ICMJE Conflict-of-Interest Form: Glossary of Terms

This Glossary accompanies the Conflict-of-Interest Form. For more information, see the Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts.

1. Conflict of interest: Exists when an author (or the author’s institution), reviewer, or editor has financial or personal relationships that inappropriately influence (bias) his or her actions (such relationships are also known as dual commitments, competing interests, or competing loyalties). These relationships vary from being negligible to having great potential for influencing judgment. Not all relationships represent true conflict of interest. On the other hand, the potential for conflict of interest can exist regardless of whether a person believes that the relationship affects his or her scientific judgment. Financial relationships (such as employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, and paid expert testimony) are the most easily identifiable conflicts of interest and the most likely to undermine the credibility of the journal, of the authors, and of science itself. However, conflicts can occur for other reasons, such as personal relationships, academic competition, and intellectual passion. For the purposes of disclosure, the term “competing interest” should be considered synonymous with conflict of interest.

2. Author: A person who has made a substantial intellectual contribution to a submitted manuscript and accepts public responsibility for its content. A substantial contribution includes all of the following: 1) conceptualization and design of the study, and/or acquisition of the data, and/or analysis and interpretation of the data; 2) drafting and/or critical revision of the manuscript; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. (In contrast, a contributor is a person who has participated in one or more, but not all, of the above activities. Indeed, all authors are contributors, but not all contributors are authors.)

3. Corresponding author: Also known as the co-author designee, the author serving as the primary point of contact for the Editorial Office for all matters pertaining to a submitted manuscript. When applicable, it is the corresponding author’s responsibility to share all communications from the Editorial Office with the other co-authors of the submitted manuscript. The corresponding author also serves as the primary point of contact for readers after publication.

4. Submitted for publication: When an article has been received by a scholarly publication. The point of submission will vary from journal to journal, some once an acknowledgement is received by the author, others once it has arrived in the journal’s offices.

5. Conception of research or study: Formulation of the idea, thesis, or question that is to be systematically investigated.

6. Direct resources: Resources that were obtained through or from one’s institution (as opposed to in one’s own name). This may refer to money, infrastructure, personnel, or contributions in kind.

7. Indirect resources: Resources that were obtained through or from one’s institution (as opposed to in one’s own name). This may refer to money, infrastructure, personnel, or contributions in kind.

8. Institution: Organization such as, but not limited to, a university, hospital, clinic, or biomedical research centre providing services to the public.

9. Financial activities: Activities pertaining to one’s finances (money matters).

10. Third-party: Person or entity (organization, government agency, public institution, company, etc.) that is not directly involved in a transaction/agreement between two principal parties but that may nevertheless have various interests (financial, legal, etc.) at stake in this transaction/agreement.

11. Sources of revenue: Revenue streams and/or sources of funding, such as those needed to fund a research project or study (grants, sponsorships, donations, etc.).

12. Sponsoring research: A person or entity (organization, government agency, public institution, company, etc.) that contributes to the creation and/or dissemination of new knowledge by ensuring that the appropriate arrangements are in place for the financing, initiation, management/governance, monitoring, and reporting of a research project or study by pledging money in advance and/or providing products, services, and/or other resources. The sponsor does not conduct the research project or study but is always a stakeholder.

13. Relevant relationship: Connection or association that is substantial enough to have a potential bearing on the matter in hand.

14. Reviewer: Person who reads submitted manuscripts and judges their suitability for publication in a journal. Reviewers are also part of the “peer-review process” for judging grants and awards.

15. Grants (grant): Financial assistance mechanism providing monetary aid, property, or both to an eligible person, group of people (e.g., research group), or other entity (e.g., research institute) to carry out an approved research project or study.

16. Consultancy: Practice of giving expert knowledge and/or advice (as a consultant) within one’s particular field of expertise. The consultant works in an advisory capacity.
only and is usually not accountable for the outcome of the consulting exercise.

17. Board membership: State or condition of being an elected or appointed member of a specially constituted administrative body (the board) with supervisory powers within an organization. Most often simply referred to as “the board,” this body sometimes has a different name, such as board of directors, board of trustees, board of governors, board of managers, or executive board.

18. Expert testimony: Testimony given in relation to a scientific, technical, or professional matter by an expert (i.e., a person qualified to speak authoritatively about the matter by virtue of his or her special education, training, knowledge, skill, or experience/familiarity with the matter) — short-hand term for “service as an expert witness” (also known as professional witness). Expert testimonies include providing a written report (especially when that report, by rule or custom, will be shared with opposing counsel), appearing for a deposition, or otherwise providing information or testifying under oath.

19. Patent: Exclusive right, granted by the government to an inventor (or his or her assignee), to make use of his or her invention (product, process, or design) for a specified time, generally 20 years, in exchange for a public disclosure of the invention.

20. Stocks: Also known as corporate stock, equity, or equity securities, instrument (“share certificate” or “stock certificate”) that entitles holders (“shareholders”) to an ownership interest (“equity”) in a corporation and represents a proportional claim on its assets and profits. Ownership in the company is determined by the number of shares a person owns divided by the total number of shares outstanding.

21. Royalties: Use-based payments made to the holder of a property, including but not limited to a patent, copyright, registered trademark, or trade name, registered design, as well as trade and business secrets and/or know-how, for the right to use the property. The amount of the payment is usually a percentage of the revenues obtained through the use of the property.

22. Speaker’s bureau: Service as an industry-remunerated speaker at functions, such as continuing medical education and/or other educational events and activities, when the paying company has the contractual right to dictate or control the content of the speaker’s presentation or talk, and/or the company creates the slides or presentation material and has final approval of its edits and ultimate content, and/or the speaker is expected to act as the company’s agent or spokesperson for the purpose of disseminating company or product information.