



POSITION STATEMENT*

*Statements created after 2011 are dubbed Issue Statements.

Appointment and Participation of Scientists on Peer Review Panels and Scientific Advisory Boards

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Toxicologists and other scientists provide a critical role in the implementation of science in regulatory and public policy decision-making. Scientists not only create new ideas and test hypotheses that address the health and well-being of humans and the environment through research, but also play critical roles as advisors/reviewers for scientific journals, federal and state regulatory agencies and other governmental agencies, non-profit foundations, non-governmental organizations (e.g., the National Academy of Sciences), and industry. Key in the review process is the inclusion of input from scientists with divergent backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Of paramount importance in any of these scientific review activities, which are designed to ensure fair representation of different scientific perspectives, is the objectivity and lack of significant bias of the individual reviewers. Policies and procedures for full disclosure of potential bias and/or conflict of interestⁱ, as described in the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)ⁱⁱ, should be clearly defined and implemented by the appointing body. However, equally important to the full disclosure of potential biases or conflicts of interest of the appointees is the assurance, through policies and actions, that the selection of the appointees is free from political influence or other forms of discrimination.

The Society of Toxicology (SOT) holds to the following principles regarding the selection and appointment of scientists to peer review panels and scientific advisory boards, which are in accord with FACA:

1. **Criteria for Appointments:** Appointments to scientific advisory bodies should be based principally on the scientific credentials, demonstrated accomplishments, and professional credibility of the nominee. His/her sector of employment and funding (past or present), religious beliefs, political persuasion, sexual orientation, gender, or race/ethnicity should not be used as (a) determinant(s) of exclusion to such a scientific advisory body. We also recognize that membership diversity is an important consideration to ensure balance of

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scientific perspectives, as long as scientific credentials and professional credibility are considered as the primary criteria for inclusion or exclusion of an individual member.

2. **Responsibilities of the Appointees:** Scientists appointed to peer review panels or advisory boards/committees must openly and honestly divulge any real or perceived conflicts of interest or potential biases that might be construed by others to interfere with the scientific credibility of the report, panel recommendations, or other product of the advisory group. If a significant conflict of interest, perceived or real, that was not identified prior to appointment arises during the course of review activities, the individual should notify the chair and recuse him/herself from further discussion. Procedures should be established to permit the formal disclosure of such conflicts at the outset, along with an affirmative statement from each panel member that there are no conflicts if that is the case.
3. **Responsibilities of the Appointers:** Leaders/organizers of peer review panels or advisory boards and editors and/or editorial boards of journals should ensure that their appointment procedures are free from political bias and other forms of discrimination. They should strive for a balance of scientific perspectives and interests as well as scientific credibility and should clearly establish the expectation for full disclosure of conflict of interest or bias among the panel members prior to the convening of any activities.

The Society of Toxicology endorses the policies and procedures that address bias and conflict of interest for committee service, as required by law under FACA and as outlined by The National Academies (National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council)ⁱⁱⁱ.

ⁱ The Society of Toxicology (SOT) has adopted a Conflict of Interest policy for our publications and meeting presentations that provides specific examples of what may constitute a conflict of interest. This policy is posted on the SOT website: <http://www.toxicology.org/about/vp/coi.asp>.

ⁱⁱ The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) pertains to federal advisory committees established by US House and/or Senate legislative action. (See <http://www.gsa.gov/faca> for a complete description.)

ⁱⁱⁱ “The National Academies Policy on Committee Composition and Balance and Conflicts of Interest for Committees Used in the Development of Reports,” May 12, 2003. (http://www.nationalacademies.org/coi/bi-coi_form-0.pdf)