

SPONSORSHIP & INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Introduction

The Collaborative Centre's **purpose** is to catalyze climate & sustainability action for health & health systems through research, education, and practice & policy change.

Achieving the Collaborative Centre's purpose will require engaging with diverse actors across the academic, public, not-for-profit, and private sectors, **fostering interaction**, and finding synergies.

While all sectors both contribute to climate change and are necessary to achieve just transitions, the private sector poses unique opportunities and challenges for interaction and engagement. Solutions to the climate crisis and ways to achieve sustainable health systems will be highly relevant to the profitability and the future of many for-profit industries, and their strategic engagement with researchers and educators will be important in progressing toward these solutions. However, some of these industries also disproportionately contribute to the climate crisis and their products and activities are health- and environment-harming. Moreover, a substantial body of research has demonstrated the specific risks that commercial sponsorship poses to the independence and integrity of research, education and practice & policy change initiatives.

Accordingly, the Collaborative Centre has drawn on global good practice¹ and established risk assessment frameworks² to develop a Sponsorship & Industry Engagement Policy.

Approach

Interaction with the private sector is appropriate for the Collaborative Centre to meet its mission. However, risks to independence and integrity must be decisively and diligently managed to ensure the Collaborative Centre protects its credibility and maintains high standards of academic integrity,

¹ The UN/WHO *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*; The World Health Assembly (2016) *Framework of engagement with non-State actors*; International Committee of Medical Journal Editors *Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals*; Institute of Medicine (2009) *Conflict of Interest in Medical Research, Education, and Practice*; University of Toronto Joannah & Brian Lawson Centre for Child Nutrition sponsorship policy.

² Charles Perkins Centre, The University of Sydney, Industry Engagement Policy; Adams PJ, Gregan MJ. (2024). Moral jeopardy, conflicts of interest and the integrity of public health research. *Int J Epidemiol.* 53(2).

transparency, and accountability. The policy covers the Collaborative Centre as a whole and members acting under its auspices, but it applies differently to these parties.

For the **Collaborative Centre**

- The policy **prohibits** financial or material sponsorship of the Centre by for-profit commercial entities.
 - We extend this prohibition to corporate or commercial foundations.
 - We **exempt** benefit corporations from this prohibition.
- The policy requires a risk-based approach to evaluate and manage all other forms of sponsorship.

This approach does not preclude other forms of engagement which would promote interaction (but which preserve independence) with leaders or employees of commercial entities such as hosting invited speakers or panel participation.

For **Members** of the Collaborative Centre who are acting in their capacity as Collaborative Centre Members (i.e., are leveraging the Centre's identity in their activities)³

- The policy requires members to **disclose** all sources of funding or sponsorship (financial or material) for the activity;
- The policy requires members to contact us to identify, evaluate, and manage all forms of sponsorship from not-for-profit and for-profit entities.

See **Appendix B** for a decision tree that supports this policy.

Process

We will use a **risk-based approach** to identify and manage the risks posed by commercial sponsorship, including preventing and managing conflicts of interest, and maintaining independence, informed by a growing body of scholarly work (see **Appendix A**). This risk-based approach will be used to assess proposals of financial or material sponsorship of the Centre that are not prohibited, and to assess proposals for Member-initiated, sponsored activities that leverage the Centre's identity.

Members of the Collaborative Centre who wish to initiate an activity with the support of the Collaborative Centre, or to otherwise substantively leverage the Centre's identity, are asked to

³ NB. The policy does not apply to Members of the Collaborative Centre who engage in these activities in any capacity that is independent of their relationship with the Collaborative Centre.

consult this Sponsorship & Industry Engagement Policy and reach out to discuss any issues (climate.health@utoronto.ca), so that we can identify, evaluate, and manage any risks posed by commercial sponsorship.

Sources of sponsorship and engagement may pose minimal risk, or risk that can be managed. For the prospective **sponsorship**, low-risk relationships can likely proceed with full, public *disclosure*; however, medium-risk relationships likely require further *management* to preserve independence and integrity. Normally, high-risk relationships should not be entered into.

Throughout the risk evaluation process, the fundamental question is, can the relationship help the Collaborative Centre achieve its purpose? This means the Collaborative Centre, or Members acting in its name, should not engage with commercial entities or funding sources/sponsors where:

- The interests of the sponsor are not aligned with improved human or planetary health
- The sponsor has any degree of control over any of the design, conduct or dissemination of the activity
- There is a reasonable likelihood that the relationship could have a negative impact on the credibility and trustworthiness of the Collaborative Centre or the University of Toronto
- The sponsor (if a subsidiary of a larger entity, the larger entity) has a poor record of corporate governance or responsibility or health- or environment-harming activities

All research partnerships at the university are guided by the [Statement of Research Partnerships](#), along with U of T policies and practices governing [research administration](#) and [involvement of human participants](#), the [Inventions Policy](#), the [Policy on Conflict of Interest - Academic Staff](#), the [Policy on Ethical Conduct in Research](#), and [other university policies or guidelines](#) that may be relevant in the circumstances.

Exploring root and structural causes

In line with this policy, the Collaborative Centre will itself make the impact on health and the environment of corporations, commercial entities, capitalism, and the broader political economy a focus of research and education. For example, the Collaborative Centre will address these issues in seminars (e.g., co-hosting with the series, Health Inc: Corporations, capitalism and the commercial determinants of health), the Student Training Program, and other capacity-strengthening efforts.

Appendices

Appendix A. Risk-based approach

A growing body of scholarly work has informed the development of an approach to manage the risks posed by commercial sponsorship, including preventing and managing conflicts of interest, and maintaining independence, to complement an approach based on prohibition.

Available frameworks characterize the different dimensions of risk arising through interaction (Adams & Gregan, 2024). These risks include:

- *Ethical* risks – accepting funding from a source that causes health or environmental harm
- *Contributory* risks – sponsored activities further the commercial interests of the sponsor in ways that are contrary to the Collaborative Centre’s mission
- *Credibility* risks – accepting funding or sponsorship jeopardizes the trustworthiness or public perception of the Collaborative Centre⁴
- *Governance* risks – the independence of decision making processes, including agenda setting is compromised or undermined by engagement or reliance on funding/sponsorship
- *Neutrality* risks – sponsorship produces a sense of mutual obligation and favourable perception/treatment of the sponsor
- *Relationship* risks – relationships with the sponsor/funder threaten or have negative impact on other internal or external relationships
- *Democratic* risks – the sponsor’s involvement in the Collaborative Centre alters the Collaborative Centre’s position within policy arenas, encouraging sponsored individuals to advocate on the sponsor’s behalf

Comprehensive risk-based frameworks often draw on the PERIL (Purpose, Extent, Relevant Harm, Identifiers, Link) typology to analyze the extent to which different kinds of risk arise in specific situations (Adams & Gregan, 2024):

⁴ Often termed “reputational risks, we see the concept of credibility risk as a clearer articulation of the risks that an academic organization should seek to avoid.

Indicator	Description	Example
Purpose	Degree to which purposes between funder and recipient diverge	Direct conflict of purpose occurs when a cancer researcher is funded by a tobacco company
Extent	Degree to which the recipient is reliant on this source	Members of a research team view an alcohol company more positively as funding from them moves from 5% to 10% of their income
Relevant harm	Degree of harm associated with this form or subform of consumption	Lottery products are considered to involve less harm than electronic gambling machines
Identifiers	Degree to which the recipient is visibly identified with the funder	A research institute is obliged to display a fast-food company's logo on all their research reports, seminars and other publications
Link	Nature and directness of the link between recipient and donor	Opioid researchers have a choice of accepting funding directly from a pharmaceutical company or channelled through a government department

(Table 2 from Adams & Gegan, 2024)

Appendix B. Sponsorship & Industry Engagement Policy Decision Tree



Sponsorship & Industry Engagement Policy

