

Exercise 3: Exploring Soft Conflicts of Interest

Discussion Prompts

Use the prompts below to guide your group's conversation.

You can focus on a real research project or make one up for this exercise.

- If you are an oversight committee member, consider how you might use or adapt these questions in your review process—for example, by including them in application materials for researchers.
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Funding Sources

1. What type of organization is funding your research?

Examples:

- a. Governmental health funder (e.g., NIH, NHS)
 - b. Governmental fund not strictly related to health (e.g., Department of Defense)
 - c. Charitable foundation
 - d. University or local institution
 - e. Individual private donor or family (that is not a charitable foundation)
 - f. Commercial health entity (e.g. pharmaceutical company, health insurance company)
 - g. Commercial entity not strictly related to health (e.g., Google, Apple)
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Motivations for Research

- ### 2. Consider the many reasons researchers pursue a question. Which resonate most with you? Are there any that you think don't belong on this list? Are there any reasons you can think of that are NOT on this list?

Funding & Resources

- a. I have received funding to work on this research question.
- b. I am doing early work in the hopes of receiving funding.
- c. I know funders are interested in this question.
- d. I have access to data that lets me answer this question.

Personal Motivation

- e. This question matters to me because I'm part of the community being studied.
- f. This question matters to me because this health condition affects me or people I care about.
- g. This question has religious or cultural significance to me.
- h. A particular event inspired me to pursue this question.
- i. I'm curious about this question.

Scientific & Professional Drivers

- j. This question addresses a priority in the scientific community.
- k. This question connects to my broader body of work as a researcher.
- l. This question relates to an urgent health issue for humanity (like a pandemic or natural disaster).
- m. Working on this question could help advance my career (e.g., publication, tenure).
- n. I see a gap in the research literature that this question could fill.
- o. Answering this question could be useful in clinical practice.

External Influence

- p. My supervisor asked me to study this question.
- q. A community asked me to study this question.
- r. I think this question could have commercial value.

- s. I think this question could inform policy decisions.
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Funding Allocation and Conflicts

- 3. What have you allocated funding towards or what are you planning on requesting funding for?** What are the reasons you would or would not request funding for each of these elements?
 - a. Scientific journal publication fees
 - b. Scientific journal open access publication fees
 - c. Scientific conference travel
 - d. Participant community engagement during the research process
 - e. participant community outreach to disseminate research findings
 - f. Data repository access or compute fees
 - g. Other fees related to data access and/or compute (e.g., revenue sharing requirements)

- 4. Are any of these “soft” conflicts of interest applicable to your work?** Are there any that you think don’t belong on this list? Are there any reasons you can think of that are NOT on this list?
 - a. The mission of the funding organization could have/could appear to have an influence on study conclusions
 - b. The mission of the funding organization is controversial or opposed by certain groups
 - c. The government behind the funding is controversial to certain groups

- 5. Make a list of bullet points about your own potential soft conflicts of interests** for a given project and then think through how you might mitigate each one of them.

- For example, creating transparency about your personal motivations for pursuing the research question by drafting and publishing a blog post or social media post about your research and why it is important to you.
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Further Reading (Optional)

If you'd like to explore further, here is an external resource.

To access, either search the title below online or visit the web version of this exercise for a clickable link.

- "When research is me-search: How researchers' motivation to pursue a topic affects laypeople's trust in science"