

Ataxia UK's conflicts of interest policy in research

Scientific Advisory Committee

Ataxia UK believes that its Scientific Advisory Committee should have a significant number of non-beneficiaries in order to avoid potential bias (i.e. researchers who are not in receipt of a grant from Ataxia UK). To achieve this, Ataxia UK actively recruits members of its Committee from areas of research that are relevant but are not generally directly related to the ataxias.

Members of Ataxia UK's Scientific Advisory Committee have agreed to follow these Guidelines to manage potential conflicts of interest:

1. The Chairman of the Committee cannot apply for funds for research grants during his/her tenure.
2. Members of the Committee, other than the Chairman, are eligible for funding from Ataxia UK. However, when an application from a Committee member is received, either as an applicant, co-applicant or collaborator he/she would need to be absent from the meeting room while his/her application is being discussed. He/she would also not be shown the reviewers' reports on his/her application in advance of a decision for funding. In cases where the decision regarding funding is not clear-cut the individual must not be in a position to influence the decision on competing applications and will therefore take no part in the discussion about prioritizing applications for funding.
3. Committee members are required to declare at the beginning of a meeting if they have a conflict of interest with any agenda item. If there is a conflict of interest the same criteria as described in point 2 would apply.

Examples of conflicts of interest to declare:

- If there is an application for discussion that is similar to one prepared or in preparation by a Committee member
- If the Committee member is closely related to the applicants (eg spouse, sibling, parent, etc.).
- If the Committee member is a member of the same department/research group as one of the applicants
- If the Committee member has a potential commercial interest

Procedure when a conflict of interest is declared:

- Strong conflict of interest (Committee member is the applicant or co-applicant, close relationship to an applicant): the person should leave the room and not assist in the discussion of this project or ranking of projects

- Less strong conflict of interest (e.g: committee member is in the same department as applicant): not taking part of the discussion and ranking but can stay in the room

External referees

When selecting external referees Ataxia UK will make all attempts to avoid asking someone who may have a conflict of interest to review a grant. Two or three referees are selected for each grant. Thus referees will not be:

- From the same department/research group as the applicants
- From the same Institution unless it is a very large one
- A close relative of any of the applicants
- Have published and/or collaborated extensively with the applicants in the last three years
- Have a potential commercial interest

It is preferable if they do not have a grant being reviewed at the same meeting, but in the event that they do, a minimum of two other referees will be sought.

In addition, all referees are asked whether they have a conflict of interest in reviewing the grant. If they do and it is considered still useful to consider their views, the reason for conflict of interest is made known to the Scientific Advisory Committee when discussing the application.

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