

Volt-Age Conflict of Interest Guidelines

Volt-Age is a seven-year research program on electrification of Canadian society funded through a \$123M Canada First Research Excellence Fund grant in April 2023. Volt-Age is led by Concordia University, in partnership with Dalhousie University, Toronto Metropolitan University, and the University of Calgary.

Volt-Age commits to following a rigorous and transparent process for managing conflicts of interest, including in its governance and strategic planning and in the development of research calls, review processes, and decision-making on funding.

Context

Many of the Volt-Age governance bodies include multiple researchers who are experts in fields related to the research program. These same researchers are also among the best candidates to lead large-scale research projects appropriate for funding through Volt-Age. Volt-Age is fully committed to managing the potential conflicts of interest (COI) that will inevitably arise. As a result, the individuals involved in the research program must be prepared to act with careful attention to actual, perceived, and potential COIs.

Volt-Age is aware of Concordia's Policy on Conflict of Interest (BD-4), Policy on Conflict of Interest in Research (VPRGS-5), and the Concordia University Faculty Association article on COI (Article 7 of the Collective Agreement), as well as COI policies at partner institutions. As a federally funded research program, Volt-Age is being guided by the Federal Research Funding Organizations Conflict of Interest Policy, available online [here](#). Following this guideline, Volt-Age defines COI as follows:

Definition of Conflict of interest: COI refers to a conflict between an individual's duties and responsibilities with regards to the research program and their private, professional, business, or public interests. COI can be real, perceived, or potential. COI can occur if an individual stands to receive a professional or personal benefit, has a relationship with person relevant to a Volt-Age decision (e.g. an applicant or a candidate), or has a direct or indirect financial interest in a decision.

Process

Volt-Age relies on voluntary disclosure of conflicts of interest (COIs) by individuals participating in the research program in different roles. It is the responsibility of these individuals to review relevant university policies as well as the Volt-Age COI Guidelines, including the definitions of COI below, and to transparently disclose any COIs in a timely manner, as outlined below. In all cases, a failure to disclose a COI that leads to a breach of these Guidelines is the fault of the individual and Volt-Age cannot be held responsible. Any such failure to disclose may result in the application of the Policy on the Responsible Conduct of Research (VPRGS-12). Voluntary disclosure of COI will take place as follows:

- **COI Declarations:** All members of the Volt-Age governance bodies, including all Volt-Age Committees and the Advisory Board, must complete a COI declaration form on an annual basis, effective immediately. These forms will be made public on the Volt-Age website upon receipt.

- **Meetings of Volt-Age Governance Bodies:** At the start of each meeting of a Volt-Age Committee or the Advisory Board, participants will be invited to disclose any COIs relating to the official agenda items, as set and distributed at the beginning of the meeting. Any disclosed COIs will be recorded in the minutes. If other items arise in a meeting where a participant feels there is a COI, they are also expected to disclose the COI as soon as it is observed. When a COI is declared, the individual may decide to, or may be asked to, recuse themselves from discussion on the relevant agenda item.

When making a decision regarding research funding, COI will be managed as follows:

- **Adjudication Jury:** All final decisions on Volt-Age research funding will be taken by the Adjudication Jury. In order to have a neutral and impartial group, no member of the Adjudication Jury will have applied for or held Volt-Age funds and must declare that they have no intention of applying for future Volt-Age funding opportunities. All members of the Adjudication Jury must complete a COI declaration form.
- **Master Reviewers:** Once funding proposals are received by Volt-Age, all candidates contacted to conduct external reviews of the proposals (the Volt-Age pool of Master Reviewers) will be asked to declare any COIs. In cases where a COI is declared with regards to a particular proposal, an alternate Master Reviewer will be selected. All proposals are evaluated using a standard evaluation rubric developed alongside the corresponding call for proposals and made available transparently on the Volt-Age website.

Individuals engaging with Volt-Age in different roles may have access to privileged and/or confidential information, for example information about funding competitions, applicants, proposals, funding decisions, strategic deliberations, and many other factors. These individuals are expected to treat this information as confidential until such time as it is released publicly by Volt-Age.

COI Declaration Form

The form is available on the Volt-Age website [here](#).

Acknowledgement

Volt-Age is grateful for the example set by the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force, whose [Governance and COI Management](#) inspired these COI Guidelines.