



**Updated - April 15, 2014**

## **Guiding Principles for Working with External Groups and Addressing Conflicts of Interest**

### **Overview**

The American Society for Nutrition (ASN) partners with industry, trade organizations, government agencies, foundations, individuals and other scientific and medical groups to further the Society's mission.

Such activities should:

- Support accomplishing the ASN mission and the improvement of global nutrition through science;
- Address the professional needs of ASN members and the nutrition community;
- Protect and maintain the Society's public trust, integrity, ethical standards, credibility, and identity; and
- Comply with appropriate authoritative guidelines including the ASN-endorsed Financial Conflicts and Scientific Integrity in Funding Food Science and Nutrition Research<sup>1</sup>; the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education; the Commission on Dietetic Registration; and the Office of the Inspector General.

ASN recognizes that our mission can only be accomplished through effective partnerships. ASN will engage in relationships with potential partners only if the relationship enhances the quality of nutrition research and education and is aligned with ASN's values and mission.

ASN accepts financial and in-kind support from individuals, foundations, industry, trade organizations, government agencies, and other scientific and medical groups only if such acceptance does not pose a conflict of interest and in no way impairs the Society's objectivity, autonomy, credibility, priorities, and actions. Support of ASN programs does not permit influence over content nor does it imply ASN approval or endorsement of an organization's policies or products, whether a program is funded by single or multiple sources.

This document serves as a general guide for working with external partners (e.g., individuals, foundations, industry, trade organizations, government agencies, and other scientific and medical groups hereafter collectively referred to as "organizations").

### **Conflict of Interest**

ASN requires disclosure of conflicts of interest (COI) of ASN officers, editors of ASN publications and members of the ASN Board of Directors and select committees. A conflict of interest exists when an officer and/or director; committee or task force member; or Council or Research Interest Section (RIS) leader has a business, financial, leadership, employment, research, family or other material relationship with a third party that may reasonably be perceived as creating dual loyalties or may reasonably call into question the ability of the individual to act solely for the benefit of ASN. A COI also may exist when the actions of a Society officer and/or director; committee or task force member; or Council or RIS leader involve an improper gain or advantage for such a person or have an adverse effect on the Society's interests.

Conflicts of interest may affect an individual's opinion, may appear to make that opinion self-serving, or might not allow for impartial objective determinations. These situations may impair objectivity and in some instances create or appear to create an unfair competitive advantage for individuals or organizations. Any potential or real conflicts of interest in decision-making and principled interactions with any external organization shall be disclosed and managed and/or resolved on an individual basis. For example, an individual must recuse his or herself from voting on an issue in which there may be a conflict and/or refrain from participating in discussions of such matter except for the purpose of providing helpful information. Staff will review and approve COI disclosures and seek guidance from the Board and/or other volunteer leaders, as appropriate, on matters that need resolution. General principles for managing COI in nutrition research have been published and can serve as a guide for other activities.<sup>1</sup> Additional guidance about managing conflicts of interest is being considered by ASN leadership (April 2014).

The existence of a COI does not automatically prohibit an individual from serving in a leadership position or other volunteer role within the Society. Further, a COI does not necessarily imply bias, fault or wrongdoing on the part of an individual. The ASN policy requires disclosure of financial or other relationships that may be regarded as possibly influencing actions taken or statement made under the aegis of the organization. ASN recognizes the need to have a policy that ensures proper balance, autonomy, objectivity and scientific rigor in governance and in education, research, health policy and all other activities sponsored by ASN. Careful compliance will inspire confidence, will avoid both actual COI and appearance of COI, and will comply with legal and regulatory standards.

With regard to governance, ASN officers, editors of ASN publications and members of the ASN Board of Directors and select committees are required to openly disclose any real, perceived and potential conflicts of interest. Candidates for elected or appointed ASN positions are informed of and asked to comply with the COI policy prior to initiating an activity or term. ASN COI/Disclosure Statements are completed at the beginning of each term of service and updated at least annually. ASN requires that all such disclosures be made and presented in a manner that will allow others to make informed decisions about the existence and/or impact of a COI.

### **Criteria for ASN Involvement**

Any program, activity or event in which ASN is involved must support an ASN goal or objective supported by the ASN Strategic Plan and/or advance the field of nutrition, and related science, research, education and/or advocacy. Programs typically include but are not limited to educational activities (meetings, webinars, etc.), scientific statements, publications, information, scholarships and awards.

All programs must 1) be of high quality in content and presentation; 2) contain accurate, balanced scientific nutrition information; 3) not be influenced by conflicts of interest among ASN, outside organization(s), and/or the subject of the program itself; 4) not be used to endorse or promote directly a commercial product; 5) be consistent with current ASN goals, objectives, and policies or meet an emerging, critical need; and 6) have ASN involvement, both in the development and distribution of content and products.

### **Support for Education Activities (Meetings, Webinars, etc)**

Regardless of whether continuing education credits are offered, ASN will strive to adhere to the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) Essential Areas and their Elements, Updated Criteria, Standards for Commercial Support, and Accreditation Policies and guidelines of the Commission on Dietetic Registration. The ACCME defines "commercial interest" as any entity producing, marketing, re-selling, or distributing health care goods or services consumed by, or used on patients.

The content of ASN meetings is determined by a program committee independent of funding. ASN may seek commercial support for its educational activities in the form of educational grants and other resources or services, as appropriate. ASN will disclose program funding to program participants/learners.

Any individual with control over CME content (e.g., faculty, authors, planning groups) must disclose to ASN and subsequently to learners any current, relevant financial relationship(s). Disclosures should be made on current relationships as well as any amount occurring within the past 12 months, and the disclosure shall include the following information:

- The name of the individual
- The name of the commercial interest(s), and
- The nature of the relationship the person has with each commercial interest.

Any individual with control over CME content but with no relevant financial relationship(s) must inform the learners that no relevant financial relationship(s) exist. "Disclosure" should not include the use of a trade name or a product-group message. Disclosure information will be communicated to learners prior to the beginning of the educational activity.

### **Sponsored Satellite Programs**

Sponsored Satellite Programs are programs that are planned and conducted by external groups (e.g., trade groups, corporations, and health and other organizations) in conjunction with ASN meetings. Applications for these programs are submitted by program organizers and peer-reviewed for objectivity, balance and scientific quality by ASN's Scientific Sessions Program Committee or the Advances and Controversies in Clinical Nutrition Conference Program Committee. ASN does not endorse the content presented in Sponsored Satellite Programs or their proceedings, publications, etc., and these programs are not considered part of the official ASN scientific program. All companies must comply with the PhRMA Code on interaction with healthcare professionals, as listed on [www.phrma.org](http://www.phrma.org). ASN reserves the right to accept, reject or condition acceptance, based on ASN's sole discretion, for any reason, which need not be disclosed to the applicant. Sponsored Satellite Programs are not part of ASN's official scientific program, and this will be indicated in all associated meeting materials.

### **Reviews, Statements and Guidelines**

ASN develops nutrition-related systematic reviews, scientific statements, consensus documents and practice guidelines to assist researchers, regulatory agencies, public/private funding agencies, health professionals and consumers. ASN's Reviews, Papers and Guidelines Committee (RPG) oversees ASN's statement development process. Multiple sources (e.g., ASN Councils, Research Interest Sections, standing committees, individual members, external organizations) can identify and propose topics for consideration by the RPG Committee. This committee evaluates suggested topics and determines the type and overall scope of the activity. Statement topics and writing groups/expert panels are approved by ASN's Board of Directors prior to initiation of work. ASN is currently reviewing and updating its procedures for development of statements (as April 15, 2014).

ASN's Foundation offers the opportunity for individuals, industry, government and other non-profit groups to support ASN's statement development process by accepting unrestricted contributions. These grants are allocated to one fund and dispersed to support the development of statements initiated by the RPG Committee.

The Society always has complete control of the statement development process, including the selection of a writing committee and peer reviewers, and exercises independent judgment in all decision making related to the project.

## **Advertising**

ASN and its journals offer a variety of print and digital advertising opportunities. All advertisements are subject to review, and any health claims included in advertisements must be supported by the best available scientific evidence. ASN reserves the right to decline any advertisement and to discontinue any advertising whenever the need arises. Advertisements will be clearly demarcated. ASN does not endorse any products and/or services in ads, the services of a vendor, or the character of advertisers.

## **Awards**

Awards are governed by endowment agreements or annual funding agreements which specify the award's scope and intent. ASN retains sole responsibility for, and independence in, selecting the recipients of awards through procedures and by criteria established by the Society. Awards are international, and open to all suitable candidates. The Society manages all communications with award recipients, stating among other items that the award is intended solely to recognize outstanding research and significant achievements by recipients. It is not intended to influence the professional judgment of the recipient and is not conditioned on the recipient's prescription or recommendation of products produced or marketed by sponsor(s) or affiliate(s).

## **ASN Advocacy Activities**

External funds are not used for ASN's public policy initiatives, including advocacy for nutrition research funding. ASN's public policy and advocacy activities are in no way influenced by ASN partnerships. ASN comments or testimony related to scientific and regulatory policy are prepared using a balance of member perspectives to inform ASN decision-making, as well as objective interpretation of available science.

## **Objectivity, Editorial Control, and Quality**

External support of ASN programs does not permit influence over content, nor does it imply ASN approval or endorsement of an organization's policies, claims or products, whether a program is funded by a single source or multiple sources. For programs developed by an external organization for which ASN collaboration is sought, ASN will require review of all program-related materials to ensure that quality and accuracy are in accordance with ASN standards. Distribution plans must also be reviewed by ASN. In some cases, ASN will allow the use of its name and logo to signify its participation in these worthwhile collaborations, subject to appropriate limitations to protect the integrity of the ASN brand.

## **Relationship Review/Approval Process**

The Board of Directors and Executive Officer have overall responsibility for ASN's relationships with external organizations and for identifying and resolving matters where potential conflicts of interest may be present.

## **Partnership Implementation & Execution**

ASN will steward funder relationships with transparency, promptness, honesty and integrity. Standard agreements for program sponsorships, educational grants and unrestricted grants are drafted, executed and maintained on file. Periodic activity/program reports will be shared with partners, as appropriate.

## **References**

1. Rowe S, Alexander N, Clydesdale FM, et al. Funding food science and nutrition research: financial conflicts and scientific integrity. *AJCN* 2009. 89:s1285-1291