

Conflict of Interest FAQs

General FAQs

What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest is any situation or relationship (personal, professional, commercial, or financial) that may compromise or appear to compromise a covered individual's professional judgment in carrying out their institutional activities because of an external relationship/interest of the employee or the immediate family members. A conflict of interest includes any external relationship/interest that may have the possibility (in actuality, or appearance) of:

1. compromising an employee's or an advisor's judgment;
2. biasing the nature or direction of scholarly research;
3. influencing an employer's decision or behavior with respect to research, teaching and student affairs, appointments and promotions, uses of university resources, patient care, interactions with human subjects, or other matters of interest to the University; or resulting in a personal or immediate family member's gain or advancement at the expense of the University.
4. A conflict of interest may arise because an external relationship/interest may have an *appearance* of conflict. Our goal is to have all employees act with honesty, integrity, and in the best interests of the University when performing their duties, and to abide by the highest ethical standards of research, educational, professional, and fiscal conduct.

What is a conflict of commitment?

A conflict of commitment is an external activity that has the potential to interfere with a covered individual's time commitment to the University terms of employment. This is an area that is monitored and addressed by an individual's department chair and/or direct supervisor. Please consult with your department chair or supervisor if you have questions about a specific proposed activity that may create a conflict of commitment.

What is meant by "related to your institutional responsibilities?"

To understand what is meant by "related to your institutional responsibilities," you should think about your outside activities that are associated with your area of professional expertise, or that are related to your role at the University. Ask yourself, "Am I being asked to participate in this outside activity because I am a professional in my field at FSU?" If the answer is "Yes," then it may reasonably appear that the requested activity is "related to your institutional responsibilities." By this measure, any consultation in your area of professional expertise should be disclosed. On the other hand, if, for example, you are an orthopedist with a family business that imports rugs, that would not need to be disclosed. Keep in mind that "relatedness" is not always a bright-line determination. You should use your judgement when deciding what needs to be disclosed; but when in doubt, err on the side of transparency.

Am I allowed to work outside of the university?

Probably yes. There is no blanket prohibition on outside employment opportunities. However, outside employment must be preapproved and comply with University policies and applicable law

Are all external interests automatically a conflict of interest?

No, external interests are not automatically considered a conflict of interest.

What external interests and/or activities are prohibited?

The policy does not specifically prohibit any external interests or activities. However, any such interests or activities that may compromise or appear to compromise a covered individual's professional judgement in carrying out their institutional activities (in actuality, or appearance) may be limited, managed, or prohibited.

Am I required to submit a Disclosure Profile if I do not have any financial interests to report?

Yes, all individuals covered by the policy are required to complete the Disclosure Profile. Your response in the disclosure will serve as documentation that you do not have any financial interests. As noted below, even if you do not receive any cash funding, any in-kind contribution from an external entity (which may include loaner equipment from a vendor, or a visiting researcher who is paid by a foreign government) could be deemed to be a reportable financial interest.

What are some examples of an external interest that would need to be disclosed?

External interests, including personal financial, commercial, or business interests, that are related to or overlap (or may have the appearance of doing so) with a covered individual's institutional role(s) and activities at the University must be reported. This includes, without limitation, off-campus, non-University commitments, such as company ownership, a board or management position, or consulting activities for external entities. In addition, any personal relationships that overlap with a covered individual's institutional role(s) (and activities) must be reported and this would include, without limitation, supervising an immediate family member who is an employee at the University or doing research in a covered individual's laboratory.

What are the interests that "relate to or overlap" with my institutional activities?

Some examples include:

- Interests that are similar to, or take advantage of, your position, activities, or expertise at the University
 - You maintain a consulting practice in an area for which you are similarly responsible for developing and/or managing on behalf of the University (e.g., fundraising)
- Outside interests that take advantage of your access to university-owned information or intellectual property, resources, or personnel
 - If your outside activity licenses (or should license) or otherwise uses the university's information or intellectual property, that will be deemed to be related or overlap with a university activity
- Outside interests that use the information or intellectual property that you acquired or use in connection with your institutional activities
 - If you are a researcher in the field of virology, your outside activities in connection with a viral vaccine will be deemed to be related to or overlap with your institutional activities

If you are not sure whether an outside interest relates to or overlaps with your institutional activities, please reach out to [CAMS Support](#).

What happens when I disclose an external interest?

When you disclose your interests and those interests exceed certain thresholds, the disclosure will be reviewed to determine if a possible conflict of interest exists and whether it can be managed or even eliminated. If it is determined that your conflict requires management, then you will be contacted if further information is required, and a management plan developed. You will have to agree to and accept the management plan in CAMS.

How often do I need to report my external interests?

Your Disclosure Profile is required to be updated annually; or when you, your spouse, or dependent child has a change of interests.

Is there a minimum amount of financial interest to be reported?

No, you must disclose all financial interests related to yourself, your spouse, and dependent children.

Who determines if my external interest is a conflict of interest?

The Final Reviewer will review any disclosed interest to determine if it represents a conflict and whether it needs to be managed, reduced, or eliminated. Disclosures are reviewed on an individual basis and, if needed, a management plan is developed. Unique situations will be discussed by the Final Reviewer with the appropriate COI Administration for a determination on the management, reduction, or elimination of a conflict of interest. In situations where additional information is required, the Final Reviewer will contact the discloser via clarification request.

How is "spouse" defined?

For purposes of this policy, "spouse" includes same-sex spouses/marriages or domestic/common law partner of an employee.

How is "Dependent Child" defined?

A dependent child is someone under the age of 18 that you have provided at least half of the person's total support for the year — food, shelter, clothing, etc.

How can I determine if I have completed the Disclosure Profile?

Log into CAMS and view your Disclosure Profile. If the status noted in the orange box in the upper left corner states **No Action Required**, your profile is complete. However, if the status states **Action Required**, read the information in the Instructions Center to determine what you need to do to complete your profile.

I am having technical difficulties completing the Disclosure Profile. Who can I contact for support?

Please log a helpdesk ticket through [CAMS Support](#) for any questions regarding the Disclosure Profile.

I just submitted my disclosure, but now I have acquired a new financial interest. What do I do?

Log into CAMS and click on Edit Disclosure and make the necessary changes. You must click on **Complete Disclosure Update** to update any certifications that may be in progress from your initial submission.

Who is required to take the COI training?

All disclosers must complete COI training in CAMS at least once a year.

How do I know when my training expires?

CAMS displays the expiration date on your Disclosure Profile.

Who are the COI Administrators?

The COI Administrators are appointed by the University's senior officers to assist a in reviewing, managing, and mitigating a conflict of interest.

Will my disclosures be kept confidential? Who has access to my disclosure?

The COI Administrators and all reviewers will keep the disclosures confidential unless limited disclosures are necessary within the University or with its outside legal, audit, or expert advisors to manage the conflict; or unless disclosures are required by a court order, a government investigation, or by an applicable law. Disclosures that

relate to federal or other research funding will need to be disclosed to the extent required under federal law or under the award terms and conditions.

How can conflicts of interest be managed?

In many instances a conflict of interest can be resolved by simple disclosure, in other cases, the conflict:

- may be monitored by an assigned monitor,
- a research plan or a work/supervision arrangement might be modified, or under certain circumstances,
- severance of a relationship that is creating the actual or potential conflict might be the only viable option.

Who will supervise my COI management plan?

Your immediate supervisor, with the assistance from the school, department and/or division, should be responsible for making sure that your COI management plan is properly implemented. The supervisor will periodically report on the status of the management action plan as requested by the COI Administrators.

Who may I contact if I suspect a violation of the FSU COI policy?

If you suspect a violation of the FSU COI policy or any otherwise unethical or inappropriate activity, you may file a report (and if desired, anonymously) via FSU's EthicsPoint reporting tool. To report a potential issue using the hotline, please call toll-free 855-231-7511 (24 hours a day, 365 days a year) or click [here](#) to submit an online report.

What University resources may be used for outside activities or interests?

Except as authorized by the University, employees may make only incidental use of university resources for purposes unrelated to the education, research, scholarship, patient care, and public service missions of the University. In addition, all non-university activities should be conducted outside of the university. Without limiting the foregoing, the following FSU resources may not be used for non-FSU related activities or interests without specific university approval:

- facilities (using your lab space to conduct research for your outside company)
- personnel (asking your office manager to do your personal errands)
- students (asking your student to conduct research for your outside company)
- equipment (including university-owned computing devices, scientific equipment, etc.)
- secure internet system (VPN)
- confidential information (including, without limitation, intellectual property)
- FSU email, telephone and address lists of university faculty, staff, students, or alums (using FSU or school directory to solicit business for your outside company)
- University address (giving as a consulting or business address any University building or department name when participating in non-University commitments)
- University emails, telephone, or fax for personal gain (using University emails as business emails for non-FSU related activities)
- University name/mark/logo (using FSU logos or stationery for personal or non-University business)
- Your university position or role to promote outside businesses or products

Can faculty-owned businesses conduct activities involving students or staff?

Members of the University community involved in business ventures as owners or major investors must be alert to the possibility that a conflict of interest may arise. Students or staff may work for a faculty or employee-owned

business, but not on University time or while they are being supervised by such faculty or employee (in lab, office, or classroom). Students may work for a faculty-owned business but may not be simultaneously enrolled in a course taught by that faculty member or may not be simultaneously working in a faculty member's laboratory. Student/faculty/staff roles and relationships must be clearly defined and disclosed.

I intend to use outside printing services to develop the layout for a new student services brochure to be issued next semester. My wife runs a printing and design shop that can perform this type of work. Can I direct the business to her? The total job cost is below the University's minimum bid requirements.

No. Regardless of whether the cost of the job is below the bid threshold, there exists a potential conflict of interest since by providing this job to your wife (or other family members or persons living in your household) you might personally benefit. Also, this situation could affect your unbiased judgment in selecting the most qualified print shop for the project. Therefore, you should not negotiate or approve a contract with the shop, and you should disclose your wife's financial interest in the shop on your Disclosure Profile.

I am the department technical support provider. Last week, my supervisor asked me if I could come over to his house that weekend and upgrade his personally-owned computer with the extra memory he recently purchased. I found it hard to say no to his request since I perform the same function for the University. Is this a conflict of interest?

Yes, this would constitute a conflict of interest. Supervisors may not make such requests. This situation can be compared to one in which a supervisor receives a gift from a vendor. Gifts are forbidden by law and our policies because they may cause the supervisor to feel beholden to the vendor or give the vendor power to coerce the supervisor. In the case of a supervisor, receipt of a "gift" of the employee's time creates the same opportunity for a conflict of interest, where the obligation of loyalty to FSU becomes secondary to other interests. This is true even if the work is, or appears to be, performed voluntarily; it need not be coerced to be wrong.

A consultant working with the University has offered to let me stay at his vacation home on Cape Cod for the weekend. Should I accept the invitation?

No. Acceptance of this gift would give the appearance of impropriety and therefore it would be inappropriate for you to accept the invitation.

In attending a conference, a vendor offers to pay for a group dinner or some type of hospitality event. Is this acceptable for me to participate?

This is probably acceptable if other prospective clients are attending and that it is part of a conference or meeting event. However, you should be cognizant of the value of the dinner and whether there is a pending opportunity for the vendor with FSU (such as a contract renegotiation), especially if you are involved in the procurement process.

I have an outside consulting practice that solicits business from several sponsoring agencies that provide funding awards to FSU. Do I need to disclose this relationship?

Yes, section 112.313, Florida Statutes, *Standards of conduct for public officers, employees of agencies, and local government attorneys*, prohibits FSU employees from doing business with entities that do business with FSU. However, there are some exceptions available in this statute. Therefore, this relationship must be disclosed in your Disclosure Profile. A University employee may not perform work, either in a self-owned business or as an employee of an outside business, which (i) uses confidential information that the employee receives during his or her employment, (ii) could be considered a "quid pro quo" for the contracting party to obtain University business or (iii) directly or indirectly places the University at a financial or competitive disadvantage.

Research Related FAQs

What is considered a conflict of interest in research?

A conflict of interest arises when an individual's financial, personal, or outside interests may compromise or bias, or be perceived to compromise or bias, their professional judgement and objectivity in conducting or reporting research. Some examples of a relationship that may constitute a research conflict of interest are a financial and/or equity interest in an entity involved in your professional field, a fiduciary duty that you hold to an external entity, or a personal relationship with a collaborator.

Conflicts of interest are the result of situations which might create the perception of bias, rather than any specific actions by an individual. For this reason, *perceived* conflicts are considered conflicts of interest regardless of whether they have materially impacted an investigator's actions. It is important to understand that the determination of a conflict of interest is an acknowledgement of such a situation, not an implication of any wrongdoing or impropriety.

Am I required to submit the Disclosure Profile if I am not currently conducting research?

Yes, all individuals covered by the policy are required to complete the Disclosure Profile.

Do I need to disclose salary paid to me by the University as an Investigator?

No. Your salary or other remuneration paid to you by FSU is not considered disclosable.

I have FSU start-up funds or other internal discretionary funds that support my research activities, do I need to disclose that on my other support?

No. However, start-up packages and other forms of support provided by *other* institutions must be disclosed.

I do not receive grant funding from an external entity, but receive other support in the form of space, equipment, supplies or personnel, etc. Does this need to be reported?

Yes, even if you do not receive any cash funding, any in-kind contribution from a company or a foreign government (which may include a loaner equipment from a vendor or a visiting researcher who is paid by a foreign government) could be deemed to be a reportable financial interest.

A portion of my FSU salary is funded by an external entity as part of a collaborative research grant. Is this considered a significant financial interest?

No. Salary paid by FSU but derived from a contract or grant from a collaborative institution or company is considered salary and is not considered disclosable.

The Federal regulations require financial interest disclosures from public health service (PHS) or other U.S. government-funded researchers. I do not receive such funding. Does this mean I do not have to complete the training or submit the disclosure form?

No, all FSU employees are required to complete the Disclosure Profile.

I have an SBIR/STTR award involving a start-up of which I am the founder/owner. FSU is a sub-recipient on this award. Is this considered a conflict?

If your laboratory at the University is receiving research funding pursuant to an SBIR/STTR award involving a company in which you have a financial interest, you will not be permitted to simultaneously serve as Principal

Investigator for both the company and FSU. Doing so would entail a conflict of interest as it would put you in a position to oversee your own work as a subrecipient.

I am the owner/founder of a start-up company that currently only exists on paper. Do I need to disclose?

Yes. If you have a financial or equity interest in any active company, this is considered a financial interest and must be disclosed.

My COI management plan requires that I disclose my financial relationship to laboratory members and in research presentations and publications. Why is this?

Objectivity in the conduct of research is critical to the values of research integrity and academic freedom. The policy requires that any significant financial interests be disclosed to the appropriate audience as a means of providing transparency around any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

My work on a research project will be conducted at another institution at which I have an appointment. Do I need to disclose that appointment?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Other Appointments or Outside Employment as applicable.

I have a dual appointment with the University of Ontario. I am a PI on a grant for the Canadian Institutes of Health there. Do I need to include this on my Disclosure Profile?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Outside Employment.

I am an Adjunct Professor at Fudan University. I am listed as a Co-Investigator on a Chinese National Science Foundation award held by that University. I do not personally receive any compensation, but the grant pays for technicians' salaries and the supplies for the aim that I work on when visiting Fudan. Do I need to disclose this?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Other Appointments.

I work on an NIH research project, and I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship from the Onassis Foundation in Greece. A stipend is paid directly to me. Do I need to disclose this?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Other Appointments.

I just won a Nobel Prize from Karolinska Institute! Do I need to disclose this?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Gifts, Prizes and Honoraria.

Am I required to disclose my relationships with foreign government entities?

Yes, all professional and financial relationships with foreign entities, private or otherwise, must be disclosed if the relationship is not limited to grant funding processed through the Office of Research.

I will be working at a foreign institution over the summer for 2 months and will receive salary support during this time. Do I need to disclose this?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Outside Employment.

Do I need to disclose sponsored travel related to my research grants?

Yes, you must disclose all sponsored or reimbursed travel related to your institutional responsibilities; provided,

however, that this disclosure requirement does not apply to travel that is reimbursed or sponsored by a federal, state, or local government agency, an Institution of higher education as defined at 20 U.S.C. 1001(a), an academic teaching hospital, a medical center, or a research institute that is affiliated with an institution of higher education.

Are there any exceptions for disclosing travel?

Yes, travel paid for by U.S. federal, state or local governments; and domestic institutions of higher education, academic teaching hospitals, medical centers or research institutes are excluded from disclosure requirements.

What if I forgot to report my sponsored travel? How will anyone know?

Update your CAMS Disclosure Profile immediately! Please be aware that the FBI is tracking who is leaving and returning to the US by air, what class ticket they have, and who paid for that ticket. They are sharing that information with the NIH. (Source: Ropes and Gray Webinar on "NIH Inquiries into Foreign Affiliations, Research Support, and Award Components" March 25, 2019, Teleconference Replay / Presentation Slides).

Is it true that I must disclose the occurrence of any reimbursed or sponsored travel (i.e., that which is paid on behalf of the Investigator and not reimbursed to the Investigator so that the exact monetary value may not be readily available), related to my institutional responsibilities?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Sponsored Travel.

If my travel is paid for by a foreign institution of higher education, am I required to disclose this?

Yes, the travel disclosure exclusion does not apply to any foreign entity including institutions of higher education, academic teaching hospitals, medical centers, or research institutes.

How about if my spouse is reimbursed for travel by a foreign entity? Does that need to be reported?

Yes, you would disclose this in CAMS under Sponsored Travel after you Select "Spouse" in Q2, "Relation to discloser."