nature portfolio

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Competing interests

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In the interests of transparency and to help readers form their own judgements of potential bias, Nature Portfolio journals' require authors to declare any competing financial and/or non-financial interests in relation to the work described. The corresponding author is responsible for submitting a competing interests' statement on behalf of all authors of the paper.

Definition

For the purposes of this policy, competing interests are defined as financial and non-financial interests that could directly undermine, or be perceived to undermine the objectivity, integrity and value of a publication, through a potential influence on the judgements and actions of authors with regard to objective data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

Financial competing interests include any of the following:

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Personal financial interests: Stocks or shares in companies that may gain or lose financially through publication; consultation fees or other forms of remuneration (including reimbursements for attending symposia) from organizations that may gain or lose financially; patents or patent applications (awarded or pending) filed by the authors or their institutions whose value may be affected by publication. For patents and patent applications, disclosure of the following information is requested: patent applicant (whether author or institution), name of inventor(s), application number, status of application, specific aspect of manuscript covered in patent application.

It is difficult to specify a threshold at which a financial interest become significant, but note that many US universities require faculty members to disclose interests exceeding $10,000 or 5% equity in a company (see, for example, B. Lo *et al. New Engl*. J. *Med*. 343, 1616-1620; 2000). Any such figure is necessarily arbitrary, so we offer as one possible practical alternative guideline: "Any undeclared competing financial interests that could embarrass you were they to become publicly known after your work was published."

We do not consider diversified mutual funds or investment trusts to constitute a competing financial interest.

Non-financial competing interests:
Non-financial competing interests can take different forms, including personal or professional relations with organizations and individuals. We would encourage authors and referees to declare any unpaid roles or relationships that might have a bearing on the publication process. Examples of non-financial competing interests include (but are not limited to):

- Unpaid membership in a government or non-governmental organization
- Unpaid membership in an advocacy or lobbying organization
- Unpaid advisory position in a commercial organization
- Writing or consulting for an educational company
- Acting as an expert witness

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Application to authors

Authors must disclose and specify any competing interest during the submission process, via declarations in the manuscript submission system. For certain types of content, declarations may be collected via the Nature Portfolio disclosure form. The corresponding author is responsible for providing a declaration on behalf of all authors.

For peer reviewed contributions, authors' declarations are disclosed to peer reviewers in full. However, if authors have opted for double-anonymized peer review, during the peer review process reviewers will be provided with a minimal statement disclosing the existence of any financial or non-financial interest, to prevent the disclosure of authors' identities. Reviewers will be

provided the full competing interests declarations at the time of acceptance. Authors opting for double-anonymized peer review should provide their minimal statement (either "The authors declare the existence of a financial/non-financial competing interest" OR "The authors declare no competing interests") in the submission system and a complete statement of disclosure in their cover letter.

In addition to any declarations in submission systems or forms, all authors regardless of peer review model are required to include a statement at the end of their published article to declare whether or not they have any competing interests. The published article indicates the authors' response using one of the following standard sentences:

- The authors declare the following competing interests:
- The authors declare no competing interests.

We recognize that some authors may be bound by confidentiality agreements. In such cases, in place of itemized disclosures, we require authors to state: "The authors declare that they are bound by confidentiality agreements that prevent them from disclosing their competing interests in this work."

We do not require authors to state the monetary value of their financial interests.

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Application to referees

The Nature Portfolio journals invite peer-reviewers to exclude themselves in cases where there is a significant conflict of interest, financial or otherwise. However, just as financial interests need not

invalidate the conclusions of an article, nor do they automatically disqualify an individual from evaluating it. We ask peer-reviewers to inform the editors of any related interests, including financial interests as defined above, that might be perceived as relevant. Editors will consider these statements when weighing reviewers' recommendations.

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Application to editors

All Nature Portfolio journal editorial staff are required to declare to their employer any interests — financial or otherwise — that might influence, or be perceived to influence, their editorial practices. Failure to do so is a disciplinary offence.

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Application to external editors, guest editors and editorial board members

The following Nature Portfolio journals make editorial decisions in collaboration with external editors and editorial board members from within the scientific community: The Communications journals, npj journals, *Scientific Reports*, *Scientific Data*.

Editorial Board Members, Guest Editors and Editors are required to declare any competing interests and may be excluded from the peer review process if a competing interest exists.

In addition, they should exclude themselves from handling manuscripts in cases where there is a competing interest. This may include – but is not limited to – having previously published with one or more of the authors, and sharing the same institution as one or more of the authors.

Where an Editor, Guest Editor or Editorial Board Member is on the author list we recommend they declare this in the competing interests section on the submitted manuscript. If they are an author or have any other competing interest regarding a specific manuscript, another Editor, Guest Editor or member of the Editorial Board will be assigned to assume responsibility for overseeing peer review. These submissions are subject to the exact same review process as any other manuscript.

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Nature Portfolio journals' editorials

- Authors will now be asked to declare any interests that might cloud objectivity. *Nature*, Nature journals tighten rules on non-financial conflicts, January 2018.
- To promote transparency and honesty, it is important for corresponding authors to divulge any financial interests that may affect how their articles are perceived. *Nature Photonics*, Truth and transparency, *June 2013*.
- The US government has changed how biomedical scientists disclose their financial interests. The revised rules are welcome, but internet access to the identified conflicts should be a requirement, *Nature,* Accountable and transparent, 6 September 2012.
- Claims of conflicts of interest highlight the difficulties facing regulators participating in collaborations with industry. *Nature Biotechnology*. Conflicts and collaborations, November 2010.
- A one-size-fits-all policy on disclosure of competing interests may not be the way forward. *Nature Reviews Clinical Oncology*. Conflict of interest disclosures, January 2010.
- Not all financial interests in drug discovery are detrimental, and many are essential for its success. But focusing on perceived conflicts of interest may cause true scientific

corruption to go unnoticed. *Nature Medicine*. A really serious conflict, May 2009.

- The distinction between actual and perceived competing interests. *Nature Medicine*. The doors of perception, February 2008.
- Scientific endeavours benefit from transparency and open declarations of real or perceived conflicts of interest. *Nature Chemical Biology*. Keeping it real, April 2007.
- Declaring competing financial interests when publishing a methods paper is essential to maintaining credibility and transparency. *Nature Methods*. Nothing to declare? November 2006.
- Researchers's disclosures of competing financial interests are undergoing a dangerous transformation from instruments of transparency to evidence of wrongdoing. *Nature Medicine*. Dealing with disclosure, September 2006.
- A competing financial interests policy adds transparency to the increasingly elaborate net of financial interests in research. *Nature Cell Biology*. Nothing to declare? June 2004.
- The journal extends its conflicting financial interests policy to include review articles. *Nature Neuroscience*. Financial disclosure for review authors, October 2003.

Introducing a competing financial interests policy for authors, 2001:

- *Nature Neuroscience*. A new policy on financial disclosure
- *Nature Immunology*. Competing financial interests
- *Nature*. Declaration of financial interests

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Application to publishing policy

The Nature Portfolio journals thrive on their independence. Their strict policy is that editorial independence, decisions and content

should not be compromised by commercial or financial interests, or by any specific arrangements with advertising clients or sponsors. Our policy is to disclose such arrangements where there is any risk of a perception of compromise.

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