



Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center | New Mexico State University

*Partnership for the Advancement of Cancer Research*

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY**

---

### **Background: Fred Hutch/NMSU Partnership**

In recognition of the need to increase recruitment and training of individuals belonging to underrepresented groups in cancer research and cancer health disparities, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) awarded funds to enhance and expand an existing collaboration between New Mexico State University (NMSU) and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (Fred Hutch).

The Partnership for the Advancement of Cancer Research [PACR] program encompasses varying numbers of pilot and full research projects that involve investigators from five research divisions at the Fred Hutch and various scientific departments at NMSU. Currently (2021-2023) the U54 award supports 5 collaborative projects. This conflict resolution policy was created specifically for researchers participating in this partnership

This policy applies to all investigators, post doctoral fellows, graduate students, training program participants, and staff supported by the Fred Hutch/NMSU U54. *This policy is not intended to supersede the individual's institutional conflict resolution policy.*

The best conflict resolution practice is to prevent conflicts or to prevent escalation of disagreements to conflicts. Essential behaviors to reduce disagreements and PREVENT conflicts are:

- Routine communication between partners.
- True appreciation of each partner's contribution to the project.
- Recognition and respect of the role of the partner at his/her home institution and therefore, patience for competing demands on his/her time.
- Communication at the first suspicion of a misunderstanding on any issue or a sense of non-alignment with the research/program goals and objectives.

Issues that may lead to conflicts or disagreement may include:

- Decisions on manuscript authorships, patents, and other intellectual property
- Lack of clear and defined responsibilities assigned to each partner. Both partners in the collaboration ought to have agreed upon who executes each experiment proposed, is responsible for collecting specific data sets and carries out data analysis, generates data graphs and writes up summaries
- Unclear and unresolved responsibilities for project reports and presentations.

To prevent misunderstandings from escalating into disagreements and conflicts, **communicate with your partner** and negotiate fair distribution of credit and effort **before** work is completed. Revisit negotiations and modify as necessary through open communication and resolution between partners.

### **Informal and Formal Resolution of Conflicts**

- I. In order to maintain and promote a fair and productive environment for all U54 participants, the Fred Hutch/NMSU partnership encourages the active resolution of conflicts.

Participants are encouraged to maintain and utilize open communication to promote and maintain professional and sensible resolution of conflicts. The Fred Hutch/NMSU partnership encourages the resolution of conflict at the earliest opportunity. Participants are encouraged to use the resources listed below to engage in conflict resolution processes that are fair, thoughtful, and effective.

- II. We define conflict as ***a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.***

### III. Informal Resolution of Conflicts

We recognize that resolving a conflict requires tremendous **courage** on the part of all parties involved. It takes courage to honestly and clearly articulate needs and it takes courage to sit down and listen to adversaries. It takes courage to look at one's own role in the dispute, and it takes courage to approach others with a sense of empathy, openness, and respect for their perspective.

The following tips may help to informally resolve conflicts with co-workers, collaborators, and/or students constructively and respectfully.

**A. Treat the other person with respect**

Although respecting the other person during a conflict is challenging, one must try. Words of disrespect block communication.

**B. Confront the problem**

A time and place to discuss the conflict with the other person should be identified. The best time is when the parties are not arguing or angry. The place should be comfortable and away from either party's "turf."

**C. Define the conflict**

The conflict should be described in clear, concrete terms. Specificity of the who, what, when, where, and why of the situation.

Behaviors, feelings, consequences, and desired changes should be discussed.

Behaviors or problems, not people should be discussed.

**D. Communicate understanding**

Listening to understand the other person's perceptions, feelings, and needs

Both parties are encouraged to step back and try to imagine how the other person sees things. After discussing the issues, the parties should explain how they see the problem after discussion. It is especially important to discuss any changes in how the parties feel about the issues.

**E. Explore alternative solutions**

Alternative solutions should be offered and consequences of each solution examined.

**F. Agree on the most workable solution**

A solution that all parties involved can understand and live with should be adopted.

Win-win solutions are most appropriate.

Commitment to resolving the conflict is required.

**G. Evaluate after time**

After a certain time has passed, the parties should evaluate how well the solution is working. Adjustment of the resolution should occur if and when necessary.

### IV. Formal Resolution of Conflicts

When informal conflict resolution is ineffective, formal mechanisms to resolution may be required. The Partnership for the Advancement of Cancer Research (PACR) program is comprised of a number of advisory committees charged with advising the Program

Directors and the NCI program director throughout its deliberations. These committees will be used to formally resolve conflicts.

**A. The Program Directors and the NCI Representative**

The two program directors and the NCI representative will form the first step in the formal conflict resolution process. This three-person committee will hear the conflict issues from all participants and make a recommendation for resolution.

**B. The Internal Advisory Committee (IAC)**

Conflicts that cannot be resolved among participants through the program directors and the NCI representative will be referred to the Internal Advisory Committee (IAC). The committee will discuss the issues with the participants either separately or jointly and will make a recommendation for resolution.

**C. The Program Steering Committee (PSC)**

In the event the conflict cannot be resolved through the IAC, the issue will be brought before the PSC. This external advisory group is responsible for seeing that the program's overall goals and objectives are met. The PSC will discuss the issues with the participants either separately or jointly and will make a recommendation for resolution. The PSC recommendation will be considered binding for the participants involved in the conflict.