

An Ethical and Financially Transparent Framework for Sponsors and Exhibitors

The Society of Biological Psychiatry (SOBP) has developed the following framework for ensuring that engaging with sponsors and exhibitors is ethical, transparent, and aligned with the Society's values.

The criteria for sponsor/exhibitor selection are intended for internal use to guide decisions that align with the Society's mission and values. These criteria are not designed to impose blanket exclusions on companies, including those with significant contributions to clinical care, such as pharmaceutical companies, to avoid discriminatory approaches. Instead, the focus remains on ensuring that sponsors/exhibitors align with evidence-based practices and the Society's values.

In instances where offers from sponsors/exhibitors are declined, the communication of the decision from the Society will not detail specific reasons for the refusal. This would be made clear on any material to potential sponsors/exhibitors from the SOBP that will specify that: "We respectfully reserve the right to decline any offer from sponsors/exhibitors at our discretion while refraining from providing detailed explanations. We deeply appreciate your understanding and consideration in this matter". This approach minimizes the risk of litigation or other adverse consequences for the Society while maintaining professionalism and safeguarding relationships with potential sponsors.

A. Ethical Guidelines for Selection of Sponsors/Exhibitors

- Sponsors and exhibitors representing reputable grant giving bodies, either governmental or charities, will be prioritized.
- Sponsors and exhibitors will be selected amongst companies that promote evidence-based products or practices contributing to advances in biological psychiatry.
- Exhibitors or sponsors providing products or services directly to scientists will be prioritized.
- Exhibitors or sponsors offering products (e.g., devices, pharmaceutical products) or services directly to patients/consumers will generally be avoided and will only be considered in cases where they demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting evidence-based products or practices that clearly contribute to advances in patient care.
- Exhibitors or sponsors promoting controversial, unverified (e.g., wellness services), or harmful practices or products will be excluded.
- Every attempt will be made to prevent over-reliance on a few large sponsors/exhibitors.
- Sponsors and Exhibitors will be evaluated on the following criteria:
 1. *Alignment with SOBP Mission and Goals*
 - 1.1 Scientific Integrity: The sponsor/exhibitor must be committed to advancing evidence-based research and avoid promoting unverified claims.

1.2 Focus on Mental Health and Neuroscience: The sponsor/exhibitor must be committed to contributing to the understanding, prevention, or treatment of psychiatric and neurological disorders.

2. Ethical Business Practices

2.1 Regulatory Compliance: The sponsor/exhibitor must comply with all relevant regulations, including those governing clinical trials, marketing practices, and data privacy (e.g., HIPAA, GDPR).

2.2 Transparency: The sponsor/exhibitor should be committed to clear disclosure of research findings, funding sources, and potential conflicts of interest.

3. Ethical Research and Innovation

3.1 Ethical Use of AI and Technology: AI tools (if used) should be developed and deployed responsibly, without bias or misuse

3.2 Support for Open Science: The sponsor/exhibitor must support data sharing within the scientific community to advance the field.

3.3 Robust Methodologies: The sponsor/exhibitor must use rigorous scientific methodologies in its research and development processes.

3.4 Transparency in Clinical Trials: Sponsors/exhibitors involved in clinical trials should ensure that studies should be registered, openly published, and available for independent review.

3.5 Adherence to Ethical Research Standards: Sponsors/exhibitors engaged in research must demonstrate compliance with ethical standards for research

- History and Reputation

4.1 Track Record of Ethical Behavior: Sponsors/exhibitors with a history of problematic conduct, including lawsuits, or ethical violations within the preceding 10 years should be excluded. Two strategies will be employed to assess history and reputation: (a) search general online databases for news alerts and news releases using the company name and terms like "lawsuit," "ethical violations," "fraud," or "misconduct"; (b) search of industry-specific regulatory and compliance databases such as FDA Warning Letters and Watchdogs (e.g., ProPublica) that track companies with problematic records

4.2 Peer and Public Perception: Sponsors/exhibitors should be viewed positively by the scientific community, patients, and the general public.

B. Process of Sponsor/Exhibitors Approval and Management of Conflicts of Interest

- The Executive Committee and the Council will review and approve potential sponsors and exhibitors.
- A conflict of interest is defined as any direct or indirect financial or professional ties to sponsors or exhibitors by members of the Council members, the Executive Committee members and of all other SOBP committees.

- All members referred to above should disclose these relationships fully and promptly. A conflict-of-interest disclosure form will be completed annually, with ad-hoc updates required if new conflicts arise.
- Members with relevant conflicts will recuse themselves from discussions and decisions related to sponsor or exhibitor selection or event programming when this relates to their specific conflict.
- A summary of disclosed conflicts and the steps taken to mitigate them will be made publicly available to foster accountability and trust.

C. Ethical Guidelines for the Sponsor/Exhibitor Involvement

- Sponsorship arrangements should not influence scientific content, program structure, or speaker selection.
- All sponsored content and exhibits should be clearly labeled to distinguish them from independent scientific discussions.
- Promotional activities to be restricted to designated exhibitor areas and should not interfere with educational content.
- Sponsorships and partnerships will be clearly indicated in the meeting program, including sponsored sessions or speaker affiliations.
- Events or other activities involving sponsors will be clearly labelled in all relevant materials.

D. Financial Transparency

- For each annual meeting, SOBP will publish a detailed financial report on the SOBP website outlining all sponsor contributions and how funds are allocated (e.g., travel grants).
- SOBP will maintain a publicly accessible archive of all sponsorship-related activities (including those not limited to the annual meeting) for accountability and reference.