

Regulation on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Evaluation Procedure

In the present document, the Board of the Croatian Science Foundation (hereinafter: the Foundation) establishes the fundamental principles for recognising, defining and regulating conflict of interest throughout the evaluation procedure. The text below prescribes steps to be taken for the purpose of preventing the participation of persons who might be in a conflict of interest during the evaluation procedure. Conflict of interest for the Foundation's bodies (Board members and Executive Director) is defined in the Act on the Croatian Science Foundation (Official Gazette 117/01, 45/09, 92/10 and 78/12).

In the present Regulation, the following terms will be used:

Applicant - person submitting a project proposal to an open call

Project proposal - application to the call that is referred to evaluation

Principal Investigator - leader of project accepted for financing

Project - project proposal accepted for financing

Prevention of conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure lies at the basis of independent assessment and equality of treatment for all project proposals, i.e. projects. Personal interest or prejudice may not in any case affect the evaluation results or the decision on financing.

Before the start of the evaluation, the Coordinator of scientific projects and programmes informs the persons participating in the evaluation procedure about the Foundation's rules regarding the prevention of conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure, highlighting that the Office of the Foundation should be notified of cases of declared conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest may be established at various stages of the evaluation procedure. All persons involved in the evaluation of project proposals and funded projects are obliged to notify the Foundation about their conflict of interest at any stage in the process. In case of doubt, they should discuss their case with the Foundation in order to establish whether they would be able to conduct the evaluation in an objective manner. Conflict of interest will be registered and competent bodies shall decide on subsequent participation in the evaluation process.

Categories of conflict of interest

For defining conflict of interest, the Foundation, in accordance with the recommendations defined in the *Peer Review Guide* published by the European Science Foundation, distinguishes between two basic categories of relationship between experts taking part in the evaluation procedure and applicants/principal investigators:

1. **declared conflict of interest** - person invited to take part in any stage of the evaluation shall not participate in the evaluation or shall be excluded immediately after conflict of interest has been declared;
2. **potential conflict of interest** - if a potential conflict of interest pursuant to points 8-13 below has been established, the decision whether the evaluator will remain in the evaluation process shall be adopted on a case-by-case basis, depending on whether the evaluator considers that they can perform the evaluation in an objective manner.

Establishing conflict of interest

Impartiality is one of the key values in the evaluation procedure. The Foundation relies on the integrity, honesty and objectivity of all persons taking part in any stage of evaluation, hence all persons included in the evaluation procedure must declare the (non-)existence of conflict of interest.

If conflict of interest is declared prior to evaluation, this conflict will be registered and appropriate steps will be taken to prevent partiality during evaluation. If conflict of interest is declared during evaluation, further evaluation should be terminated, the conflict of interest registered and solution to the situation proposed.

Conflict of interest shall be established based on the Declaration on the Safeguarding of Confidentiality and Avoidance of Conflict of Interest.

Procedure for declared conflict of interest

A person shall be immediately excluded from the process of evaluating project proposals or funded projects in the following cases:

1. s/he applied to the same Call as the Principal Investigator and research team members whose project s/he is evaluating¹ or is in direct competition with the Principal Investigator in terms of their projects dealing with a similar or related topic;
2. s/he has joint publications or national/international projects with the Principal Investigator in the past three years, or collaboration plans or common interests, e.g. joint entrepreneurial activity;
3. s/he is a direct relative, spouse or civil partner of the Principal Investigator or any research team member;
4. s/he has been in a relation of interdependence with the Principal Investigator in the previous two years (e.g. supervisor - student or similar relations);
5. s/he is a member of the management bodies (Chancellor, Dean, Head etc.) of the institution in which the Principal Investigator is employed and in which the Project is being implemented;

¹ Only in case of evaluation of project proposals.

6. s/he has personal economic interests in the Project's field of research;
7. s/he estimates that they would not be able to remain unbiased during the evaluation process for any other reason.

All persons taking part in the evaluation process who declare a conflict of interest in any of the cases 1-7 above shall notify the Office of the Foundation immediately. If direct conflict of interest has been established for a member of the Evaluation Panel, s/he shall be excluded from evaluating the specific project proposal and shall be asked to leave the room during the discussion on the project proposal concerned.

In case a Panel member plans to submit a project proposal to the Foundation's call in the capacity of Principal Investigator or team member or mentor candidate at the Call "Young Researchers' Career Development Project – Training New Doctoral Students", they shall be excluded from evaluation at the call concerned.

Procedure for potential conflict of interest

All persons taking part in the evaluation shall be obliged to report to the Foundation any circumstances that may affect their objectivity during evaluation. The decision on participation or of that person in the evaluation procedure shall be made by the Office of the Foundation in collaboration with competent bodies.

Potential conflict of interest shall be deemed to take place in the following situations:

8. the person taking part in the evaluation process is employed at the same organizational unit (Department, School, Centre, Clinic, Institute) as the Principal Investigator;
9. the person taking part in the evaluation process has personal connections or financial interests with the Principal Investigator and/or research team member not described in point 3 above;
10. the person is looking for future employment in the Host Organization of the Principal Investigator, except in cases described in point 5 above;
11. the person has joint publications or national/international projects with the Principal Investigator in the past three years, or collaboration plans or common interests, e.g. joint entrepreneurial activity;
12. the person is a member of another national or international body which decided or would decide, in the next 12 months, on the advancement of the Principal Investigator's career or is evaluating another project by the Principal Investigator;
13. there is another circumstance which might put doubt on the person's impartiality during the evaluation process.

If a potential conflict of interest has been established according to points 8 to 13, the Office of the Foundation and the competent Evaluation Panel or monitoring expert (in case of funded projects) shall decide whether the expert will be allowed to take part in the evaluation process. In case of

conflict of interest of the Panel coordinator, the Office of the Foundation shall assess whether a different Evaluation Panel member may be included in the evaluation procedure.

Conflict of interest in adopting decisions on financing

When adopting decisions on accepting projects for funding and/or project report evaluation results, a Board member who is in a conflict of interest shall not take part in the discussion on the project proposal/project with which they declared conflict of interest, while the Board President may ask them to leave the room during the discussion about the proposal/project in question. The Executive Director of the Foundation, even though they hold no voting rights, should express their potential conflict of interest.

Preventing conflict of interest of Board members shall be the responsibility of the Board President or their Deputy, while conflict of interest shall be registered in the minutes from the Board session.

Professor Dario Vretenar, PhD, F.C.A.

Board President

The Board of the Croatian Science Foundation adopted the text of the Regulation on the Prevention of Conflict of Interest at its 86th session, held on 24 February 2017 (Decision No.: O-739-2017).

Declaration on the Safeguarding of Confidentiality and Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

1. Safeguarding of Confidentiality

All participants in the evaluation process implemented by the Croatian Science Foundation shall be obliged to respect the confidentiality of all information that will be presented to them during the evaluation process and upon its conclusion.

The evaluators shall not be allowed to discuss the projects with persons who are not taking part in the evaluation process. No exchange of information with Principal Investigators about the projects is allowed. Every participant in the evaluation process is personally responsible for the confidentiality of information they were granted access to regarding the projects under evaluation as well as all documents related to the subject matter of the project and shall not reveal any information about the projects.

By signing this Declaration, I verify that I shall safeguard the confidentiality of all materials and information that will be presented to me for the purpose of evaluation and shall not copy, cite or use the materials for any other purpose nor shall discuss this material with persons not involved in the evaluation process.

I accept the terms and conditions of safeguarding confidentiality: YES NO

2. Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

Declared conflict of interest implies the exclusion of an expert from any stage of the evaluation process. A person shall be immediately excluded from the evaluation process in the following cases:

1. s/he applied to the same Call as the Principal Investigator and the research team members whose project s/he is evaluating or is in direct competition with the Principal Investigator in terms of their projects dealing with a similar or related topic;
2. s/he has joint publications or national/international projects with the Principal Investigator in the past three years, or collaboration plans or common interests, e.g. joint entrepreneurial activity;
3. s/he is a direct relative, spouse or civil partner of the Principal Investigator or any research team member;
4. s/he has been in a relation of interdependence with the Principal Investigator in the previous two years (e.g. supervisor - student or other relations);

5. s/he is a member of the management bodies (Chancellor, Dean, Head etc.) of the institution in which the Principal Investigator is employed and in which the Project is being implemented;
6. s/he has personal economic interests in the Project's field of research;
7. s/he estimates that they would not be able to remain unbiased during the evaluation process for any other reason.

All persons taking part in the evaluation process who declare a conflict of interest in any of the cases 1-7 above shall notify the Office of the Foundation immediately.

Potential conflict of interest of the persons taking part in the evaluation process shall be assessed by the Foundation, but all persons taking part in the evaluation shall be obliged to report to the Foundation any circumstances that may affect their objectivity during evaluation.

Potential conflict of interest shall be deemed to take place in the following situations:

8. the person taking part in the evaluation process is employed at the same organizational unit (Department, School, Centre, Clinic, Institute) as the Principal Investigator;
9. the person taking part in the evaluation process has personal connections or financial interests with the Principal Investigator and/or research team member not described in point 3 above;
10. the person is looking for future employment in the Host Organization of the Principal Investigator, except in cases described in point 5 above;
11. the person has joint publications or national/international projects with the Principal Investigator in the past three years, or collaboration plans or common interests, e.g. joint entrepreneurial activity;
12. the person is a member of another national or international body which decided or would decide, in the next 12 months, on the advancement of the Principal Investigator's career or is evaluating another project by the Principal Investigator;
13. there is another circumstance which might put doubt on the person's impartiality during the evaluation process.

If a potential conflict of interest has been established according to points 8 to 13, the Office of the Foundation and the competent monitoring expert shall decide whether the expert will be allowed to take part in the evaluation process.

I hereby declare that my participation in the evaluation process for the projects below represents a real conflict of interest:

Project title or code	Please indicate the type of declared conflict of interest (points 1-7)

I hereby declare that my participation in the evaluation process for the projects below represents a potential conflict of interest:

Project title	Please indicate the type of potential conflict of interest (points 8-13)

By signing this Declaration, I verify that I have read and understood the rules defining declared and potential conflict of interest in the evaluation process, which are in line with the Regulation on the Avoidance of Conflict of Interest in the Evaluation Process. If I become aware of a conflict of interest during my participation in the evaluation process, I shall immediately notify the Foundation thereof.

Date:
Full name:
Signature: