

COBRA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy

Version 1.1 June 2022

I. COBRA Code of Conduct

The Crustal Ocean Biosphere Research Accelerator (COBRA) is an international research coordination network funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation and based at the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences. The mission of COBRA is to accelerate research on the structure, function, resilience, and ecosystem services of the crustal ocean biosphere to inform decision making. To fulfill this mission, COBRA participants need to conduct themselves to the highest standards in their professional activities.

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to provide guidance on the behaviors to which members and participants will adhere and to set forth enforceable rules of unacceptable conduct that can result in termination of membership and participation. COBRA is committed to providing in-person and virtual meeting spaces where all participants feel welcome, safe, and supported. This Code of Conduct seeks to reinforce positive behavior in the scientific and learning environment. **By registering for and attending COBRA events, participants agree to review and abide by this Code of Conduct.**

The following behaviors are expected of participants at COBRA events:

1. Participants will treat others and communicate with dignity and respect, regardless of their own or another's race, color, national or ethnic origin, immigration status, religion, age, marital status, parental status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic background, educational background, disability, military service, or veteran status.
2. Participants will promote a supportive, respectful, inclusive, and welcoming environment that encourages open and honest communication and sharing of diverse points of view from different backgrounds and perspectives.
3. Participants will give fair, inclusive, and equitable consideration and acknowledgement to all students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty, professionals, and amateurs.
4. Participants will strive to promote diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of COBRA events.
5. Participants will avoid research misconduct, fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism and protect confidential and proprietary information.
6. Participants will recognize and report potential conflicts of interest to prevent personal interests, compensation, and relationships from interfering with professional activities. Please see more detailed discussion in the next section.
7. Participants will maintain clear, accurate records of research in ways that allow verification and replication of their work by others.
8. Participants will strive to promote safety in research and the workplace, including in the laboratory and field settings.
9. Participants engaged in student mentoring will encourage all students in a respectful manner that is inclusive of diverse backgrounds and experiences and is sensitive to the power imbalances in student-advisor relationships.

10. Participants will not attempt to injure the reputation or professional opportunities for others by false, biased, or undocumented claims.
11. Participants will not practice, incite, encourage, or condone prohibited behavior (as listed below), including but not limited to harassment in any form.
12. Participants will observe the guidelines for the reporting of prohibited behavior and recognize that such guidelines are in effect at all times during the event.

The following behaviors are prohibited during COBRA events, whether in person or remote:

1. Recording and/or re-posting meeting material without express permission of the presenter and the meeting organizers (for example, taking photographs, screenshots or recording video during virtual meetings).
2. Non-accidental disruption of meeting proceedings (for example, interrupting speakers, presentations, or receptions)
3. Harassment or bullying in any form, including sexual harassment, denigrating jokes, stereotyping, or a recurring pattern of [microinvalidations](#), [microassaults](#), [microaggressions](#), and [microinsults](#).
4. Physical abuse or intimidation, including disregard for safety.
5. Intentional, unwelcomed physical behaviors including but not limited to stalking, physical contact, and aggressive or intimidating displays and/or body language.
6. Verbal or written abuse, intimidation, or threats.
7. Violating previously communicated (verbally or nonverbally) physical, emotional, and sexual boundaries of others through the continuation of otherwise prohibited behaviors, or through verbal or written comments founded on any personal aspect of another individual.
8. Any other behaviors that may be reasonably be interpreted to create, contribute to, or maintain an environment that is hostile toward or hurtful to a person or group.

Consequences of unacceptable behavior:

- Anyone requested to stop unacceptable behavior is expected to comply immediately.
- COBRA event organizers and Bigelow Laboratory may take any necessary and appropriate disciplinary action, including immediate and permanent removal of the individual from the event, communication of the prohibited behavior to the individual's employer, and/or cancellation of any current financial support previously offered.
- COBRA and Bigelow Laboratory reserve the right to prohibit attendance at future meetings or other COBRA and/or Bigelow Laboratory events.

Reporting unacceptable behavior:

- If you are the subject of unacceptable behavior or have witnessed any such behavior, please immediately notify the COBRA leadership member(s) at the event to assist with addressing the issue. If it is not readily apparent who to contact, or if the leadership member is the person displaying unacceptable behavior, please email your concern to the COBRA Director, Dr. Beth Orcutt borcutt@bigelow.org.
- Anyone reporting unacceptable behavior can expect that their concerns will be handled as confidentially as possible, without threat of retaliation.

Training Recommendations

COBRA participants are strongly encouraged to explore options and take suitable training to make sure they are familiar with Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) issues and obligations, such as norms, principles, regulations, and rules governing the practice of research. In the U.S., anyone who receives federal funds for research is required by the government to complete basic training that covers RCR. At most US institutions, this typically requires completion of a basic, online tutorial and periodic refresher tutorials. For example, RCR training tutorials are available through the [CITI program](#), which was developed for use by researchers funded through the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), and/or U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Many states and institutions have their own RCR materials, too.

Anyone who receives COBRA funding through contract or reimbursement will be asked to certify that they have taken the required RCR training at their institution and/or gone through the Basic RCR tutorials available from the CITI program. If RCR training is not available at the recipient's institution, the recipient may petition COBRA to pay the cost of taking the RCR Basic training.

II. Conflict of Interest Policy

A. Definition of Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest (Col) occurs when an individual has multiple financial, personal or professional interests or is involved in multiple activities, one of which could compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, the motivation for an act in another. This definition is based on perception or potential for conflict, rather than requiring proof that an improper action or decision has been made. This focus on avoidance of Col is important for maintaining collegial and public trust, particularly when difficult leadership and/or research decisions are made. Additional information on conflicts of interest on academic and research projects can be found here:

<https://ethicscenter.csl.illinois.edu/>

<https://coi.ucsf.edu/>

http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr_conflicts/foundation/

B. Application of Conflict of Interest Policy

All persons providing scientific, technical, or administrative review of materials that could lead to a funding or participation decision must disclose an existing Col. In the context of proposal review, a Col may include (but is not limited to): being employed by the same institution, having a history of student/postdoctoral-advisor relationship, having a long-term professional relationship with a PI or Col, having had a close personal or family relationship, and being a recent (within three years) co-author on a publication or a co-PI on a recent proposal.

Decision makers who have a Col with a proposal under review may not be part of conversations in which that proposal is evaluated or discussed. If proposals are to be ranked, a decision maker with a Col will not be permitted to rank a conflicted proposal. In some cases, this might require delegation of decision authority to alternative members of the COBRA Executive Committee.

This Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy has been adapted from materials from the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, the Center for Dark Energy Biosphere Investigations, the Deep Sea Biology Society, and the American Geophysical Union.