



## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATION: ETHICAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOLS/COLLEGES OF VETERINARY MEDICINE AND EXTERNAL ENTITIES**

### **Introduction:**

This document is intended to reflect the general principles and considerations that the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) considers important in the development of policies related to interactions with industry, donors, or other external entities. It is not intended to be exhaustive of all possibilities or circumstances that may confront a school or college of veterinary medicine.

The AAVMC strongly encourages individual schools and colleges of veterinary medicine to develop and implement detailed policies, tailored to the individual institution, that ensure freedom from bias or inappropriate influences that might otherwise occur as a consequence of support from external entities.

Schools and colleges of veterinary medicine hold a public trust, with the expectation that educational, clinical, research and outreach programs will be based on the best, current and unbiased scientific knowledge. That information must be free of biases or inappropriate influences that may result from interactions with external entities, especially with companies that provide goods and services of value within veterinary medicine. Educational institutions and their faculty, staff and students can benefit in many ways from different types of support that can be provided by industry. The institution and the school/college share a responsibility of managing that support in a manner that ensures the integrity and independence of all of its academic programs.

Private philanthropy has also played a significant role in enhancing the educational programs of schools and colleges of veterinary medicine, and the importance of private philanthropy has grown remarkably in recent years. The foundation at the institution of each school/college will have its own established criteria for accepting or declining a gift and for determining whether a proposed gift is truly a gift, i.e., without expectations of a deliverable product, as would be expected from a research or educational contract. In addition to foundation criteria, however, the school or college should ensure that a gift does not influence the integrity of its decisions on such academic issues as curriculum, student admissions or academic advancement decisions, among others.

### **Definitions of terms used within this document:**

- **Industry or Industry Representatives:** Manufacturers, servicers, and other vendors of pharmaceutical, medical and veterinary medical devices and supplies, commercial products, and medical and veterinary medical testing companies and their employees, representatives, agents, and vendors.
- **Consortium:** Represents a collection of companies or commercial concerns who may contribute resources to a common pool to a school/college. Such a consortium may be

formally established, or may simply represent a collection of companies whose gifts are pooled and administered by the institution.

- External entities: Include, but are not limited to, commercial companies, not-for-profit and/or charitable organizations, government (e.g., legislators), philanthropic groups, and individual donors.
- Faculty and Staff: All individuals holding appointments, whether paid, unpaid or emeritus, in a school/college.
- Institution: The university in which a school/college of veterinary medicine is administratively embedded.
- Foundation: The organization or office of the institution that is responsible for accepting gifts.
- School/college: An individual school or college of veterinary medicine.
- Student: All individuals enrolled in courses offered by the school/college or completing a course of study, e.g., as a trainee/fellow/graduate student within a school/college.

### **Background information for gifts and services:**

- Gifts and services to faculty, staff and students: Gifts and services to faculty, staff, individual students and student organizations may take many forms, such as pens, food and beverages, back-packs, items of clothing, books, and sporting/concert tickets. Such gifts have been shown to significantly influence the attitudes and preferences of the receiver, regardless of the value or nature of the gift.
- Gifts and services to the school/college/teaching hospital from industry donors: Examples of these gifts include pharmaceutical or biological products, animal food/feed, equipment or monetary donations. Such gifts may influence the attitudes and preferences of faculty, staff and students, particularly if they are aware that these products have been provided as a gift by a specific entity rather than through a purchase by the institution. That influence is increased if faculty, staff and students are not exposed to competing products.
- Gifts from individual companies versus gifts from an industry consortium: Gifts from an individual company, especially when dedicated to a specific purpose, can present a particular challenge for the institution struggling to provide appropriate recognition while seeking to avoid the creation of a preferential bias toward that company. That process may be eased, but not reduced in importance, when numerous companies provide resources toward a similar purpose through a consortium, with no single company serving as a dominant contributor. In such circumstances, it is incumbent on the school/college to maintain open access to other companies seeking to join the consortium, providing that all companies adhere to the same common consortium rules adopted by the school/college. Ultimately, the school/college must solely control the use and application of such resources.
- Gifts to the school/college/teaching hospital from private donors: Examples of gifts from private donors can include monetary donations, facilities, land, and bequests. The normal and routine recognition of a private donor, e.g., a named room, building, scholarship, etc., may pose ethical issues such as maintaining the integrity of admissions and academic advancement decisions of a student who is a relative of the donor. The policies of the institution and its foundation will determine the decision to accept or reject a gift, as well as the level and nature of the recognition of a donor for that gift.

## **Important Principles:**

- **Transparency and disclosure:** Faculty and staff who have financial interests in a company, as defined by the institution's conflict of interest policy, who are supported by grants/contracts from a company, serve as consultants to a company, or who may have similar relationships must clearly and openly disclose such relationships to students.
- **Maintaining intellectual independence of individuals and the institution:** The intellectual independence of faculty and staff must be maintained and protected. The independence is abrogated if/when faculty engage in such activities as accepting compensation for speaking engagements that limit their discretion regarding content, or agree to have their name included on a publication to which they did not meaningfully contribute.
- **Value of gifts and their impact:** As noted previously, gifts, regardless of their nature or value, have been shown to influence attitudes and preferences of the receiver.
- **Gifts such as pharmaceutical/biological products from a company or consortium of companies,** if such gifts are permitted by the school/college/teaching hospital, should be managed centrally so they can be utilized without attribution to a specific company.
- **Continuing veterinary medical education (CVME):** All CVME programs developed and presented by a school/college must conform to the standards and processes of that school/college. While commercial companies, singly or as a consortium, may provide support for CVME programs, the school/college must maintain sole responsibility and control of the CVME program, e.g. selection of speakers, program content, etc.
- **Gifts for scholarships/fellowships:** Scholarships or similar funds, e.g. for graduate student or intern/resident support from a company should be given centrally to the school/college, and in a manner consistent with the gift acceptance policies of the institution and its foundation. Consistent with the widely accepted definition of a gift, a gift should not require a quid pro quo other than the normal level and nature of recognition and acknowledgement provided by the foundation of the receiving institution. The evaluation and selection of recipients of such gift funds must be determined by the school/college, without involvement of an individual company or consortium.
- **Gifts versus contracts:** Commercial concerns may wish to establish educational contracts with a school/college for specific educational activities, e.g., internship or residency training, typically for an individual designated by the company. Support provided for such purposes is to be distinguished from a gift, and in most institutions will follow a process for institutional and school/college approval that is similar, if not identical, to that of a research contract. Beyond such approval processes, the school/college holds the responsibility for establishing and implementing processes that ensure that educational contracts are consistent with the academic independence and integrity of the school/college and its training programs.
- **Financial remuneration from industry:** Remuneration by a company for services or skills provided, whether as a consultant, representative, etc, clearly introduces the potential of bias. Faculty and staff with such relationships are subject to their institution's conflict of interest policy. Students are not subject to those policies, but may be approached by industry to serve as paid "student representatives" of a particular company. The compensation or considerations they may receive for such activities may influence their attitudes and preferences, similar to that of a gift. Each school and college should consider and address the practice of "student representatives" as they develop their policies for interaction with external entities.

- Integrity of purchasing decisions: Personnel employed by a school/college who have a financial interest, as defined by the institution's conflict of interest policy, in a company or commercial entity should not play a role in any school/college purchasing decisions that may involve products or services of that company.
- Use of generic versus brand names in instruction: The use of brand names in didactic instruction provides a clear risk of bias or undue influence. Consequently, the use of generic terms should be strongly encouraged, with the use of brand names reserved for circumstances when their use is important for clarity, student awareness, or to discuss differences between products. In such instances, the reason for brand identification should be made clear in the course syllabus and/or during the presentation.

The AAVMC is committed to working with its member schools/colleges to ensure that our professional and academic integrity are affirmed and maintained. These guidelines are reflective of that commitment, and are intended to provide general guidance to schools and colleges of veterinary medicine. Each school/college retains the responsibility and authority to develop their own policies, individualized for that institution, to govern their interactions with external entities. Support from external entities, of all types, for schools and colleges of veterinary medicine has taken many forms over the years, and has significantly enhanced the success of the instructional, research, and outreach missions of our AAVMC constituent institutions. These guidelines, and the individual policies promulgated by each institution, are intended to manage such relationships and support in a manner that will maintain the public trust that is at the core of academic veterinary medicine and our profession.