

Public-Private Partnerships

An FAQ Prepared by the CDC Foundation

What is the CDC Foundation's relationship with CDC?

Authorized by Congress in 1992, the CDC Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges partnerships between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and private sector organizations. Classified as a 501(c)(3) public charity, the Foundation is not a government agency or a division of CDC. To ensure that the Foundation remains independent from CDC, its founding legislation prohibits the CDC director or other CDC employees from sitting on the Foundation board. However, Foundation leaders work closely with CDC leaders and scientists to ensure that the organization's overall strategic direction and portfolio of programs and activities have the greatest possible impact for CDC and public health.

What kinds of partnerships does the CDC Foundation facilitate?

Partnerships forged by the CDC Foundation include traditional philanthropic donor/grantee relationships, collaborative alliances between CDC and a single private-sector organization, broad multi-partner initiatives that may include more than one funding stream, and research collaborations that leverage CDC's and partners' expertise to achieve mutual public health objectives. A listing of CDC Foundation's partnerships is available at : <http://www.cdcfoundation.org/what/programs>

How does the CDC Foundation add value for CDC?

The CDC Foundation helps CDC pursue innovative ideas that might not be possible without the support of external partners. The support needed is most often funding, but also can include expertise, information, or introductions to additional partners. CDC Foundation partnerships help CDC launch new programs, expand existing programs that show promise, or establish a proof of concept through a pilot project before scaling it up. In each partnership, external support gives CDC the flexibility to quickly and effectively connect with the experts, information and technology needed to address a public health challenge.

How are programs with external partners initiated?

Some partnership ideas begin with a CDC staff member who has an idea and wants to collaborate with a partner to make it happen. At other times, a private-sector organization has specific public health interests that are also of interest to CDC as part of its public health agenda.

While each partnership is unique, most CDC Foundation programs begin with an exploratory conversation, originating either with experts at CDC or with representatives of potential partner organizations. CDC Foundation Advancement staff members help guide the conversation toward areas of mutual interests – where a public health problem of interest to both parties could be addressed by combining resources and expertise. See partnership cycle: <http://www.cdcfoundation.org/what/partnership-cycle>

Specifically, how do you select and review projects?

CDC Foundation programs begin as a program concept outline. The program concept outline is developed by an expert or team of experts at CDC – sometimes after the CDC Foundation has facilitated exploratory conversations between CDC and partner organizations, and other times before any conversations with the CDC Foundation or other potential partners have taken place.

Once developed, the lead CDC scientist for the program submits the program concept outline through a review process at CDC. CDC leaders at progressively higher levels in the agency review the program concept outline. They each evaluate how the program supports CDC's mission, aligns with CDC science, affects other agency programs, and adheres to federal policies on public-private partnerships and conflicts of interest. At any point in this review process, questions and concerns may be raised, the concept outline may be sent back to the lead scientist for additional information or revision, or the concept may be rejected.

Once the program concept has completed the review process at CDC, ending with final approval by a representative in CDC's Office of the Director, it is submitted to the CDC Foundation's executive team for review. The Foundation's executive team evaluates the program concept outline to determine if:

- the program will have a meaningful impact for CDC and for public health
- the program complements CDC's priorities and ongoing work
- the CDC Foundation has the capacity to successfully fundraise for and subsequently manage the program
- the program work scope, goals and potential funders represent no reasonable conflict-of-interest for the CDC Foundation, our staff or our board of directors

If the CDC Foundation executive team accepts the program concept outline, the Foundation's Advancement department begins the formal process of securing funding. The executive team may also request additional information before making a decision, or they may reject the program concept outline.

Are there kinds of programs or partnerships you will not engage in?

The CDC Foundation does not accept all offers of partnership. The Foundation turns down funding from donors when the project is not of interest to CDC or when the donor has inappropriate expectations.

Specifically, the CDC Foundation will not enter into partnerships that:

- lack an identifiable, substantial public health benefit
- lack a clear, identifiable, substantial leadership role for CDC
- require exclusivity (only one funding partner may participate) or otherwise create the impression of a "brand affiliation," endorsement or other form of advertising for the funding partner
- create any real or perceived conflict of interest (financial or personal) for staff or Board members of CDC, the CDC Foundation or their families
- conflict in any way with current partnership and gift policies governing CDC and HHS

How do you ensure that a project does not present any conflicts of interest for CDC as a federal agency?

The CDC Foundation serves as a vehicle to enable CDC to act with the private sector, but we rely on CDC's governance and policies and its high standards of science to guide every partnership we build. Projects facilitated by the CDC Foundation go through a rigorous review and sign-off process through both CDC Foundation and CDC leadership at many levels to ensure that the project 1) is relevant for CDC, 2) has appropriate research methodologies, 3) maintains CDC's research independence and 4) does not present any conflicts of interest.

How does CDC prevent conflicts of interests?

CDC is an operating division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Therefore, CDC follows the conflict of interest and governance policies of HHS:
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/special/conflict.html>

In addition to the policies and procedures of HHS, CDC has specific policies and rules governing conflict of interest, public health and science. The policy that evaluates the potential for conflict of interest for projects involving CDC staff can be found here:
<http://www.cdc.gov/od/science/policies/authorship.htm>.

What policies guide CDC's use of private funds?

CDC has a gift acceptance policy. Each program in the agency must be aware of the policy and familiar with its specifics and functionality.
<http://www.cdc.gov/about/ethics/resources/topics/gifts1.htm>

CDC must evaluate when a gift offered by a private entity, e.g. company, foundation, enterprise, etc., may create a conflict of interest or may be from a prohibited source. The fact that a potential donor is a prohibited source does not necessarily mean that a proposed gift may not be accepted, only that it must be carefully evaluated for possible conflicts.

CDC's statutory authority to accept gifts does allow some discretion in the expenditure of private funds. Generally, donated funds are not subject to all of the restrictions applicable to direct appropriations from the U.S. Congress. They are, however, still considered "public funds." Gift funds can only be used in furtherance of CDC's stated mission.

How do you ensure that CDC's work is not influenced by a single funder or group of funders?

Because CDC is a federal agency, all scientific findings resulting from CDC research are available to the public and open to the broader scientific community for review. Funding for CDC's work provided through the CDC Foundation is not contingent on the outcomes of research or other scientific activity being favorable to one or more funding partners. The majority of the Foundation's programs involve use of existing data or dissemination of key messages to extend CDC's reach beyond activities specifically included in federal appropriations. When the CDC Foundation accepts funding, we execute a legal agreement with partners stating that CDC is responsible for the control of the content and the selection of individuals and entities that will provide expertise, materials and other resources for execution of the project.

What are your sources of funding?

As a private 501(c)(3) public charity, the CDC Foundation receives charitable contributions and philanthropic grants from individuals, foundations, corporations, universities, NGOs and other organizations to advance the work of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unlike many large foundations, the CDC Foundation does not have a large endowment to support our activities. The CDC Foundation builds in an administrative fee, typically 13.5 percent, into each grant or agreement to support our operating costs. Through Congressional authorization, CDC also contributes some funds to the Foundation annually to help cover operational costs. (CDC Foundation Reports and Financials: <http://www.cdcfoundation.org/who/financial>) For four consecutive years, the CDC Foundation has received the highest (four star) rating from Charity Navigator, which annually assesses fiscal responsibility and financial health of organizations.