**Framework for Sanctions and Corrective Actions in Cases of Conflict of Interest**

**Purpose**

This Framework outlines the range and severity of sanctions and corrective actions that may be imposed in response to actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including inappropriate interactions with the tobacco industry. It is designed to guide decision-makers in responding to violations consistently and proportionately, in alignment with broader conflict of interest policies, as defined in Conflict of Interest Policy: Tobacco Industry Non-Engagement Provision.

**Application**

This framework serves as a reference tool for decision-makers when determining appropriate responses to breaches of/non-compliance with Conflict-of-Interest policies or in cases of actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest including engagements with the tobacco industry.

**Levels of Severity**

Violations are categorized by severity (Levels 1–4), based on the nature of the engagement, its intent, and its impact on policy, advocacy, or institutional integrity.

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| **Level** | **Intensity** | **Example of Individual Actions** | **Sample Remedial Actions** |
| 1 | Low | Attendance at tobacco industry-sponsored events without direct influence on advocacy decisions. Receipt of nominal gifts or hospitality from tobacco industry representatives. | - Verbal warning or counseling.  - Training on conflict of interest policies.  - Public disclosure of the conflict.  **Documentation of incident in organizational records.** |
| 2 | Moderate | Acceptance of significant funding or sponsorship from the tobacco industry for unrelated activities. Participation in industry-funded research projects. [[1]](#endnote-1) | - Written warning or reprimand.  - Recusal from specific activities related to the conflict.  -Public disclosure with commitment to mitigate impact.  **Requirement to terminate funding relationship.** |
| 3 | High | Direct employment or consultancy with tobacco industry entities. Acceptance of substantial grants or donations with strings attached from the tobacco industry. Advocacy positions aligned with tobacco industry interests.[[2]](#endnote-2) | - Suspension of membership or affiliation.  - Public apology and acknowledgment of wrongdoing.  - Restitution or repayment of funds.  - Referral to regulatory authorities.  **Notification to all partner organizations of violation.** |
| 4 | Critical | Systemic infiltration[[3]](#endnote-3) or subversion of advocacy organizations by tobacco industry actors.  Sabotage or undermining of tobacco control initiatives.  **Serving as industry informant while in tobacco control role.**  **Deliberately concealing direct tobacco industry funding.** | - Expulsion from movement.  - Legal action where applicable.  - Implementation of systemic reforms.  - Other measures to counteract industry interference.  **Permanent ban from future engagement.**  **Public disclosure with comprehensive details.** |

**Any engagement that leads to or is associated with public policy influence should be automatically considered of High or Critical Intensity.**

**Organizational Actions**

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| **Level** | **Intensity** | **Organizational Actions** | **Remedial Actions** |
| 1 | Low | Failure to establish adequate conflict of interest policies or disclosure mechanisms. Tolerance of minor conflicts of interest among members. | - Implementation or enhancement of conflict-of-interest policies and procedures.  - Training and education for members on identifying and disclosing conflicts of interest.  - Public commitment to transparency and accountability in managing conflicts of interest.  **Requirement to adopt model COI policy within specified timeframe.** |
| 2 | Moderate | Acceptance of funding or support from the tobacco industry for certain activities. Lack of oversight or enforcement of conflict of interest policies. | - Review and revision of funding and partnership criteria to exclude tobacco industry involvement.  - Establishment of an independent ethics committee or oversight body to monitor and address conflicts of interest.  - Public disclosure of past and present relationships with the tobacco industry, along with corrective measures to mitigate their impact.  **External verification of all funding sources.** |
| 3 | High | Direct collaboration or alignment with tobacco industry interests in advocacy or policy positions. Failure to address or remediate conflicts of interest despite awareness. | - Suspension or termination of organizational memberships or affiliations with tobacco control coalitions or networks.  - Public apology, full disclosure of industry links and correspondences, and commitment to restructuring organizational governance and practices to prevent future conflicts of interest.  - Independent audit or review of organizational activities and relationships to identify and rectify instances of industry influence. **Notification to all funding partners and stakeholders.** |
| 4 | Critical | Systemic infiltration or manipulation by tobacco industry actors to undermine tobacco control efforts. Complicity in industry-led efforts to weaken or obstruct tobacco control policies.  **Serving as front group or conduit for industry messaging. [[4]](#endnote-4)**  **Combination of Level 3 situations with Level 1-2 situations, including failure to disclose** | - Dissolution or disbandment of the organization if irreparable harm to tobacco control objectives is determined.  - Legal action and pursuit of civil or criminal penalties against responsible individuals or entities.  - Collaboration with international bodies and other stakeholders to expose and counteract industry interference at a global level.  **Public warning to all tobacco control stakeholders.**  **Comprehensive documentation of case for educational purposes.** |

**Any engagement that leads to or is associated with public policy influence should be automatically considered of High or Critical Intensity.**

**Recidivism Framework**

**For repeat violations**:

1. First repeat violation: Automatic escalation to Critical (Level 4)
2. All repeat violations: Permanent exclusion from tobacco control coalitions

**ANNEX:**

**Definition of the Tobacco Industry[[5]](#endnote-5)**

In accordance with WHO FCTC Article 5.3 Guidelines, tobacco industry entities include, but is not limited to:

* 1. Tobacco manufacturers, wholesalers, importers, and exporters
  2. Parent, subsidiary, and affiliate companies of tobacco manufacturers
  3. Any organization or individual that represents tobacco industry interests, including but not limited to:
* Law firms representing tobacco companies
* Public relations companies working for the tobacco industry
* Consultants and lobbyists advancing industry positions

d) Organizations receiving funding from the tobacco industry, including:

* Front groups and third-party allies
* Research institutions accepting tobacco funding
* Foundations established by tobacco companies

1. Entities that work to further tobacco industry interests, including:

* Industry-established "corporate social responsibility" initiatives
* Organizations promoting "reduced-harm" products while opposing evidence-based measures aligned with the WHO FCTC
* Entities that consistently advance tobacco industry policy positions

**Disclaimer: This represents minimum standards only. Organizations should adapt and strengthen these materials to address their specific context and evolving industry tactics, provided all modifications enhance protection against tobacco industry interference.[[6]](#endnote-6)**

1. Tobacco Tactics. (2021). Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. University of Bath. <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Parties should, in addition, raise awareness about the tobacco industry’s practice of using individuals, front groups and affiliated organizations to act, openly or covertly, on their behalf or to take action to further the interests of the tobacco industry.”¹

   World Health Organization, *Guidelines for Implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*, Recommendation 1.2, page 6, 2008. Available at: <https://fctc.who.int/publications/m/item/guidelines-for-implementation-of-article-5.3> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Evidence from internal tobacco industry documents in the US shows that tobacco companies attempted to infiltrate at least two organisations. STAT (Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco) and INFACT (the Infant Formula Action Coalition) were active and effective during the 1990s and pursued agendas antithetical to industry interests. … the tobacco industry used intermediaries to access materials on their behalf and to attend conferences, planted public relations consultants as spies to attend and report on meetings, and illegally tape recorded meetings.”

   Cancer Council Victoria. “10A.4 Mechanisms of influence—undermining public health organisations.” *Tobacco in Australia: Facts and Issues*, 2018. Available at: <https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-10-tobacco-industry/indepth-10a-strategies-for-influence/10a-4-the-mechanisms-of-influence-undermining-publ>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Front groups are used to obscure tobacco industry links and oppose regulation under the guise of independence.” **— STOP, ExposeTobacco.org, 2020**[**https://exposetobacco.org/news/stop-exposes-18-more-industry-allies/**](https://exposetobacco.org/news/stop-exposes-18-more-industry-allies/) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Preventing tobacco Industry Interference. A Toolkit for Advocates and Policymakers. GGTC. 2023. Available at: <https://files.ggtc.world/uploads/2024-02-01/03-07-53-470050/GGTC%20Toolkit%20(Redesign)%20171123.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. World Health Organization. (2012). Tobacco industry interference with tobacco control. Geneva: WHO  
   <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/70894> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)