

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

**Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Guidelines**

AS A REVIEWER, PLEASE REVIEW THESE GUIDELINES PERIODICALLY DURING YOUR SERVICE

**CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST GUIDELINES**

You must disqualify yourself as a reviewer of an application if you have had one of the following relationships with the Project Director (PD) or other key personnel listed in the application:

- Have been a thesis or postdoctoral advisee/advisor;
- Have been a co-author on a publication within the past three years, including pending publications and submissions;
- Have been a collaborator on a project within the past three years, including current and planned collaborations;
- For someone in your field, have had a consulting/financial arrangement/other conflict-of-interest in the past three years including receiving compensation of any type (e.g., money, goods or services);
- Are from the same institution, had previous employment with the institution within the past 12 months, or are being considered for employment at the institution;
- 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 NIFA National Program Leader for a decision.

If you determine that you have a conflict of interest, or an appearance of a conflict, and, therefore, are unable to review an application which you have been assigned, please notify the NIFA National Program Leader immediately and destroy all printed and electronic materials related to the application.

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

**CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES**

While the content of applications is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), reviewers should not disclose information contained in applications 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 please DO NOT copy, quotes, or otherwise use material from this application. If you believe that a colleague can make a substantial contribution to the review, consult with the NIFA National Program Leader before disclosing either the contents of the application or the applicant's name. When you complete the review, please destroy the application and maintain its confidentiality. If you are unable to review, please contact the respective NIFA National Program Leader, destroy the application and maintain its confidentiality.

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

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**Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Certification Form for NIFA Panelists**

**1. Your Potential Conflicts-of-Interest**

Your designation as a NIFA 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 NIFA panelist, you will be asked to review grant applications. You might have a conflict, or an appearance of a conflict, with one or more. Should any conflict arise, you must bring the matter to the attention of the National Program Leader. 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 application 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 your personal benefit or make it available for the personal benefit of any other individual or organization. This is to be distinguished from the entirely appropriate general benefit of learning more about NIFA, learning from other panel members, or becoming better acquainted with the state of a given discipline.

**3. Your Obligation to Maintain the Confidentiality of Applications or Applicants.**

While the content of the applications is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), reviewers should not disclose information contained in the applications 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 please DO NOT copy, quote, or otherwise use material from any application you are asked to review. When you complete the review, please destroy the application and maintain its confidentiality.

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

**4. Confidentiality of the Review Process and Reviewer Names**

NIFA keeps reviews and your identity as a reviewer of a specific application confidential to the maximum extent possible, except that reviews are routinely sent to project directors of their own application without your name, affiliation or other identifying information. It is critical that you respect the confidentiality of all project directors and/or other reviewers. Do not disclose their identities, the relative assessments or rankings of applications by a peer review panel, or other details about the peer review of applications.

**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 application 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 application(s) will be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible, except that copies of written reviews that I submit will be sent to the Project Director(s) without my name and affiliation.

Panel Member's Name (Please Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Panel Member's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Panel \_\_\_\_\_