

## AKU Society Funding Conflict of Interest Policy

By following this conflict of interest policy, the AKU Society can ensure that its funding decisions for research into AKU are made fairly, transparently, and without any undue influence. This policy relates to all committees and other funding panels of the AKU Society, their chairs and other members, including trustees. The purpose of this policy is to minimise the potential for conflicts of interest arising and to protect the AKU Society and those who work for it from any perception, real or otherwise, that the external interests and affiliations of its committee members might interfere with their ability to work towards the aims of the AKU Society.

**Definition of Conflict of Interest:** A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal or financial interests interfere with their ability to make impartial decisions in the best interest of the AKU Society. Conflicts of interest can occur in situations where an individual trustee, employee or volunteer stands to gain directly or indirectly through engagement in activities which may potentially affect the AKU Society adversely. It will also occur if that individual is engaged with an organisation which has aims incompatible to those of the AKU Society.

The AKU Society will follow the following steps to avoid conflicts of interest during our funding of scientific research:

### 1. Disclosure

All individuals involved in the funding decision-making process, including trustees, staff members, and volunteers, must disclose any potential conflicts of interest before the funding decision is made. This includes any financial, personal, or professional relationships that may influence their decision-making.

### 2. Discussion of proposals

Details of applications, meeting papers and related correspondence and the names of external referees are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside the review process.

Discussions of a proposal between members of a funding committee which occur outside a committee meeting should be declared to the chair of the committee.

If a committee member (including serving trustees) is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application, he or she may provide advice, but must report this to the committee chair and secretariat. They may subsequently be asked by the chair to absent themselves from a discussion of the application concerned.

### 3. Review

The AKU Society will review all potential conflicts of interest to determine their impact on the funding decision. The review will be conducted by an impartial party or committee.

### 4. Managing conflicts of interests

Where a panel member is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, they must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member will not receive documents pertaining to the application, learn the identity of its referees or receive its referees' reports. They must retire from the meeting when the application is assessed. Details of discussion of that application will be deleted from any papers the member receives. This should also apply to trustees who serve as panel members and are applicants in the grant round.

Where the chair of the panel is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, they declare an interest and should not be involved in that round of meetings. A vice chair will chair the meeting to prevent any undue influence.

Panel members who could be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant (e.g. they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the proposal under discussion) or have collaborated or published with the proposal applicant within the past three years, or work in the same institution, should declare an interest and may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for that application, or may be allowed to stay, but not vote on the application.

### 5. Resolution of conflicts of interest

The AKU Society recognises that the majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for the AKU Society or to sit on its committees. In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within the AKU Society. Where such a situation relates to a member of a funding committee/panel, the matter will be discussed by the chair of the committee together with a committee staff member or secretary. In cases where agreement cannot be reached through this means, the case will be referred to the committee as a whole, whose decision should be taken as final.

Members of funding committees are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest relating to individual funding decisions to the committee secretariat before the meeting wherein they will be discussed, or during the meeting as soon as the existence of a conflict becomes apparent.

In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to the committee secretariat. The secretariat shall discuss the matter with the individual as necessary and report to the Chair, who will decide on a course of action.

If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of a funding panel, then he or she should raise the matter with the chair of the panel.

6. Documentation

The AKU Society will maintain documentation of all potential conflicts of interest, including disclosures, reviews, and any mitigation measures taken.

7. Transparency

The AKU Society will be transparent about the conflict of interest policy and the steps taken to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest. This includes communicating the policy to all stakeholders, making disclosure forms available, and providing information on how potential conflicts of interest are managed.

8. Training

The AKU Society will provide training to all individuals involved in the funding decision-making process on the conflict of interest policy and the importance of impartial decision-making.

9. Updating the policy

The AKU Society will endeavour to review this policy, if necessary, every two years, in consultation with the board of trustees.