



Principles Governing AAN Relationships with External Sources of Support

June 26, 2004

I. Preamble

A. As a professional organization, the AAN operates with a high level of purpose representing the ideals of neurology and medicine and depends on the dues of its members to help fulfill its mission. Nevertheless, the AAN, like most non-profit associations today, also generates non-dues revenues to fulfill its mission, including support from external sources. The AAN's values and ethical principles should guide the appropriate development and utilization of external support that may be necessary to implement programs and activities to fulfill the AAN's mission.

B. Leaders of the AAN recognize the critical role the organization plays as the largest professional association for neurology in the United States. AAN activities reflect on all neurologists, and all neurologists are represented to some extent by the AAN. Thus, the AAN serves all neurologists as a representative for the profession of neurology and is not merely an advocacy group for AAN members. AAN leaders make programmatic choices that reflect a commitment to the AAN's professional values and its core organizational purpose. Similarly, every staff member in the AAN is accountable to explicit ethical standards that are derived from the mission of the association.

American Academy of Neurology Mission Statement: The American Academy of Neurology (AAN) is a medical specialty society established to advance the art and science of neurology and to promote the best possible care for patients with neurological disorders by: ensuring appropriate access to neurological care; supporting and advocating for an environment that ensures ethical, high quality neurological care; providing excellence in professional education by offering a variety of programs in both the clinical aspects of neurology and the basic neurosciences to physicians and allied health professionals; and supporting clinical and basic research in the neurosciences and related fields.

The AAN exists for and is dedicated to the following purposes: 1) Support for those principles, policies and practices that seek the attainment of the best in neurologic patient care; 2) The pursuit of excellence in medical education, especially as it concerns the neurological sciences; 3) The pursuit of high standards of excellence in the practice of neurology; 4) Support for the quest of scientific knowledge by support for research in related fields; 5) The communication of scientific and scholarly information through scientific meetings and publications; and 6) Provision for communication with other groups and representation for neurologic opinion to best achieve and preserve the purposes of the AAN.

II. Overview of Principles

A. Any financial relationship with an external source of support may create a potential conflict of interest for the AAN. Conflicts of interest are common, and although some conflicts are unethical, others are not and can be appropriately managed (AAN Code of Professional

Conduct). The appearance of a conflict of interest may be damaging to AAN's reputation, regardless of whether a conflict of interest actually results in inappropriate action.

Concerns that the acceptance of external support creates an inappropriate conflict of interest occur in two particular situations: 1) when external support is from for-profit companies (or not-for-profit entities funded largely by for-profit companies); and 2) when the amount of external support, particularly from a single source, becomes large enough that the AAN may become dependent on external support to continue essential activities.

B. These principles apply to all external sources of support, including corporate support, philanthropic support from individuals or foundations (excluding the AAN Foundation), federal or state grant support, and other external sources of support.

C. External support comprises financial support (e.g. contracts or grants), material support (e.g. products or publications), and staff support (e.g. salary support for AAN staff or provision of external staff to accomplish AAN activities).

D. These principles should serve as a starting point for anyone reviewing or developing AAN relationships with outside groups. These principles apply to all AAN corporate entities, including the American Academy of Neurology, the AAN Foundation, and AAN Enterprises, Inc. (AEI).

E. These principles should be reviewed periodically to assure their relevance to the mission, values, and operations of the AAN and its business environment.

F. The AAN's principles to guide external funding relationships have been organized into the following sections: General Principles that apply to most situations; Special Guidelines that address specific issues and concerns; Organizational Review that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Directors, Executive Director, and other staff units; and operational issues that outline the annual reports to the Board of Directors.

III. General Principles

The AAN's mission statement provides guidance for developing relationships to secure external support. Relationships that are not motivated by the AAN's mission can threaten the AAN's integrity and reputation, along with its ability to provide representation and leadership for its members, neurologists, and the neurological profession.

A. The Academy's mission and values must drive the proposed activity.

The AAN's mission and values must determine whether a proposed relationship for external support is appropriate for the AAN. In general, rather than responding to others, the AAN will proactively choose its priorities for external relationships and participate in those that fulfill AAN priorities. The AAN should not have relationships with organizations or industries whose principles, policies, or actions obviously conflict with the AAN's mission. For example, relationships with producers of products that harm the public health (e.g., tobacco) are not appropriate for the AAN.

B. The external support relationship must preserve or promote trust in the AAN and the medical profession.

To be effective, medical professionalism requires the public's trust. External support relationships that could undermine the trustworthiness of the AAN, and thus the public's trust in the AAN or the profession, are not acceptable. For example, no relationship should raise questions about the scientific content of the AAN's health information publications or clinical

practice guidelines, the AAN's advocacy on health issues, or the truthfulness of AAN public statements.

C. The AAN must maintain its objectivity with respect to health issues regardless of external support relationships.

The AAN shall accept support, funds or royalties from external sources only if acceptance does not pose a conflict of interest with the AAN's mission and values, and in no way impacts the objectivity of the Academy, its members, activities, programs or employees. The AAN must strive to assure that its actual or perceived objectivity with respect to health issues is not biased by external support relationships.

D. The externally supported activity must benefit public health, patient care, research, or physician practice.

Public education campaigns and programs for AAN members or the public are potentially of significant benefit to the AAN's mission and constituency. Externally supported programs that provide financial benefits to the AAN but no significant benefit to the public or direct professional benefits to AAN members are not acceptable. In the case of member benefits, external relations must not detract from AAN's professionalism.

E. The AAN shall comply with applicable laws, regulations, and codes of ethics as they apply to external support of AAN activities and programs.

Many AAN activities and programs are affected by laws, regulations, and codes of ethics, including, but not limited to, those governing continuing medical education, political activities, and advocacy. In addition, many entities that are current or potential sources of external support for AAN activities are similarly governed by laws, regulations, and their own codes of ethics. The AAN, in establishing and implementing its relationships with external sources of support, shall make every effort to respect and comply both with its own and with the external source's applicable laws, regulations, and codes of ethics. When conflicts arise between the laws, regulations, and codes of ethics affecting the AAN and its external sources of support, the AAN Board of Directors has final responsibility for approving an acceptable resolution which, in rare circumstances, may entail not proceeding with a proposed externally-supported activity.

F. The AAN shall apply the principles of disclosure and transparency for all external support relationships.

Consistent with expectations outlined in the AAN Code of Professional Conduct for its members, the AAN has a duty to disclose its financial relationships with external sources of support.

IV. Special Guidelines

The following guidelines address several special situations concerning AAN development and utilization of external support.

A. The AAN may provide health and medical information for the public and health care professionals through its own and externally-supported publications and electronic media.

The public and health care professionals can benefit through the creation of independently authored and reviewed publications and electronic media addressing health care issues. External support of such publications is permissible as long as the AAN retains control over the assignment of authors, the determination of content, and the editorial review process.

B. The AAN must not involve itself in the production, sale, endorsement, or marketing to consumers of products that claim a health benefit.

Marketing health-related products that claim a health benefit (e.g., pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and home health care products) undermines the AAN's objectivity and diminishes its role in representing health care values and educating the public about their health and health care.

C. Externally supported activities should be funded from multiple sources whenever possible.

Support of individual activities from multiple sources reduces AAN dependence on a single source for continuing a given activity. The AAN recognizes that there may be some activities for which the benefits to the AAN's mission and constituency are so great, the potential harms so minimal, and the prospects for developing multiple sources of support so unlikely that single-source support is a reasonable option.

C. The relationship between the AAN and external sources of support must preserve the AAN's control over any projects and products bearing the AAN name or logo. The AAN retains editorial control over any information produced as part of an externally supported arrangement.

When an AAN program receives external support from an entity that requests the AAN's name be placed on products produced by the external entity, the AAN must remain in control of its name, logo and AAN content, and must approve all marketing materials to ensure that the message is congruent with the AAN's mission. A statement regarding AAN editorial control, as well as the names of the program's supporters, must appear in all public materials describing the program and in all educational materials produced by the program. (This principle does not apply to those situations where the AAN only licenses its own products for use in conjunction with another entity's products.)

D. Relationships between the AAN and external sources of support must not permit or encourage influence by the external source of support on AAN policies, priorities, or actions.

An AAN relationship with an external source of support must not permit influence, or the appearance of influence, by the external source of support on AAN policies, priorities, and actions. For example, agreements stipulating access by representatives of the external source of support to AAN leadership would be of concern. Additionally, some relationships that appear to be acceptable when viewed in isolation may become unacceptable when viewed in light of other existing or proposed AAN priorities and activities.

E. Receipt of support from an external source does not imply AAN's endorsement of the external source of support, its products, services, or policies.

An external source's support or sponsorship of an AAN program does not imply AAN approval of the external source's general policies, nor does it imply that the AAN will exert any influence to advance the external source's interests outside the substance of the arrangement itself. The AAN's name and logo should not be used in a manner that would express or imply an AAN endorsement of the external source of support, its products, services, or policies.

F. To preclude any appearance of undue influence on the affairs of the AAN, the AAN will not accept external support for core governance activities.

Financial dependence is potentially created when the AAN's core operations become too reliant on external support. The AAN operating budget best reflects expenses for core activities; it is the proportion of external support contained within the operating budget that, if too high, raises concerns about dependence. In this context, "internal" funds are considered revenues from dues, meeting and course registrations, serial publications (including subscriptions and royalties from Neurology), sales of products and services to members, and member donations. "External" funds are revenues from all other sources.

Financial support of core governance activities (e.g., financial support for conduct of the Board and standing committees or clinical practice guideline development) by an external funding source could make the AAN become dependent on external funding for its existence or could allow an external funding source to have undue influence on the affairs of the AAN, compromising the integrity of the AAN's mission or its ability to fulfill its mission. The AAN Board of Directors is responsible for assuring the separation of core governance activities from external funding sources.

G. Funds from external funding sources shall not be used to support lobbying or political advocacy activities.

To maintain independence in advocacy for health policy, regulations, and the law, AAN political advocacy activities must be funded only from internal revenue sources. The AAN should not advocate for a particular issue because it has received funding from an external funding source that has an interest in the same issue. Furthermore, the AAN should be mindful of the potential, especially in relation to political issues, that even the appearance of influence of an AAN position by an external funding source could compromise the AAN's integrity and effectiveness in advocacy.

V. Organizational Review

A. Every proposal for an AAN external funding relationship must be submitted to, and approved by, Executive Director prior to staff implementation. The Executive Director will consult with the appropriate Executive Staff concerning all proposals.

B. The Executive Director shall report all approved external funding relationships to the Board of Directors.

C. All AAN decisions regarding external funding arrangements will be reported by the Board of Directors to the membership at the annual meeting and published in the Annual Report.

Approved
Board of Directors – June 26, 2004