

Policy on Composition and Balance, Conflicts of Interest, and Independence for Committees Used in the Development of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Note: This policy applies to committees used in the development of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It does not apply to committees used for other non-advisory program activities, including roundtables, forums and other similar bodies; committees used to plan workshops, symposia and other similar activities; 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 thousands of scientists, engineers, health professionals and other experts are appointed to National Academies' committees charged with developing findings, conclusions and recommendations regarding 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.

Work that is of high quality and integrity requires that the membership of these committees be qualified and appropriately balanced. Members must be free of conflicts of interest, transparent about their relevant relationships and publications, and independent from the sponsors of the committee's work. Therefore the appointment of members of any committee charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations must conform to this policy.

I. Committee Composition and Balance

The composition and balance of the membership of a committee charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations must be appropriate for the work that is to be done. The members of the committee must be able to work together to reach scientific consensus 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 issues to be addressed by the committee.
2. **Perspective.** Consideration should be given to whether there is an appropriate range of perspectives on the issues to be addressed by the committee. Differing and new perspectives on an issue, shaped by individual knowledge and experience, can be vital to

achieving an informed, comprehensive, and authoritative understanding and analysis of a problem and potential solutions.

3. Objectivity. Consideration should be given to whether the committee membership can be objective and open-minded in addressing the issues before it. 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 an issue before the committee. This does not preclude appointment to the committee as long as the individual remains open to new learning that could change his/her views. However, it may be necessary to include on the committee other members with contrasting views to maintain balance. Appointment to the committee is not appropriate if an individual is not open to any new learning or discussion that could change his/her views on an issue being addressed by the committee.
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 outcome of the committee's work.
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.

II. Disqualifying Financial Conflicts of Interest

An individual may not be appointed to a committee charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations if the individual has a financial conflict of interest with respect to the issues to be addressed by the committee. The conclusion that an individual has conflict of interest is not an assessment of the individual's actual behavior or character. The exclusion of an individual with a conflict of interest from service on a committee is intended to avoid a potentially compromising situation, thereby protecting the individual, the Academies, and the public interest.

An exception to this prohibition is permitted only if the Academies determine that the conflict is unavoidable. A conflict is determined to be unavoidable when the Academies have not been able to identify another individual who (1) has the specific required expertise and experience, (2) is available to serve on the committee, and (3) does not also have a conflict. Unavoidable conflicts must be disclosed at the time of committee formation, posted on the National Academies' website, and documented in any report 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.

III. Disclosure of Relevant Relationships

Relationships of a member of a committee charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations that are relevant to the issues to be addressed by the committee must be disclosed at the time of committee formation and in any report of the committee. Relevant relationships that must be disclosed are separate from, and in addition to, the relationships that create a conflict of interest.

A relevant relationship that must be disclosed is --

1. any past relationship within the last five years of the committee member with an entity that has a financial interest that could be affected directly and predictably 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, 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;
2. any current or past relationship within the last five years of the committee member involving uncompensated advisory or consulting services, including uncompensated

service on a scientific or technical advisory board, with an entity that has a financial interest that could be affected directly and predictably by the outcome of the committee's work;

3. any current or past relationship within the last five years of the committee member with an entity that has taken a public position on an issue that is central to the work of the committee involving –
 - i. a business partnership or employment;
 - ii. the provision of advisory or consulting services, including service on a scientific or technical advisory board, whether compensated or not;
 - 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, 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; or

4. any current or past relationship within the last five years of the committee member's spouse, domestic partner, or dependent child with an entity that has a financial interest that could be affected directly and predictably 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, 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.

An example of a relevant relationship is past service by a committee member within the last five years on the scientific advisory board of an automobile manufacturer, whether compensated or not, in the case of a study reviewing the Environmental Protection Agency's regulation of automobile emissions. Similarly, 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 the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's weather satellite program in the case of a study examining the need for increased federal investment in weather forecasting is a relevant relationship.

IV. Disclosure of Relevant Publications

Publications of a member of a committee charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations that are relevant to the issues to be addressed by the committee must be disclosed at the time of committee formation and in any report of the committee. A relevant publication of a study committee member is any published or otherwise public statement authored by the committee member alone or with others during the last five years that takes a position on an issue that is central to the work of the committee.

V. Disclosure of Other Relevant Information

Any other information regarding a committee member, of which the committee member is aware, that in the judgment of the National Academies could have a significant impact on public perception of the objectivity and value of the committee's work must be disclosed at the time of committee formation and in any report of the committee. For example, in the case of a committee studying opportunities for mandating improved motor vehicle fuel efficiency, the fact that an adult daughter of a committee member is the vice president for engineering of a major vehicle manufacturer should be disclosed.

VI. 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 charged with developing findings, conclusions or recommendations 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.