

Guidance for the Public, FDA Advisory
Committee Members, and FDA Staff on
Procedures for Determining Conflict of Interest
and Eligibility for Participation in FDA
Advisory Committees

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Guidance for the Public, FDA Advisory Committee Members, and FDA Staff on Procedures for Determining Conflict of Interest and Eligibility for Participation in FDA Advisory Committees¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

This guidance document is intended for FDA staff involved with advisory committee matters, FDA advisory committee members, and the public to help describe the applicable laws, regulations, and policies for determining whether an advisory committee member has a potential conflict of interest and whether participation in an advisory committee meeting is appropriate. FDA plans to develop further staff instructions consistent with this guidance to assist staff in implementing the guidance. This guidance describes FDA's policy in applying the statutory and regulatory requirements found in 18 U.S.C. 208(b), 21 U.S.C. 379d-1, and 5 CFR 2640. This guidance applies to special Government employees (SGEs) and regular Government employees invited to participate

¹ This guidance has been prepared by the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness in the Office of the Commissioner in conjunction with the Agency's Office of Science in the Office of the Commissioner, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER), Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM), Center for Devices and Radiological Health (CDRH), Center for Biologic Evaluation and Research (CBER), and Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN).

in FDA advisory committees subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (5 U.S.C. App. 2). For purposes of the guidance, we refer to such SGEs and regular Government employees as advisory committee “members.”

FDA's guidance documents, including this guidance, do not establish legally enforceable responsibilities. Instead, guidances describe the Agency's current thinking on a topic and should be viewed only as recommendations, unless specific regulatory or statutory requirements are cited. The use of the word *should* in Agency guidances means that something is suggested or recommended, but not required.

This guidance document replaces the “FDA Waiver Criteria 2000” guidance document.

II. WHY IS FDA REVISING ITS GUIDANCE ON CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION IN FDA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS?

FDA's advisory committees play an essential role in FDA's activities to protect and promote public health through the regulation of human and animal drugs, biological products, medical devices, and foods. FDA's advisory committees provide independent expert advice to the agency on scientific, technical, and policy matters related to the development and evaluation of FDA-regulated products. Advisory committees enhance FDA's ability to protect and promote public health by ensuring FDA has access to such advice in a manner as public as permitted by existing laws and regulations. Although advisory committees provide recommendations to FDA, FDA makes the final decisions.

FDA is committed to strictly adhering to the laws and regulations governing the process for selecting advisory committee members. FDA for many years has screened, prior to each meeting, all potential participants who are SGEs or regular Government employees, to determine whether the potential for a financial conflict of interest exists. Where such a conflict exists, the agency may grant a waiver allowing participation in an advisory committee meeting when statutory criteria are met; for example, when the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest created by the financial interest involved (18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3)). However, because FDA's conflict of interest screening process is complex and has been poorly understood, the agency has been criticized in its application of the legal framework. Moreover, while many conflict of interest laws and regulations apply to advisory committees across the federal government, the public has a particular interest in and high expectations for FDA's process.

FDA administers several laws and regulations that govern conflict of interest determinations -- and the legal landscape has changed in recent years. The current laws set forth different standards for determining whether participation in advisory committee meetings may be permitted. For example, two separate statutes govern whether the SGEs and regular Government employees subject to this guidance are prohibited from participating in advisory committee meetings because of financial interests that may be affected by the work the committee is to perform. First, 18 U.S.C. § 208 prohibits an SGE or regular Government employee with disqualifying financial interests (see 5 CFR 2640.103(b)) from participating in an advisory committee meeting unless a waiver is granted. Under 18 U.S.C. 208, the financial interests of certain persons and organizations

are imputed to the employee, and must be considered in addition to his personal financial interests. Second, section 712(c)(2)² of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (the Act), which replaces former 21 U.S.C. § 355(n)(4) and expands its applicability, prohibits advisory committee members from participating in a meeting if they (or any immediate family member) have a disqualifying financial interest, unless a waiver is granted.

Both statutes specify the circumstances under which FDA may grant waivers to permit participation in specific meetings. Section 712 (c)(2)(B) authorizes FDA to grant a waiver (to participate as a voting member or as a non-voting member) if “it is necessary to afford the committee essential expertise.” FDA must also apply the provisions of 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1) or 208(b)(3) to these same advisory committee meetings. The test for a regular Government employee who seeks to participate in an advisory committee meeting is whether the financial interest is “not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services which the Government may expect” from the employee (18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1)). However, in the case of an SGE seeking to participate in an advisory committee meeting, the test is whether the “need for the individual’s services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest created by the financial interest involved” (18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3)). Several regulations promulgated pursuant to 18 U.S.C. 208(b) further explain and delineate the parameters of the statutes and detail certain exemptions to the conflict of interest prohibitions (see 5 CFR Part 2640).

Issued before recent changes in the applicable law under FDAAA (section 712 of the Act), FDA's Waiver Criteria 2000 guidance attempted to address a complex set of

² Section 712 of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C. 379d-1) was added by the Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act of 2007 (FDAAA), Pub. L. No. 110-85, sec. 701. Section 712 became effective October 1, 2007.

variables by setting out a series of tables indicating involvement levels and expected action that FDA advisory committee staff would take. The tables varied depending on the type of interest (e.g., stocks and investments, primary employment, consulting work, contracts and grants, patents/royalties/trademarks, expert witness work, teaching/speaking/writing, contracts/grants for department heads, and institutional directors), level of involvement (low, medium, or high), type of meeting (particular matters involving specific parties or particular matters of general applicability), as well as a number of other factors. In applying the tables, FDA staff also considered enumerated circumstances favoring the use of the member and additional criteria that would exclude a member.

The Waiver Criteria 2000 guidance was an attempt to address comprehensively the multiple variables that can be applied in reaching a determination about an individual advisory committee member. However, because of its complexity and discretionary elements, Centers and offices sometimes found it difficult to achieve consistent results that the public could readily understand.

Most recently, Congress enacted section 701 of FDAAA (section 712 of the Act), which, in addition to establishing a new conflict of interest prohibition and standard for assessing waivers, encourages FDA to focus efforts on recruitment of advisory committee members with fewer potential conflicts of interest and caps the numbers of waivers that the agency may grant in a given year. Section 712(c)(2)(C) requires that FDA reduce the rate of waivers the agency issues each year (total number of waivers issued per total number of members attending advisory committee meetings) by 5 percent, beginning

with fiscal year 2008. By 2012, the agency may issue waivers at a maximum rate of 75 percent of the rate issued in 2007.

As part of FDA's recent internal assessment of its advisory committee process, the agency has targeted its assessment of potential conflicts of interest and granting of waivers as an area that needs improvement. This guidance incorporates the changes in the applicable law made by FDAAA and greatly simplifies and streamlines the process by which we determine meeting participation. FDA intends that this guidance increase the transparency, clarity, and consistency of the advisory committee process and enhance public trust in this important function.

III. WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND PRINCIPLES OF THIS GUIDANCE?

This guidance sets out a clear, streamlined approach for considering who may participate in an advisory committee meeting. As a policy matter, FDA is choosing to implement a more stringent policy for considering eligibility for participation than is required under the current legal framework. Under this approach, participation of members with potential conflicts of interest generally would occur under narrow circumstances where the potential conflict is minimal and the member's expertise is necessary to afford the committee essential expertise. The principal tool in considering advisory committee participation is a flowchart, or algorithm, that sets out the questions and considerations to address in a step-wise manner. This algorithm is discussed in detail in Part IV of this guidance, and is attached as Appendix 1.

The algorithm consolidates the various standards and tests found in the applicable statutes into a series of straightforward steps that generally apply to all meetings, regardless of the subject matter or type of meeting and irrespective of the type of financial interest(s) held by the member. This unified, simpler approach will improve consistency within the agency in considering advisory committee participation and will provide greater clarity to the public regarding how FDA selects members.

FDA's policy for evaluating whether a waiver should be issued is more stringent than the Waiver Criteria 2000 Guidance (that this guidance replaces) in four major ways. First, FDA intends to apply a stricter policy with respect to granting waivers for those whose personal financial interests and those of their immediate family exceed certain levels. Under this guidance, if an individual or her spouse or minor child has disqualifying financial interests whose combined value exceeds \$50,000, she generally would not participate in the meeting, regardless of the need for her expertise.

Second, FDA does not intend to issue a waiver in certain circumstances where the agency has determined that the conflict of interest is significant. These circumstances are enumerated and described in Section H (Step 7) of this guidance.

Third, FDA will apply a more stringent test to all waivers than is contemplated by some of the laws that the agency administers. FDA is choosing to limit the waivers the agency grants and harmonize our implementation of the various statutory provisions by applying a stricter test than would be required in some cases. Although 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3) authorizes the agency to grant a waiver to an SGE where a balancing test is met -- "the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest

created by the financial interest involved”-- FDA will also apply to all waivers for SGEs the generally stricter standard established by section 712 (c)(2)(B) of the Act, requiring a showing that the waiver “is necessary to afford the committee essential expertise.”

Similarly, for regular Government employees, where the test under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1) is whether the “financial interest is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services provided by that individual,” FDA will also require a showing of essential expertise. In order to meet the “essential expertise” standard, the agency will conduct a needs analysis -- recommending in most cases that staff document their search for an equally qualified expert with few or no conflicts of interest. An expanded search for unconflicted, qualified experts is consistent with FDAAA’s focus on recruitment of advisory committee members with no conflicts of interest and may assist in minimizing the numbers of waivers needed.

Fourth, as discussed in Section II, FDA will limit the number of waivers the agency grants each year, in accordance with section 712(c)(2)(C) of the Act. By applying the \$50,000 limit for personal financial interests and the strict “essential expertise” test, FDA intends that the agency will meet the waiver limits incorporated in FDAAA. However, the agency intends to further limit numbers of waivers if necessary to assure that the FDAAA waiver caps are met, even if an employee’s personal financial interests are at or below \$50,000, and the “essential expertise” test is met.

IV. HOW DOES THE ALGORITHM OPERATE?

A. Introduction

This part of the guidance discusses each step in the algorithm. The algorithm consists of ten steps, and we will discuss each step sequentially.

B. Step 1 – Is the Subject Matter of the Meeting a “Particular Matter?”

The first step is to ask, "Will the meeting itself or a governmental action of which it is a part involve a 'particular matter'?" The term "particular matter" includes only matters that involve deliberation, decision, or action that is focused upon the interests of specific persons, or a discrete and identifiable class of persons. It does not cover consideration or adoption of broad policy options directed to the interests of a large and diverse group of persons such as actions that will affect all companies or the economy in general (5 CFR 2640.103(a)(1)). While most FDA advisory committee meeting topics will involve "particular matters," some topics are so wide-ranging in nature and could potentially affect such a large number of persons or organizations, that they would not be considered a "particular matter."

When an FDA advisory committee meeting is educational in purpose and the agency is not seeking advice on a regulatory decision or action, it may not meet the definition of "particular matter." For example, a meeting of FDA's Risk Communication Advisory Committee was determined not to involve a "particular matter" because the meeting focused on a broad discussion of hypothetical communication problems and the pros and cons of different components of a draft template for press releases about recalls of all FDA-regulated products. The discussion pertained to such a large number of firms

and organizations that it would not be considered to have an effect on a discrete and identifiable class.

Other examples of FDA advisory committee meeting topics that are not “particular matters” include:

- The agenda topic is devoted to committee member training on advisory committee practices and procedures.
- The agenda topic is devoted to general scientific presentations and discussions exclusive of particular products or guidance for a class of products. For example, a presentation solely on methodology for analyzing statistical data may be a general scientific presentation.
- The agenda topic is devoted to a review of intramural research, where the research would have no impact on an outside financial interest.

If the answer to this question is "no," no further inquiry is necessary to determine whether there is a conflict of interest. All members may fully participate³ in the meeting.

If your answer to the question is "yes," then proceed to step 2.

C. Step 2 – Will the particular matter have a direct and predictable effect on the financial interest(s) of any organization?

Under step 2, the question is, “Will the meeting have a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of any organization?” This step is intended to provide an

³ Full participation includes voting.

early opportunity for the agency to determine, before meeting-specific conflict of interest screening, whether the meeting is of the type that would not have a direct and predictable effect on any financial interest that could be anticipated. In order to determine that there is no direct and predictable effect on any potential financial interest, the meeting topic and any anticipated FDA actions as a result of the advisory committee's advice would need to be well understood. In many cases, staff will be unable to conclude at this stage that the meeting topic will not have a direct and predictable effect on any potential financial interest and will need to proceed to Step 3 and subsequent steps. Nevertheless, in proceeding through the subsequent steps in this guidance, staff will analyze reported financial interests and may determine for an individual that the outcome of the meeting will not have a direct and predictable effect on his or her reported interest(s).

Under 5 CFR 2640.103(a)(3)(i), a particular matter will have a "direct" effect on a financial interest if there is a close causal link between any decision or action to be taken in the matter and any expected effect of the matter on the financial interest. An effect may be direct even though it does not occur immediately. A particular matter will not have a direct effect on a financial interest, however, if the chain of causation is attenuated or is contingent upon the occurrence of events that are speculative or that are independent of, and unrelated to, the matter. A particular matter will have a "predictable" effect if there is a real, as opposed to a speculative, possibility that the matter will affect the financial interest. It is not necessary, however, that the magnitude of the gain or loss be known, and the dollar amount of the gain or loss is immaterial (5 CFR 2640.103(a)(3)(ii)).

For example, a meeting that will affect the legal rights or responsibilities of a known organization or organizations, such as most potential advisory committee recommendations pertaining to marketing status, labeling, post-marketing requirements, and device classification or reclassification, would ordinarily have a "direct and predictable effect" on financial interests. In some cases, however, the meeting topic will be so general that to determine any effect on any organization's financial interests would be speculative. In these cases, it may be concluded that the particular matter will not have a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of any organization.

If the answer to this question is "no," no further inquiry is necessary to determine whether there is a conflict of interest, and all members may fully participate in the meeting.

If the answer to this question is "yes," or staff cannot determine at this stage that the meeting topic will not have a direct and predictable effect on any potential financial interest, proceed to step 3.

D. Step 3 – Identify Potentially Affected Products/Organizations and Request that the Employee Complete the Financial Disclosure Form

Once it is determined that the meeting will likely have a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of an organization or organizations, staff will need to

identify potentially affected products and/or organizations and request that the member complete FDA Form 3410, a financial disclosure form.⁴

Potentially affected organizations generally include companies or entities that could be affected by the outcome of the advisory committee proceedings and any FDA decision based on the committee's recommendations. For example, the sponsor of a new drug application that is being presented to an advisory committee and sponsors of drugs that closely compete with the subject drug would all be "potentially affected organizations" for which the financial interest of the SGE or regular Government employee in the organization would need to be considered for potential conflict of interest.

The list of potentially affected products and/or organizations should be transmitted to the member with the FDA Form 3410 so that the member can complete his financial disclosure to the agency, referring to the list.

E. Step 4 -- Does the employee, or persons/organizations whose interests are imputed to him, have a financial interest in one or more of the potentially affected products and/or organizations?

Under Step 4, staff should examine the member's financial disclosure form and determine whether the member or the persons or organizations whose interests are imputed to him have financial interests in the potentially affected products or

⁴ Note that for some meetings, the agency may determine that a complete and efficient review of potential conflicts of interest may be accomplished by reviewing OGE Form 450, which requires the employee to list all financial interests in a broad range of areas. If review of a current OGE Form 450 is conducted, it can replace the more specific review under FDA Form 3410.

organizations.⁵ The term "financial interest" means the potential for gain or loss to the employee (or persons/organizations whose interests are imputed to him) as a result of governmental action on the particular matter (5 CFR 2640.103(b)). Disqualifying financial interests include only financial interests that are currently held.⁶ In general, staff should consider the financial interests (if any) of:

- The member;
- The member's spouse and minor children;
- The member's general partner(s);
- Prospective employers of the member⁷; and
- Any organization in which the member serves as an officer, director, trustee, employee, or general partner.

The nature and amount of those financial interests also needs to be determined.

If the member and the persons or organizations whose interests are imputed to him do not have any financial interests in the potentially affected products or organizations, then that individual may fully participate in the meeting.⁸ Alternatively, if the member or persons or

⁵ In some cases, an advisory committee member will identify a relevant financial interest that is not included in the agency's list of potentially affected products and/or organizations. Staff should include this interest when working through the remaining applicable steps for that member, and add the entity to the list of potentially affected products and/or organizations to consider for other members.

⁶ In some cases, an employee will have a financial interest or relationship that, while not a disqualifying financial interest, may cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question his impartiality in the matter. *See* 5 CFR 2635.502. Such matters should be evaluated under this regulatory standard and, if appropriate, an impartiality determination should be requested.

⁷ A prospective employer would be anyone with whom the employee has any arrangement concerning future employment or with whom he/she is seeking or negotiating for employment.

⁸ See note 6.

organizations whose interests are imputed to him has financial interests in the potentially affected products and/or organizations, staff should proceed to step 5.

F. Step 5 – Will the Particular Matter Have a Direct and Predictable Effect on the Financial Interest of the Employee and/or Persons/Organizations Whose Interests are Imputed to Him?

Under Step 5, staff should examine the financial interest(s) that the employee has reported on his financial disclosure form and determine whether the particular matter to be discussed at the meeting will have a direct and predictable effect on any current financial interest of the employee or the financial interest of a person or organization whose interests are imputed to him. Although the question of “direct and predictable effect” has been examined in Step 2 for the effect of the meeting as a whole, here the question is individualized to the particular financial interests held by, or imputed to, the member. For each interest, staff should ask if there is a close causal link between any decision or action to be taken in the matter and any expected effect of the matter on the financial interest, and if there is a real, as opposed to a speculative, possibility that the matter will affect the financial interest. For further discussion about the meaning of “direct and predictable effect,” refer back to Section IV C of this document.

Financial interests that ordinarily will not be affected in a direct and predictable manner include a grant or contract between an organization and the employee's university to conduct research on a product that is not the subject of the particular matter before the advisory committee or a competitor product (see 5 CFR 2640.103(a)(3), example 2).

If the answer to this question is “no,” no further inquiry is necessary to determine whether there is a conflict of interest, and the member may fully participate in the meeting.⁹

If the answer to this question is “yes,” you should proceed to Step 6.

G. Step 6 – After Applying Applicable Regulatory Exemptions, Does the Employee or Persons/Organizations Whose Interests are Imputed to Him Have a Disqualifying Financial Interest?

Under Step 6, staff should consider whether regulatory exemptions apply to the financial interests identified under Step 5.

Certain financial interests have been determined by the Director of the Office of Government Ethics to be too remote or too inconsequential to affect the integrity of the services of the Government officers or employees (see 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(2)). The regulations issued by the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) expressly exempt these financial interests from consideration (see 5 CFR 2640.201-206). Likewise, section 712(c)(2)(A) of the Act excludes from consideration those same interests exempted in the OGE regulations.

Staff should consider whether any of the following exemptions apply. For further description of each exemption, see the applicable provision in 5 CFR 2640, Subpart B.

⁹ See note 6.

- Diversified mutual funds and unit investment trusts (5 CFR 2640.201(a)).
- Certain sector mutual funds (see 5 CFR 2640.201(b)).
- Certain employee benefit plans (5 CFR 2640.201(c)).
- Certain matters affecting mutual funds and unit investment trusts (5 CFR 2640.201(d)).
- *De minimis* exemptions for interests in securities (5 CFR 2640.202).
- Certain financial interests that may arise for individuals on a leave of absence from an institution of higher education (see 5 CFR 2640.203(b)).
- Certain financial interests that may arise for individuals employed by one campus of a multi-campus State institution of higher education (see 5 CFR 2640.203(c)).
- Certain financial interests that may arise for individuals whose financial interests arise from Federal Government employment or from Social Security or veterans benefits (see 5 CFR 2640.203(d)).
- Certain employment interests of SGEs serving on advisory committees (5 CFR 2640.203(g)).
- Hospital employment and use/prescription of medical products for patients for advisory committee matters concerning medical products (5 CFR 2640.203(i)).

- Certain non-voting representative members of FDA standing technical advisory committees (5 CFR 2640.203(j)).

If, after applying the regulatory exemptions, there are no disqualifying financial interests, the member may fully participate in the advisory committee meeting.¹⁰

If the employee or those persons or organizations whose interests are imputed to him have disqualifying financial interests, staff should proceed to Step 7.

H. Step 7 – Are There Disqualifying Financial Interests For Which a Waiver Would Not Be Considered?

Under Step 7, staff should review the disqualifying financial interests and determine whether any is such a significant conflict of interest that a waiver would not be considered.

The following list includes the disqualifying financial interests that are considered so significant that a waiver would not be issued:

- The SGE or his/her employing institution receives (or is negotiating) a contract, grant, or Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) from a firm that is the sponsor of the product application that is the subject of the particular matter involving specific parties to be discussed at the advisory committee meeting, and the SGE is or will be the principal investigator or co-principle investigator on the same product/indication that is the subject of the meeting.

¹⁰ See note 6.

- The SGE or his/her employing institution receives (or is negotiating) a contract, grant, or CRADA from a firm that is the sponsor of a product labeled for the same indication (or, if an investigational product, that has the same indication for use) as the product that is the subject of the particular matter involving specific parties to be discussed at the advisory committee meeting, and the SGE is or will be the principal investigator or co-principle investigator on the competing product.

- The SGE or his/her employing institution receives (or is negotiating) a contract, grant, or CRADA from a firm that is the sponsor of the product that is the subject of the particular matter involving specific parties to be discussed at the advisory committee meeting, and the SGE is the head of the department that is conducting or will conduct the studies on the same product/indication that is the subject of the meeting, and the SGE:
 - Receives or will receive personnel or salary support; or
 - Designs/will design or advises/will advise on any aspect of the clinical trial(s); or
 - Reviews or will review data or reports from the clinical trial(s).

- The SGE or his/her employing institution receives (or is negotiating) a contract, grant, or CRADA from a firm that is the sponsor of a product labeled for the same indication (or, if an investigational product, that has the same indication for use) as the product that is the subject of the particular matter involving specific parties to be discussed at the advisory

committee meeting, and the SGE is the head of the department that is conducting or will conduct the studies on the competing product, and the SGE:

- Receives or will receive personnel or salary support; or
- Designs/will design or advises/will advise on any aspect of the clinical trial(s); or
- Reviews or will review data or reports from the clinical trial(s).

If staff determines that the individual has one or more of the above listed financial interests, the member should not be considered for a waiver and would not participate in the advisory committee meeting.

Alternatively, if the answer to the question is “no,” staff should proceed to Step 8.

I. Step 8 – Is the Combined Value of the Employee’s Personal Disqualifying Financial Interests and Those of His Spouse and Minor Children \$50,000 or Less?

Under Step 8, staff should calculate the total value of the disqualifying financial interests that are his personal interests, those of his spouse, and those of his minor children. Disqualifying financial interests include only financial interests that are currently held. Some examples of an employee’s personal financial interests would be stocks or investments that he owns, his primary employment relationship, his consulting work, patents/royalties/trademarks owned by him, his work as an expert witness, and his teaching/speaking/writing work. If the employee’s spouse and/or minor children have

personal disqualifying interests, these should be included in the total value. In calculating the value of an employee's disqualifying financial interests attributed to a financial interest that extends into the future, such as a contract or employment, staff should include current financial interests over a one year period of time. For example, if the employee has a \$100,000 personal consulting contract that covers a five year period of work, he would be deemed to have a financial interest in the consulting contract of \$20,000 per year. If the employee's relationship is ongoing but there is no specified dollar amount for future work, staff should calculate the amount of the financial interest over the previous 12 months.

If the combined value of these disqualifying financial interests is greater than \$50,000, the member would not ordinarily be considered for a waiver and would not participate in the advisory committee meeting.¹¹

If the answer to the question is "yes," staff should proceed to Step 9.¹²

J. Step 9 – Is the Individual's Participation Necessary to Afford the Advisory Committee Essential Expertise?

Under Step 9, staff will determine whether a waiver may be considered to permit the member to participate in the advisory committee meeting. As a policy matter, FDA is

¹¹ In limited cases, FDA may determine that a conflict of interest waiver is appropriate, provided that the relevant statutory and regulatory standards are met. In such cases, the Commissioner of FDA will review the request and make a determination on the appropriateness of a waiver.

¹² Note that, even if the member has \$0 personal and immediate family disqualifying financial interests, staff should still proceed to Step 8, as other imputed financial interests will require evaluation as to whether a waiver may be granted.

choosing to limit the waivers the agency grants and harmonize our implementation of the various statutory provisions by applying a more stringent test than would be required in some cases. Before FDA grants a waiver, we will determine that the individual's participation is necessary to afford the advisory committee essential expertise.

As discussed in Section II of this document, FDA must evaluate the potential for conflict of interest, and may grant waivers, under three statutory provisions: section 712(c)(2) of the Act, 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1), and 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3). The "essential expertise" test is the standard for granting a waiver under section 712(c)(2)(B) of the Act for a member who has a personal financial interest (or whose spouse or minor child has a financial interest) that could be affected by the advice given with respect to the matter. Because this is generally a stricter test than the balancing test contemplated in 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3) for an SGE -- whether the "need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest created by the financial interest involved" -- when FDA finds that an SGE qualifies for a waiver under section 712(c)(2)(B) of the Act, the SGE would ordinarily also qualify for a waiver under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3).

In order to determine that the employee's participation is necessary to afford the committee essential expertise, staff should perform a needs analysis that demonstrates that the member provides important expertise that may not be feasibly acquired through alternative means. The test does not impose a standard of indispensability or demonstration that it would be impossible for the committee to accomplish its work without the member's expertise; however, it requires more than a showing of inconvenience to the committee or FDA from the loss of the member. To determine

whether the “essential expertise” test is met, FDA’s judgment may be informed by Office of Government Ethics (OGE) regulations at 5 CFR 2640.302(b) that interpret the requirements for issuing a waiver pursuant to 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3).

Some factors that may be considered include:

- The uniqueness of the individual’s qualifications (5 U.S.C. 2640.302(b)(3));
- The difficulty of locating a similarly qualified individual without a disqualifying financial interest to serve on the committee (5 U.S.C. 2640.302(b)(4));
- The SGE will provide expertise that is necessary to the issues on the agenda and that would otherwise be unavailable. Expertise may ordinarily be considered unavailable if staff has failed to find similar expertise on other standing committees or among existing consultants, and has made reasonable efforts to survey the field;
- For a product-specific meeting, the product in question is studied widely and it would be difficult to find a qualified SGE who was not at least as involved/conflicted with the product or a competing product.

In most cases, staff should document that a search for an equally qualified, less conflicted individual has been conducted and the results of that search.

If staff concludes that the individual’s participation is not necessary to afford the advisory committee essential expertise, the individual may not participate in the meeting.

Alternatively, if staff concludes that the individual's participation is necessary to afford the advisory committee essential expertise, staff should proceed to Step 10a, if the individual is an SGE, or Step 10b, if the individual is a regular Government employee.

**K. Step 10a – If the Individual is a Special Government Employee,
Does the Need for the Individual's Services Outweigh the Potential
for a Conflict of Interest Created by the Financial Interest
Involved?**

Under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3), a provision that applies to advisory committee members who are SGEs, the standard for evaluating whether a waiver may be granted is whether the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest created by the financial interest involved.

In determining whether the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest, we may consider a number of factors, including the type of interest that is creating the disqualification, the relationship of the person whose financial interest is involved to the member, the uniqueness of the individual's qualifications, the difficulty of locating a similarly qualified individual without a disqualifying financial interest, the dollar value of the disqualifying financial interest, and the extent to which the disqualifying financial interest could be affected by the actions of the advisory committee. (see 5 CFR 2640.302(b)).

Because staff has already determined in Step 9 that the individual's participation is necessary to afford the advisory committee essential expertise, in most cases, the individual will already have met the balancing test required under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3).

FDA expects that an SGE who has reached this stage in the algorithm (i.e., met the "essential expertise" test outlined in Step 9) would, in most cases, also qualify for a waiver under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3). However, the agency will ensure that waivers will be issued to only those individuals who qualify for a waiver under all applicable statutory provisions and will fully analyze the matter under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3).

If staff concludes that the need for the individual's services does not outweigh the potential for a conflict of interest, the individual does not qualify for a waiver and may not participate in the meeting.

Alternatively, if staff concludes that the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest, staff should proceed to Step 11.

L. Step 10b – If the Individual is a Regular Government Employee, Is the Financial Interest Not So Substantial as to be Deemed Likely to Affect the Integrity of the Services Provided by that Individual?

Under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1), a provision that applies to advisory committee members who are regular Government employees, the standard for evaluating whether a

waiver may be granted is whether the member's financial interest is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services provided by that individual.

In determining whether the member's financial interest is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services provided by that individual, we may consider a number of factors, including the type of financial interest that is creating the disqualification, the relationship of the person whose financial interest is involved to the member, the dollar value of the disqualifying financial interest, the nature and importance of the employee's role in the matter, the sensitivity of the matter, and the need for the employee's services in the particular matter (see 5 CFR 2640.301(b)).

If staff determines that this standard is not met – that the member's financial interest is so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services provided by that individual, the individual does not qualify for a waiver and he may not participate in the advisory committee meeting.

Alternatively, if staff concludes that the member's financial interest is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services provided by that individual, staff should proceed to Step 11.

M. Step 11 – Waiver May Be Recommended If Consistent With Waiver Cap.

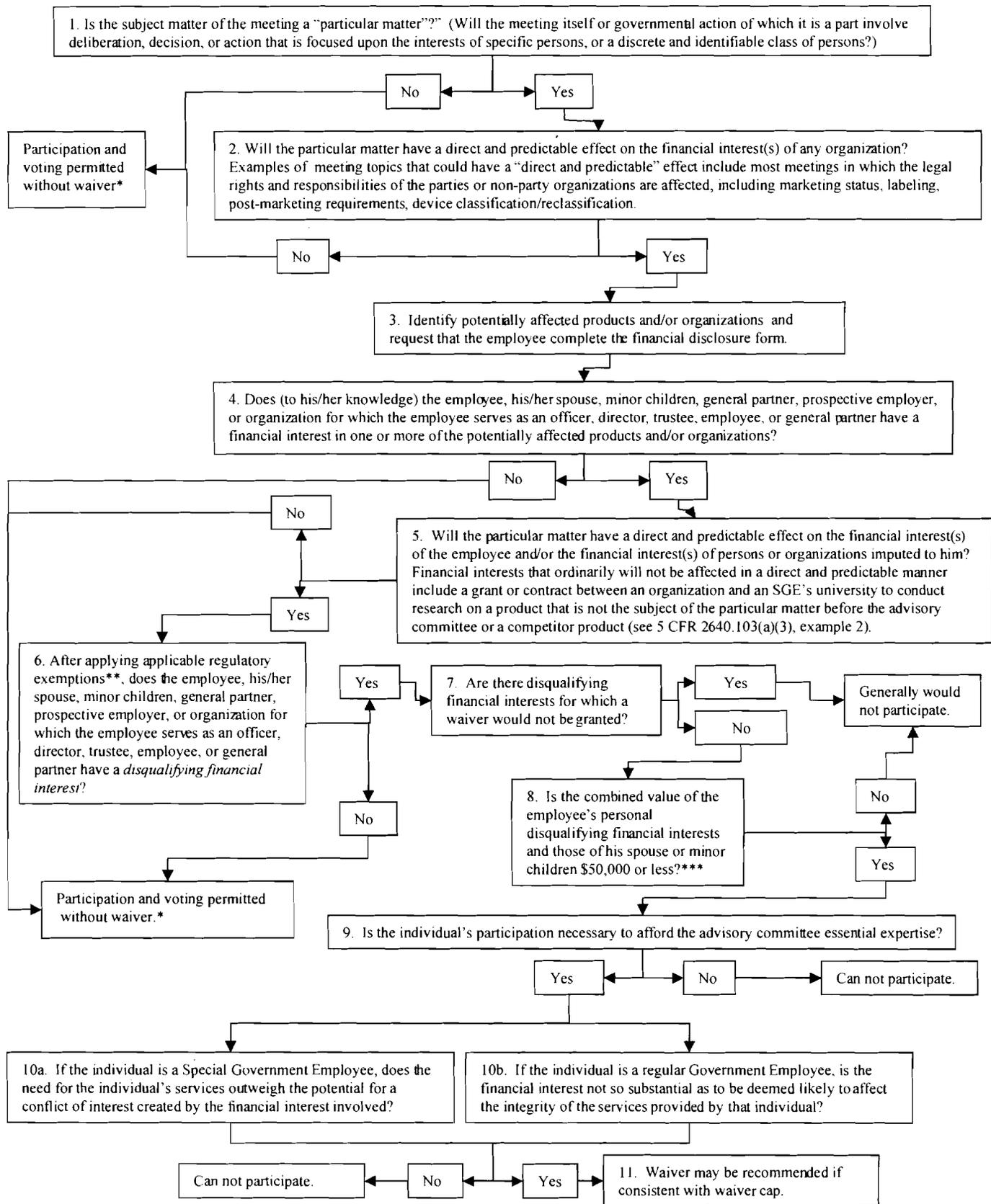
In reaching Step 11, staff has concluded that a waiver would meet the statutory standards and FDA's more stringent policy considerations. Under Step 11, staff should evaluate whether recommending a waiver for the individual would be consistent with the

target rate established for the current fiscal year for issuing waivers under section 712(c)(2)(C) of the Act. Provided that the applicable waiver cap would not be exceeded, staff may recommend that a waiver for the individual be granted. FDA has discretion to issue limited waivers under 18 U.S.C. 208 and under section 712(c)(2)(C) of the Act; e.g., by limiting participation to non-voting. If staff decides to recommend that a waiver be granted, they should determine which type of waiver(s) (including any recommended limitations) is appropriate to recommend to FDA officials who will review and decide whether to approve the waiver.¹³

If the individual, his spouse, or minor child has personal disqualifying financial interests, a waiver under section 712 of the Act should be prepared. In such cases, 18 U.S.C. 208 also applies and a 208 waiver should be prepared. If the individual is a regular Government employee, a 208(b)(1) waiver should be recommended. If the individual is an SGE, a 208(b)(3) waiver should be recommended.

If the individual, his spouse, and minor children do not have personal disqualifying interests, but the financial interests of other persons or organizations (other than those of his spouse and minor children) have been imputed to him, section 712(c)(2)(A) of the Act does not apply, and staff should not prepare a 712 waiver. However, 18 U.S.C. 208 does apply in such cases, and a 208 waiver should be prepared. If the individual is a regular Government employee, a 208(b)(1) waiver should be recommended. If the individual is an SGE, a 208(b)(3) waiver should be recommended.

¹³ As a practical matter, staff may prepare a single waiver for an individual that includes the necessary information for all applicable statutory authorities.



*In some cases, an employee will have a financial interest or relationship that, while not a disqualifying financial interest, may cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question his impartiality in the matter. See 5 CFR 2635.502. Such matters should be evaluated under that regulatory standard and, if appropriate, an impartiality determination should be requested.

**The applicable regulatory exemptions are found in 5 CFR 2640.201-206.

***In rare cases, staff may pursue whether a conflict of interest waiver is appropriate where the combined value of the employee's personal disqualifying financial interests and those of his spouse or minor children is over \$50,000. In such cases, the Commissioner of FDA will review and make a determination on the appropriateness of the waiver.