

ICAPS Conflict of Interest Policy

Adapted from [Conflict of Interest Policy for ACM Publications](#)

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Executive Summary

This policy outlines a Conflict of Interest (COI) policy for the ICAPS conference series. It describes what a COI is, who is responsible for being aware of such conflicts, how to manage COIs, and how to report violations.

COI in publication are to be avoided because they raise questions about the quality, impartiality, and accuracy of published items, even when the parties involved believe they have been fair and impartial. Sometimes, a conflict will lead to an unconscious bias that can influence decisions, even if the parties involved believe they are objective. Thus, a credible COI policy cannot rely solely on individuals to make their own COI self-determinations.

Avoiding a COI means avoiding circumstances that would lead to a reasonable person believing there might be some biased processes or results. The exact definitions of "reasonable" and "biased" are nuanced and context-dependent, and as a result cannot be completely framed. So, this policy provides guidance on their interpretation in specific instances related to papers published in the ICAPS conference series. In general, when determining what to do, the advice is to:

- Use common sense
- Disclose any potential conflicts
- Consult with others not involved with the current instance

This document provides specific guidelines for common instances with the goal of assisting in the process of identifying and resolving potential COI. It also describes how the policy can be augmented, and how exceptions may be approved.

It is in the interest of all professionals to uphold the highest standards of professional, ethical behavior. Violations of this policy will be referred to either the chairs of the current ICAPS conference, or the ICAPS Executive Council if a chair is part of the COI.

Introduction

This policy outlines:

- What constitutes a conflict of interest (COI) for ICAPS papers
- Who is in a position to identify and report potential COIs
- How a potential COI should be managed

Papers published in the ICAPS conference series are peer-reviewed. ICAPS also oversees awards and other content of professional interest. It is essential that these materials are accurate and issued based on merit and published criteria, without a perception of improper influence.

This *ICAPS Conflict of Interest Policy* always applies to:

- Any material that is formally reviewed or refereed and published as part of the ICAPS proceedings
- Awards handed out by the ICAPS Executive Council or the ICAPS conference
- Authors, reviewers, PC members, judges, and other persons associated with ICAPS
- This policy is not mandatory for workshops, tutorials and demos but organizers are encouraged to use it as guideline for what constitutes a COI also for these parts of the conference

This policy should be explicitly referenced in any call for papers or guide for submissions for ICAPS. For example, a call for papers could state, "Authors and reviewers will be asked to indicate their understanding and acceptance of the ICAPS Conflict of Interest Policy when items are submitted, reviewed, or both."

What Constitutes a Conflict of Interest

A COI occurs when a person's objective judgment is — or is perceived by a reasonable observer to be — compromised by an existing relationship, affiliation, or connection to a person whose work they must evaluate.

The following are considered to be specific examples of relationships that produce COIs. Individuals in such relationships should not be involved in peer review of, or making editorial decisions about, published materials provided by the related parties.

- Notable personal or professional rivalry/animosity (publicly known or not)

- The lifelong relationship between Ph.D. student and Ph.D. supervisor
- Personal or family relationships that would reasonably cause others to doubt impartiality.
- Potential for financial gain or significant recognition, personally or for a close associate or family member
- Within the last two years or reasonably expected within the next year:
 - Working closely together (e.g., at the same institution, company or organization; or within the same organizational team)
 - Supervisor/Supervisee relationship exists
 - Funder or program manager/awardee relationship exists
 - Recipients of joint funding or significant professional collaboration
 - Joint authorship of an archival publication (e.g., an item having a DOI)

Identifying a Conflict of Interest

A potential conflict of interest can be identified at any point during the publication process, but when possible, potential conflicts should be determined before reviewing and before acceptance and publication decisions are made. Anyone involved in this process can identify a potential COI and request that COI to be evaluated and managed, including but not limited to:

- Direct Content Evaluators (e.g., program committee members)
- Indirect Content Evaluators (e.g., senior program committee members, program/track chairs)
- Other Content Evaluators (e.g., member of a program committee not directly involved in submission evaluation)
- Professional colleagues
- Content Producers (e.g., authors) - authors can indicate a COI exists, and must justify why the COI exists. The program chairs can decide whether the COI is justified or not. This is to discourage the option of excluding harsh reviewers by claiming a false COI.

All content evaluators, direct and indirect, bear primary responsibility for identifying and disclosing potential COIs in the review process.

All content creators bear primary responsibility for providing complete and honest information about COIs in their submissions and as otherwise requested. In particular, content creators should explicitly note any support they have received or are receiving that might be viewed as having an influence on their submitted content.

Possible conflicts should be reported to the individual in charge of the venue involved (e.g., program chair). In the case that the individual in charge is also conflicted, then conflicts can be reported to a predesignated alternate (typically one of the other chairs, or the ICAPS Executive Council). A best practice would be for there to be one or more predesignated alternates identified and publicized in advance of any potential need for reporting.

Managing a Conflict of Interest

If a potential conflict of interest in reviewing is identified, the party or parties should note this, and then recuse themselves from any further deliberation or decision-making.

If a potential conflict involves one or more of the content creators in the reporting of their work (e.g., source of support, employment), that conflict should be explicitly noted in some way in the content, so that reviewers, PC Members, SPC, program chairs, and (eventually) readers will see it. For instance, a footnote could be placed on the first page noting the nature of the COI (e.g., "The second author has received research funding from Corporation X which makes Product Y, described in the text.")

In cases where COIs in reviewing are unavoidable (for example, in specialized communities with small reviewing pools), those conflicts should be fully disclosed to cognizant personnel (e.g., to PC chairs or the ICAPS Executive Council) who are in a position to advise, remediate, or mitigate any conflict. A COI can be managed in this way so long as the conflicted person is not directly responsible for decisions in the peer review process.

Double-anonymous reviewing may help to reduce - but not eliminate - reviewer COIs. Program chairs may consider this as a practice but should also be aware it may raise other problems related to COIs.

In all cases of identified review COIs, it is best practice for the alternate decision-maker to ensure that any conflicted parties (e.g., reviewers, SPCs) are not aware of who has assumed their roles. If the conflicted party is in a lead decision-making role (e.g., PC chair), s/he should designate an appropriate colleague (e.g., co-chair, SPC, ...) to appoint another person to the decision-making role. Using this process, the third person remains anonymous from all conflicted parties, when feasible.

In all cases of identified author COIs, reviewers and those in a decision-making role should take extra care in evaluation to ensure that what is reported in the submission has not been unduly influenced by the COI.

If a COI is suggested or identified, it should be addressed as follows:

Before or During Evaluation

Senior reviewer (for example, Program Chair) determines if there is a valid review conflict and if so, reassigns any reviewer found to have a COI or who reports a potential COI. If the COI is alleged for the PC chair, the decision is delegated to an appropriate alternate, as per the above. Evaluation proceeds as usual.

If an author COI is identified but not disclosed in the submission, the senior reviewer should verify that the COI exists. If so, the senior reviewer may either require modification of the submission to explicitly note the COI, or may reject the submission for cause; the review process may not continue with a valid, unnoted author COI.

After Evaluation (Rejected, or Accepted before Publication)

Senior Reviewer (for example, Program Chair) determines if the identified COI influenced the reported results or the publication decision and may reopen the evaluation or remove the item from publication. If the COI is alleged for the PC chair, the decision is delegated to an appropriate alternate.

Published Content

The matter should be reported for investigation (see below). After investigation, a determination that a COI has influenced the decision for an item that has been published may result in the item being retracted or removed from the published proceedings and replaced with a posted notation that a violation of COI policy was the reason.

In each of these cases, the outcome of the determination will be reported to the parties identifying the potential COI. The ICAPS Executive Council assumes the organizing committee will carefully decide how to handle Conflicts of Interest discovered during or after the paper reviewing process. Consultation with the ICAPS Executive Council is possible if deemed necessary.

Violations

Knowingly and falsely asserting a COI — e.g., to prevent or alter peer reviewing, to discourage appropriate editorial oversight, or to seek disadvantage of another — is a violation of the ICAPS Code of Conduct and this policy.

Knowingly hiding or falsifying a stated COI is a violation of this policy.

Any violation of this policy should be reported for investigation by the ICAPS Executive Council.

Deviations from this Policy

Alternate COI policies that differ from this one must be submitted to the ICAPS Executive Council along with a detailed rationale. Requests will be reviewed, and if approved they must be published in advance of any application of that revised policy. Approved deviations can be applied at the conference level.

A less restrictive policy than this one will only be considered in special cases, backed by extraordinary reasons. The request must explicitly describe how resulting COIs will be remediated.

See also the discussion under "Managing A Conflict of Interest" about unavoidable, single deviations from the above examples.

Questions, Deviations, and Reporting Violations

The ICAPS conference liaison should be contacted for any

- Questions about the interpretation of this policy
- Requests for deviations from, or extensions to, this policy
- Reporting of egregious behavior related to this policy, including purposeful evasion of the policy or false reporting