



*Society for
Epidemiologic
Research*

Guidelines for SER Executive Committee Review of External Opportunities

Rationale:

From time to time, the Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER) receives inquiries about partnering with an external organization. Oftentimes, this partnering would require SER to contact its members about their interest in an event or organization, although other types of partnering opportunities also arise. These guidelines have been prepared to help the Executive Committee evaluate such opportunities, and to assure a uniform and transparent review process. The Executive Director is responsible for working with leadership to consistently implement these guidelines.

Primary considerations:

SER Mission—The Executive Committee should favorably weigh applications that directly advance the two main SER missions: (1) to foster epidemiologic research, and (2) to connect students and new researchers with senior epidemiologists in a meaningful way. Applications that indirectly advance the SER missions or do not advance the SER missions should be weighed less favorably.

Competition—The Executive Committee should weigh applications less favorably if the application advances the interests of one member, or a member's organization, against the interest of another member, or another member's organization. For example, a member may propose to solicit SER members for participation in a training event to be sponsored by a competitive grant application for which other members may also apply (even without SER assistance). In this circumstance, helping one member's organization may put another member's organization at a competitive disadvantage, which should be weighed unfavorably.

Access—The Executive Committee should avoid external partnering opportunities that involve the release of membership information to an external partner. Contact with members should come only from SER, and all such communication should be subject to review, editing, and/or refusal by the Executive Committee or Officers.

Policy recommendations—Historically, SER usually does not make joining policy statements regarding public health, medical practice, research priorities, or other topics directly or indirectly related to epidemiologic research. One of the main missions of the Society is to foster research, which members universally endorse. Not all members agree on the implications and policies that rest on that research, which is the fundamental rationale for why the Executive Committee should maintain this view.

Secondary considerations:

Costs and benefits—As stewards for SER’s resources, the Executive Committee should weigh the costs and benefits associated with external opportunities. Costs should include the reallocation of limited SER staff and Executive Committee effort. Benefits should include accumulated goodwill.

Precedent—The Executive Committee should consider previous similar external opportunities that were agreed to or declined. If agreed to, the Executive Committee should consider whether the opportunity fared well towards its stated aims, or poorly. If declined, the Executive Committee should consider whether the lost opportunity was regrettable.

Timeliness—The Executive Committee should weigh more favorably applications for external opportunities that give the Committee ample time for due consideration, generally at least two months before an answer is required.

Duration—The Executive Committee should be mindful of the fact that its membership turns over completely every third year. Obligations that extend beyond the duration of any current member of the committee should be weighed less favorably.

Goodwill—The Executive Committee should be wary of any external opportunity that they reasonably foresee may diminish the standing of SER in the view of its stakeholders.

Exception for Universal Principles of Research Conduct and Ethics—

While SER usually does not make or join policy statements on public health, medical practice, or research priorities, the Executive Committee may consider making or joining policy statements that pertain to the conduct and ethics of research, provided these statements reflect principles that are universally endorsed by the epidemiologic community and aligns with SER’s mission to foster epidemiologic research. Such statements should be limited to issues of general research conduct (e.g., access, infrastructure, policy, etc.), research integrity, ethical standards, and/or professional conduct, and must not extend to interpretations of research findings or policy recommendations. The Committee should ensure that any endorsement has broad consensus from members.