

## **Policy on Composition and Balance, Conflicts of Interest, and Independence for Committees Used for Workshops, Symposia and Other Similar Activities**

*Note: This policy applies to committees used to plan workshops, symposia and other similar activities. It does not apply to committees used for other non-advisory program activities, including roundtables, forums and other similar bodies; committees used in the development of findings, conclusions and recommendations; boards and committees used for institutional oversight; the NRC Governing Board; or the elected Councils of the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering and National Academy of Medicine. A complete list of all policies on composition and balance, conflicts of interest, and independence for the committees, boards and councils of the National Academies can be read [here](#).*

Every year hundreds of scientists, engineers, health professionals and other experts are appointed to National Academies' committees charged with planning workshops, symposia and other similar activities. These activities address a wide range of national and international problems, needs, and opportunities. The quality and integrity of the work of these committees is essential to the reputation of the National Academies and to continuation of the institution's role as an advisor to the government and the nation on matters involving science, engineering and medicine.

### **I. Committee Composition and Balance**

In order to do work of high quality the membership of a committee charged with planning a workshop, symposium and other similar activity must be qualified and appropriately balanced. The members of the committee must be able to work together to carry out their task through cooperative, respectful discourse and the free exchange of ideas (see [Preventing Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying: Expectations for Participants in NASEM Activities](#)). The assessment of composition and balance also includes consideration of the following:

1. Expertise. Consideration should be given to the range of knowledge and expertise required to fully address the committee's charge, and to the appropriate balance among disciplines and fields of expertise, taking into account the subtleties and complexities of the subject matter of the committee's charge.
2. Perspective. Consideration should be given to whether there is an appropriate range of perspectives on the subject matter of the committee's charge. Differing and new perspectives on a topic, shaped by individual knowledge and experience, can be vital to planning a successful workshop, for example.
3. Objectivity. Consideration should be given to whether the committee membership can be objective and open-minded in addressing the subject matter of its charge. For example, an individual may have strongly held views or biases, or may be closely associated with a group that has taken a strong position, on the subject matter of the committee's charge. This does not preclude appointment to the committee as long as the individual remains

open to taking account of the views of others in carrying out the committee's charge. However, it may be necessary to include on the committee other members with contrasting views to maintain balance.

4. Background. Consideration should be given to the committee membership with respect to, for example, age, employment sector experience, and geographic location. The membership of the committee should reflect the communities of scientists, engineers, health professionals and other experts from which the committee members are drawn, and of the communities that have a stake in the topics involved in the committee's charge.
5. Academy Membership. Consideration should be given to the importance of including members of the Academies on the committee. Academy members are leaders in science, engineering, and health. The inclusion of Academy members on a committee contributes to its expertise and increases the involvement of Academy members in the program work of the Academies.

In many cases, a committee appointed to a plan workshop, symposium or other similar activity is relatively small, sometimes with as few as three members. In these situations, tradeoffs among these considerations may be necessary. In making these tradeoffs, the considerations should be taken into account to the extent possible while still appointing a committee that can successfully carry out its charge.

## **II. Disqualifying Financial Conflicts of Interest**

An individual may not be appointed to a committee charged with planning a workshop, symposia or other similar activity if the individual has a financial conflict of interest with respect to the task of the committee. An individual has a conflict with respect to the task of a committee in any of the following circumstances:

1. The individual has a financial interest that could be affected directly and predictably by the outcome of the committee's work;
2. The individual's spouse, domestic partner, or dependent child has a financial interest that could be affected directly and predictably by the outcome of the committee's work; or
3. The individual has a current relationship with an entity that has a financial interest that could be directly and predictably affected by the outcome of the committee's work involving --
  - i. a business partnership or employment;
  - ii. the provision of compensated advisory or consulting services, including compensated service on a scientific or technical advisory board;
  - iii. the provision of representation services or service as an expert witness, whether compensated or not;
  - iv. service as an officer, director, trustee, or other fiduciary of the entity, whether compensated or not; or
  - v. research support for the individual, except for research support that is awarded on the basis of merit without restrictions on the conduct of the research or the publication of the results.

Financial interests include stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments and investments; patents, copyrights and other intellectual property interest; and ownership interests in for profit business enterprises. Financial interests do not include any financial asset with a value of less than \$15,000 or diversified mutual funds and similarly diversified investments. There is no minimum threshold for income or compensation.

Conflict of interest issues seldom arise under this policy for planning workshops, symposia and other similar activities because of the nature of many of the activities, the broad scope of the subject matter of the activities, and the absence of any consensus findings, conclusions or recommendations. There is seldom a basis for concluding that the outcome of the committee's work will have a direct and predictable effect on any financial interests. In most cases, adequate attention to the composition and balance of the committee, and particularly the balance of views and perspectives among the members of a planning committee, is sufficient to ensure the quality and integrity of the committee's work.

However, there are some situations in which a conflict could arise. For example, if a workshop is being organized at the request of a federal agency to explore the issues surrounding a pending decision by the agency on expanding the biosafety level 4 facility at a university despite local community objections, the university's provost cannot serve on the planning committee for the workshop. Although the workshop will not produce any conclusions or recommendations on the pending decision, the subject matter of the workshop is focused on a specific agency decision affecting a specific institution, and closely tied to the agency's decision making process. In this situation, the potential for the selection of topics and presenters for the workshop to have an impact on the agency decision is sufficiently direct and predictable to create a conflict of interest for the provost.

### **III. Disclosure of Other Relevant Information**

Any other information regarding a planning committee member that does not create a conflict of interest but could have a significant impact on a reasonable person's perception of the member's objectivity regarding the task of the committee must be disclosed at the time of committee formation and in any publication resulting from the activity. It does not disqualify the member from full participation in the work of the committee.

For example, past service by a planning committee member within the last five years on the advisory board of an electric utility, whether compensated or not, is relevant information in the case of a workshop exploring steps for improving the reliability of urban electric power distribution systems and should be disclosed. Service by a committee member within the last five years on the board of a nonprofit organization that has taken a public position on increased funding for federal food assistance programs in the case of a workshop exploring ways to reduce food insecurity in the United States is another example of relevant information that should be disclosed. Similarly, in the case of a workshop exploring possible new directions for the U.S. Navy's cyber security strategy, the fact that an adult daughter of a committee member is an executive of a long-time supplier of cyber security systems to the Navy is relevant and should be disclosed.

For a brief discussion of when the outcome of the work of a committee charged with planning a workshop, symposia or other similar activity could potentially have a direct and predictable

effect on the financial interests of others, see **Section II. Disqualifying Financial Conflicts of Interest.**

## **IV. Independence from Sponsors**

An individual who is –

an employee of a governmental entity, or

controls or is an officer, director, trustee or employee of a nongovernmental entity

that is providing sponsorship for the work of a committee used to plan a workshop, symposium or other similar activity may serve as a member of the committee only if –

1. The individual brings unique expertise or perspective to the committee;
2. The individual is not involved within the entity in any deliberative or decision-making process or policy-making related to the work of the committee or the expected or intended results of the work;
3. Service by the individual will not compromise, or appear to compromise, the independence or objectivity of the committee's work; and
4. The service is not prohibited by any federal, state, or local law or regulation.

For example, working scientists, engineers, and health professionals at government laboratories often meet these requirements, while senior government officials in policy-making roles do not.

Sponsorship for purposes of this restriction is any funding provided by an entity to support a specific workshop, symposium or other similar activity. It does not include contributions by an entity to the pooled funds of a roundtable, forum or other similar body and controlled by the body, even if the pooled funds are subsequently used by the roundtable, forum or other similar body to support a specific workshop, symposium, or other similar activity.