

# Conflict of Interest Policy for the iPlant Collaborative Board of Directors

## **General Statement of Policy**

All members of the iPlant Collaborative are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct. This includes the Board of Directors, faculty, staff, students, visiting scientists, and educators. The success of the iPlant Collaborative in performing its mission depends on the effectiveness and evenhandedness of its decision making processes. If judgments are biased because of conflicting outside interests, the decision making process is compromised. The iPlant Collaborative must continually earn the public's confidence in its integrity. To do so, each iPlant member must endeavor to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Additional information is provided below to guide iPlant Collaborative members and to inform the public concerning potential conflicts of interest.

*This document focuses on general guidelines for the iPlant Board of directors.*

## **Selection and Role of the iPlant Collaborative Board of Directors**

The role of the Board of Directors will be to provide oversight of Project Management and to evaluate and prioritize community proposals for Grand Challenge Workshops (GCW) and Grand Challenge Projects (GCP) that will receive iPlant Collaborative (iPC) resources. The Chair will be appointed by Project Management and the Members will be appointed by the Nominating Committee. Members will have broad experience and knowledge of plant biology, computational biology, and/or the computer and information sciences. They will be well known and broadly respected by the communities they represent, and they will be thoughtful, fair-minded and forward-thinking. They will be selected to ensure that they are not compromised by significant conflicts of interest. They will be responsible for soliciting and acting on community input. The BoD will be the community's vehicle for determining the priorities and major activities of the iPC. Terms will be limited to three years, with one third of the members replaced annually by the Nominating Committee, beginning 18 months after the BoD is formed. The Collaborative Director will be an ex officio member of the committee. It is anticipated that the BoD will meet in person quarterly and will conduct much of its business by biweekly or monthly conference call as well as by electronic mail.

## **Declaring Potential conflict of Interest**

Your designation as an iPlant BoD member requires that you be aware of potential conflict situations that may arise. See the list below for potential conflict of interest situations. As iPlant BoD member, you will be asked to review grand challenge proposals. You might have a conflict with one or more of these proposals. Should any general conflicts arise during your term or conflicts regarding a specific proposal you must bring the matter to the attention of the iPlant BoD chairperson and the iPlant administrative staff member who is supporting the BoD. The chair and staff member will document the CoI, and in consultation with the Collaborative Director, determine how the matter should be handled, and will tell you what further steps, if any, to take. The Project Director's decision of course of action will insure that the potential conflict will not jeopardize the integrity of the selection process.

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### *Your may have a Conflict of Interest under a variety of circumstances:*

- Financial Interests – If you are employed by the same institution as one of the lead PIs of the GCW or GCP proposal. Current consideration of new employment also creates a conflict with any proposal from that institution.
- Collaborative relationships – If you are currently collaborating, have a publication with someone submitting a GC proposal in the past 12 months, or are actively considering collaboration with the named leaders or key collaborators of the GCW or GCP proposal.
- Personal relationships – If you have a family or close personal relationship with any of the named leaders or key collaborators on a GCW or GCP proposal you are asked to review.
- Lack of Objectivity – If you feel that you are unable to be objective in the review of a GC proposal for any reason it is best to declare yourself in conflict with the proposal. Examples include a long-term friendship with a principal on the proposal, animosity between yourself and one of the principals, or your alignment with a particular part of the community represented by the proposal or in conflict with the proposal. Frank discussion of concerns about potential conflict of interests will take place prior to discussion of each of the proposals being considered by the BoD.

Participation in a GC proposal or project – BoD members are selected by the Nominating Committee because of their expertise and community leadership in the areas central to the success of the iPlant Collaborative project. As a result, it is anticipated that some BoD members might choose to get involved in Grand Challenge activities of the iPlant Collaborative. As a member of the BoD you may not participate in review of a GCW or GCP proposal where you are a named member of the proposal, including as a named key collaborator, or are deemed likely to participate directly if the proposal is funded. If you choose to participate in a GCP project you will step off of the BoD to avoid conflict of interest. This is because the BoD shares Grand Challenge Project oversight responsibilities with the PI and Management Team members. Once you step down from the board, you will be required to wait for the next round of grand challenge workshop solicitations to be issued if you wish to participate in a proposal, or for 6 months before playing a major role in an ongoing project. Use of Discovery Environments by Board members is accepted and encouraged, but participation in their design and development is precluded for 6 months after leaving the Board. Board members may participate as “observers” in Grand Challenge Workshops, however, they may not drive the design of proposals, at workshops, or at any other stage of the process while sitting on the Board.

### **Use of “Insider” Information**

If your designation gives you access to information not generally available to the public, you must not use that information for your personal benefit or make it available for the personal benefit of any other individual or organization. This is to be distinguished from the entirely appropriate general benefit of learning more about the iPlant Collaborative learning from other BoD members, or becoming better acquainted with the state of a given discipline.

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**Your Obligation to maintain Confidentiality of Grand Challenge Proposals**

The iPlant Collaborative will receive grand challenge proposals in confidence and will protect the confidentiality of their contents. For this reason, you must not copy, quote, or otherwise use or disclose to anyone, including your graduate students or post-doctorals, research associates, or colleagues any material from any proposal you are asked to review. If you believe a colleague can make a substantial contribution to the review, please obtain permission from the iPlant BoD chair before disclosing either the contents of the proposal or the name of any applicant. Note that it is up to the Management Team of the iPlant Collaborative (and not the Board of Directors) to determine what proposal information will be made publically available, when it is done, and the manner used to disseminate this information.

**Confidentiality of the Review Process and Reviewer Names**

The iPlant collaborative will keep reviews and your identity as a reviewer of specific proposals confidential to the maximum extent possible, except that we will routinely send to principal investigators (PI's) reviews of their own proposals without your name, affiliation, or other identifying information. By participating in this process you promise to respect the confidentiality of all grand challenge proposers and of other reviewers. Do not disclose their identities, the relative assessments or rankings of proposals by a BoD, or other details about the review of GC proposals. Unauthorized disclosure of any confidential information could subject you to sanctions. Such sanctions may include dismissal from the BoD, and will be decided by the BoD chair in consultation with the Management team.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to the above conflict of interest statement.

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Signature

Date