



International
Mathematical
Union

Guidelines for Handling Conflicts of Interest

*Endorsed by the 17th IMU General Assembly in 2014
with subsequent changes made by the IMU EC in April 2017*

Preamble

Because the activities of the International Mathematical Union (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 harm to its reputation. In particular, this applies to prize selection committees, the activities of which must always be beyond reproach. The IMU is aware that conflicts of interest may result from one's life's path, and they may or may not influence one's ability to make impartial assessment. However, it is essential that the IMU processes would be deemed fair by any reasonable third person who is aware of the circumstances.

At its 78th meeting in 2009, the IMU Executive Committee (EC) issued guidelines on the handling of conflicts of interest in its prize selection committees. Revised by the EC in 2014, the Guidelines below were endorsed by the 17th IMU General Assembly in 2014. The EC has decided that these Guidelines apply to all IMU activities, including those of the IMU committees and commissions, as well as all committees formed by the IMU, e.g., prize committees and program committees.

To ensure that the IMU committees and commissions, both individually and collectively, know about and abide by the spirit of these Guidelines, it is requested that committee and commission members confirm in writing that they have read, understood, and accept the Conflict of Interest Guidelines before agreeing to serve.

The Guidelines

Because the IMU 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 committees or commissions, as well as all committees formed by the IMU, e.g., prize committees and program committees, to review their circumstances and report, if necessary, any relationships, whether scientific or personal, with nominees that could reasonably be viewed with suspicion. When in doubt, the default position is to disclose the circumstances without delay in order to find a reasonable solution before the deliberations continue. In the following we use the word «committees» to simplify the presentation.

Since some committees are active for several years, conflicts of interest may arise during its term. The IMU therefore recommends that the chairs periodically invite, at the start of all formal discussions, everyone involved to review possible 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 issue. 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. When the IMU President has a conflict of interest,

the EC shall designate a conflict moderator with extensive IMU experience, e.g., the IMU Secretary or one of the IMU Vice-Presidents.

To be considered as a conflict of interest (non-exhaustive list):

- A committee member is a nominee.
- There is a close personal relation with a nominee, for example, close relative, spouse, ex-spouse, partner, friend, 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 the former advisor of the nominee or a former student of the nominee.
- A committee member is a recent (within approximately five years), current, or the known 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 the discussions, leaving the room, if necessary, until the matter is resolved by the rest of the committee.

Regarding IMU awards, such as the Fields Medal and the Nevanlinna Prize, where eligibility is ruled by age requirements, the individuals invited to serve on these prize selection committees should not be eligible in terms of age. A committee member who has a former or current PhD student on the list of candidates may remain on the committee during initial stages of the selection process leading to the shortlist. However, he or she will 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.