

**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agriculture Research Service - Office of Scientific Quality Review**

Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Guidelines

CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST GUIDELINES

Please identify if you have had any of the following relationships with the Principal Investigator (PI) or listed personnel in the peer review documentation:

- Have been a thesis or postdoctoral advisee/advisor;
- Have been a co-author on a publication within the past 36 months, including pending publications and submissions;
- Have been a collaborator on a project within the past 36 months, including current and planned collaborations;
- For someone in your field, have had a consulting/financial arrangement/other conflict-of-interest in the past 36 months including receiving compensation of any type (e.g., money, goods or services);
- Have a known family relationship such as a spouse, child, sibling, or parent, or other relationship, such as a close personal friendship, that you think might tend to affect your judgment or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

If you encounter a situation about which you are uncertain, please bring it to the attention of the OSQR Coordinator for a determination.

If you determine that you have a conflict of interest, or an appearance of a conflict, and, therefore, are unable to review a research project plan which you have been assigned, please notify the OSQR Coordinator immediately and destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the research project plan.

Failure to identify a conflict of interest may subject you to administrative sanction, i.e., removal from review of the research project plan and/or disqualification from involvement in future reviews.

CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

While the content of research project plan is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), reviewers should not disclose information contained in research project plans as it is the role of the Department of Agriculture, not the reviewer, to determine whether such information is releasable pursuant to the FOIA. For this reason, confidentiality must be maintained--therefore **DO NOT** copy, quote, or otherwise use material from this research project plan. If you believe that another individual or group could make a substantial contribution to the review, consult with the OSQR Coordinator before disclosing either the contents of the research project plan or the applicant's name. When you complete the review, you are requested to destroy the peer review documentation and maintain its confidentiality. In the event you are unable to complete the review, please notify the OSQR Coordinator for instructions on how to proceed.

Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information may subject you to administrative sanction, i.e., removal from peer review and/or disqualification from involvement in future reviews.

Public Burden Statement: According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an Agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0518-0028. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 10 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

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Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Certification Form for OSQR Panelists

1. Your Potential Conflicts-of-Interest

Your designation as a OSQR panelist requires that you be aware of potential conflict situations that may arise. Read the examples of potentially biasing affiliations or relationships listed on the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Guidelines. As a OSQR panelist, you will be asked to review research project plans and other science related guidance or policy materials. You may have a conflict, or the appearance of a conflict, with one or more. Should any conflict arise, you must bring the matter to the attention of the OSQR Coordinator. This official will determine how the matter should be handled and will tell you what further steps, if any, to take.
Failure to identify a conflict of interest may subject you to administrative sanction, i.e., removal from review of the research project plan and/or disqualification from involvement in future reviews.

2. No Use of "Insider" Information

If your designation gives you access to information not generally available to the public, you must not use that information for any personal benefit or gain, nor make it available for the personal benefit or gain of any other individual or organization. This is to be distinguished from the entirely appropriate general benefit of learning more about selected reviews, learning from other panel members, or becoming better acquainted with the state of the science of a given topic.

3. Your Obligation to Maintain the Confidentiality of Research project plans or Applicants.

While the content of the research project plan is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), reviewers should not disclose information contained in the research project plan, as it is the role of USDA, not the reviewer, to determine whether such information is releasable pursuant to the FOIA. For this reason, confidentiality must be maintained – therefore **DO NOT** copy, quote, or otherwise use material from any research project plan you are asked to review. When you complete the review, destroy such documents related to the research project plan and maintain its confidentiality.

Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information may subject you to administrative sanction, i.e., removal from review of the research project plan and/or disqualification from involvement in future reviews.

4. Confidentiality of the Review Process and Reviewer Names

OSQR keeps reviews and your identity as a reviewer of a specific research project plan confidential to the maximum extent possible, except that reviews are classified as necessary to be kept transparent for the benefit of public awareness, your name and affiliation or other identifying information may be made public. It is critical that you respect the confidentiality of all project directors and/or other reviewers. Do not disclose their identities, the relative assessments of research project plans by a peer review panel, or other details about the peer review of research project plans.

YOUR CERTIFICATION

Your Potential Conflicts

I have read the list of affiliations and relationships that could prevent my participation in matters involving such individuals or institutions. To the best of my knowledge, I have no affiliation or relationship that would prevent me from performing my panel duties. Where there is an appearance or actual conflict-of-interest, I will recuse myself from the review of the research project plan or be granted an appropriate waiver.

Maintaining the Confidentiality of Others

I will not divulge or use any confidential information, described above, that I may become aware of during my service.

Your Identity as a Reviewer Will Be Kept Confidential

I understand my identity as a reviewer of specific research project plan(s) will be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible, except in those instances where greater transparency is expected. Otherwise, copies of written reviews that I submit will be sent to the Principal Investigator(s) without my name and affiliation.

Panel Member's Name (Please Print) _____

Panel Member's Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Panel _____

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN VIA EMAIL WITHIN 3 DAYS OF RECEIPT.