

## **Guidelines for Determining Arm's Length Status**

### **I. Purpose**

An arm's length reviewer is one who can provide an independent, unbiased assessment of the candidate's dossier (including, in the case of the research faculty - scholarly impact, reputation, and trajectory) free from personal, professional, or financial conflicts that could reasonably call objectivity into question. **The standard applied is whether a reasonable observer would conclude that the reviewer's relationship with the candidate permits a fully independent evaluation.**

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### **II. Core Criteria for Arm's Length Status**

To qualify as arm's length, a reviewer **should**:

- Be a recognized expert in the candidate's field.
- Have no close mentoring, supervisory, or dependent relationship with the candidate.
- Have no recent or ongoing research collaboration that would compromise independence.
- Have no financial relationship tied to the candidate's professional advancement.

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### **III. Relationships That Generally Disqualify a Reviewer**

The following relationships ordinarily preclude arm's length status:

#### **1. Training and Mentorship Relationships**

- Dissertation advisor or co-advisor
- Dissertation committee member
- Postdoctoral mentor or supervisor
- Former doctoral or postdoctoral trainee of the candidate

#### **2. Research Collaboration (Recent or Substantial)**

- Co-authorship within the past 5 years (or a sustained pattern of co-authorship at any time)
- Ongoing or recent joint grants or funded research
- Co-Principal Investigator status on grants
- Co-editorship of books, journal issues, or major scholarly projects (Assess recency, extent, and materiality – often co-editorship will not involve a close working relationship such as to preclude arm's length status)
- Active participation in the same tightly integrated research team or center

Non-recent collaborations may warrant scrutiny if they were substantial or career-defining.

### **3. Institutional Proximity**

- Current faculty member in the same department
- Individuals with direct supervisory or reporting relationships
- Department chairs, deans, or others who have had formal evaluative authority over the candidate
- Individuals who were recently departmental colleagues (typically within 3–5 years)

### **4. Personal Relationships**

- Family members
- Close personal friends
- Former or current romantic partners

### **5. Financial Conflicts**

- Direct financial arrangements tied to shared research, consulting, patents, or business ventures
- Situations in which the reviewer's funding or professional advancement is materially connected to the candidate

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## **IV. Relationships That May Be Acceptable**

The following do not automatically disqualify a reviewer, particularly in small or highly specialized fields:

- Service together on editorial boards.
- Participation in national professional organizations (e.g., the American Association of Universities or major disciplinary societies).
- Service on grant review panels (e.g., for the National Science Foundation or National Institutes of Health).
- Occasional conference panels.
- Limited, incidental professional interaction without joint scholarly production.

In highly collaborative disciplines (e.g., laboratory sciences, engineering), some prior contact is often unavoidable. The determining factor is whether the relationship creates a reasonable appearance of partiality.