

Objectivity in Research

For purpose of promoting Objectivity in Research, it is highly critical that conflicts of financial interest be identified and avoided when funding is being sought after.

To give you a general idea, Significant Financial Interest may be as anything of monetary value, including but not limited to:

- salary or other payments for services (e.g., consulting fees or honoraria);
- equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options or other ownership interests);
- intellectual property rights (e.g., patents, copyrights and royalties from such rights).

However, the term may not include:

- salary, royalties, or other remuneration
- income from seminars, lectures, or teaching engagements sponsored by public or nonprofit entities;
- income from service on advisory committees or review panels for public or nonprofit entities;

When monetary transactions did have involved, public prices or other reasonable measures of fair market value would always be an important factor to consider. All relevant financial disclosures must be reviewed for determining whether a financial conflict of interest exists; and, if so, determine what actions should be taken to manage, reduce, or eliminate such conflict of interest.

You may come across the term Investigator. An “Investigator” is defined as the Principal Investigator and any other person is responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of research funded by the funding organization, or proposed for such funding, including subgrantees, contractors, or collaborators. The definition of Investigator would cover the Investigator’s spouse and dependent children. Investigators are usually required to disclose a listing of Significant Financial Interests (and those of his/her spouse and dependent children) that would reasonably appear to be affected by the research for which funding is sought, and in entities whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research.

Research Ethics

The practice of research should never exist outside the domain of societal interests. There is always an inherent and unavoidable impact on society, and that research must be based upon that relationship with society. A researcher's conduct toward other researchers, toward employers, toward clients, and toward the public is therefore an essential part of the life of a professional researcher. Simply put, a professional differs from a technically competent person in his/her awareness of the society in which the professional skills are being deployed.

Professional ethics deal with how we agree to relate to one another. The codes of professional conduct is therefore in a role of laying out the road map for professional relationships. As professionals, researchers must be able to internalize their codes and to realize that they have a personal stake in the application of codes as well as the process of developing the codes. Viewing professional codes as static statements developed by "others" is NOT the right attitude at all.

Proper code of ethics should be treated as a reminder of moral standards; a source of guidance in difficult moral dilemmas; and a standard of evaluating cases of alleged misconduct. For researchers in particular, it would be dangerous to ignore moral dilemmas and focus on dealing with physical problems only. Dilemmas are problems without a unique right solution, therefore it is necessary for researchers to be sensitive to areas outside the pure technical areas.

Below shows some general ethical principals on conducting academic research:

- Honesty - never fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data. Never attempt to deceive colleagues, granting agencies, or the public.
- Objectivity - avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research.
- Integrity - always act with sincerity and strive for consistency of thought and action.
- Carefulness - critically examine your own work and the work of your peers, and keep good records of research activities.
- Openness - be open to criticism and new ideas.