

International Mathematical Union (IMU) Guidelines for handling conflicts of interest in prize selection committees¹

Preamble

Because the activities of the IMU are many and complex, involving large numbers of individuals, potential conflicts of interest inevitably arise in innocent and unexpected ways. The IMU must be vigilant, and be seen to be vigilant, by having in place effective and transparent measures to minimize the risk of damage to its reputation through misunderstanding. This is especially important in the context of its prize selection committees, the activities of which must always be beyond reproach.

At its 78th meeting in April 2009, the IMU Executive Committee (EC) issued guidelines on the management of conflicts of interest in its prize selection committees. Revised by the EC in 2014, the guidelines below were endorsed by the IMU General Assembly on August 11, 2014.

To ensure that IMU prize selection committees, both individually and collectively, know about and abide by the spirit of these guidelines it is requested that:

- committee members declare that they have read and accept the conflict of interest guidelines below before agreeing to serve
- committee chairs contact the IMU President for advice when there is concern or doubt about how to deal with a particular set of circumstances. If the President is conflicted, then the Secretary or one of the Vice-Presidents should be consulted.

The Guidelines

Because the IMU EC understands that there is no precise and exhaustive definition of conflict of interest it has not attempted to draft strict rules and is counting instead on the common sense and integrity of individuals. It therefore asks all those invited to join prize committees to review their circumstances and report if necessary any relationships, whether scientific or personal, with prize nominees that could reasonably be viewed with suspicion. When there is doubt the default position should be to disclose.

Since prize committees are active for several years, conflicts of interest may arise after a period of time. The EC therefore recommends that committee chairs periodically invite, at the start of all formal discussions, everyone involved to review conflicts of interest and declare changes that may have occurred.

When committee members disagree on the importance of a potential conflict of interest, the committee chair should ask the IMU President to resolve the problem. The IMU EC has given the President authority to make final decisions, for instance, to remove a person from a committee or to replace a committee member by someone else.

¹ IMU documents sometimes refer to these committees as *prize committees* or *juries*.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of major conflicts of interest:

- A committee member is nominated for an IMU prize.
- There is a close personal relation with a nominee, for example, close relative, spouse, ex-spouse, partner, etc. (A more distant relationship should be disclosed to the committee chair and if necessary discussed with the committee.)
- A committee member is a major co-author of a nominee.
- A committee member is a recent (within five years), current, or future departmental colleague of a candidate.

No individuals in similar circumstances should be asked to write evaluation letters for nominees.

When there is a perceived conflict of interest the committee member involved should, after reporting the circumstances, take no further part in discussions, leaving the room if necessary until the matter is resolved by the rest of the committee.

For prizes such as Fields Medals and Nevalinna Prizes where eligibility is limited by age, individuals who are invited to join prize committees normally should not be eligible for the prizes. The current rules state that a Fields or Nevanlinna committee member shall withdraw from the committee if a former PhD student is shortlisted, see <http://www.mathunion.org/general/prizes/fields/details/>. A committee member who has a former or current PhD student on the candidates list may remain on the committee during initial stages of the selection process leading to the shortlist. However at the discretion of the chair, he or she may be asked to leave the room during consideration of the candidate and in any case should not take any part whatsoever in discussions of, or vote on, the nominee concerned.

When the IMU president is conflicted the EC shall designate a conflict moderator with extensive IMU experience.

Martin Grötschel
IMU Secretary