Peer Review member's spouse, significant other, or immediate family member is an applicant.

How is it handled? If any of the above situations exist, the application/s **MUST** be brokered to another relevant and qualified peer review group, or the reviewer must drop from the committee.

### SECONDARY CONFLICT

What is a Secondary Conflict?

- The application is from peer reviewer's institution or the peer reviewer's adjunct institution
- The peer review member is a:
  - Department Head
  - Consultant
  - Has written a reference letter
- The peer reviewer has published with the applicant or sponsor/advisor/mentor (if a training funding opportunity) within the last 3 years. Exception: a reviewer may review an application if he/she co-authored a review article, position paper, professional group or conference report or "mega-authored paper" where the applicant and/or sponsor/advisor/mentor and reviewer did not have a direct working relationship.
- The peer reviewer has or had a previous relationship with the applicant and/or sponsor/advisor/mentor which would influence scoring (post-doc student, competitors, in process of recruiting applicant, etc.)
- The peer review member has relocated from applicant's and/or sponsor/advisor/mentors institution within the past 12 months

How is it handled? The peer review member must leave the peer review meeting during review of that application. In virtual meetings staff have the capability to move conflicted reviewers from the discussion. Conflicted peer reviewers are put on a virtual hold until the discussion of the application is completed. The final safeguard against potential conflict of interest during peer review arises from the ethics of each peer reviewer. When any peer reviewer identifies a relationship with an applicant and/or sponsor/advisor/mentor (or application) which might influence their scoring, the peer reviewer should announce the possible conflict, leave the meeting and abstain from voting.