

ASN Advisory Committee on Ensuring Trust in Nutrition Science
CALL NOTES
Monday, March 14, 2015

Bert Garza, Chair
Carol Tucker-Foreman
Doug Bannerman (for Catherine Woteki)
Michael McGinnis
Eric Campbell
Robert Steinbrook
Sylvia Rowe
Vinita Bali
Ed Cooney
Catherine Bertini
Patrick Stover, ex officio
John Courtney, ex officio
Sarah Ohlhorst, staff

Chair Bert Garza welcomed the committee and noted that they will have a chance to meet each other face-to-face and go over all background materials in more detail at their Monday, April 25th meeting. Patrick Stover, ASN President, and John Courtney, ASN Executive Officer, are ex officio committee members. There were no changes to the agenda. It was requested that all committee members identify themselves on the call before offering comments.

Committee members should treat all information received, whether provided in-person or not, as confidential, proprietary, not to be shared. Chatham House rules apply to all Advisory Committee discussions. Sarah Ohlhorst, Director of Government Relations, will be the ASN point of contact. Summaries of all calls and meetings will be posted online. The committee will have 2-3 days to react to notes before they are posted. An interim report will be available for public comment and the Committee's final report will be published, preferably in an open access journal. Specific reviewers will be used, but the documents will also be posted for public review and comment. It is a hope that the committee will be able to reach consensus on all recommendations.

This is a complex topic with differing points of view and recommendations will be of interest to many groups in the US and internationally. The food sector represents nearly as much of the GDP as does healthcare. Food and nutrition is global, as is ASN – so the committee should not be limited to just domestic issues or concerns.

The Advisory Committee has an ambitious schedule and therefore flexibility will be required. Similar efforts have taken more than a year, and we hope to complete the final report by the end of 2016. The committee may not be able to provide a draft report to the ASN Board for review in September 2016 – perhaps only an outline will be ready. The committee was asked to make its conference calls and meetings a priority on their calendars. All calls on the proposed timeline may not be needed. The timeline includes a tentative second face-to-face meeting in

November/December, 2016, but that meeting date hasn't been set. ASN will be cognizant of international committee members' timing when scheduling calls and meetings.

The background materials sent to the committee for review are not complete, but give a good look at the way various organizations have approached transparency and maintaining public trust. All communications to the committee will come from Sarah Ohlhorst. If committee members would like other materials distributed to the committee for review, please send suggestions to Sarah Ohlhorst (sohlhorst@nutrition.org). Committee members should get back to Sarah Ohlhorst by March 31st so ASN can gather all useful materials and allow 2-3 weeks for review before April 25th. The background materials will provide a basis for discussions at the April 25th meeting. It was noted that materials on the legal definition of conflict of interest versus the appearance of conflict of interest may be useful to the committee. Materials on avoidance or management of conflict of interest would also be useful, as this is not addressed well in the current background materials. The distinction between real or apparent conflict of interest is a thin line. All conflicts are "real" as soon as they get raised.

A good formal definition for conflict of interest can be found in the following publication: <http://scholar.harvard.edu/dft/publications/conflicts-interest>

A complete financial accounting of all expenditures and revenues and all staff financials could help the committee understand ASN's potential/actual conflicts of interest. The committee will have discussions on that point on April 25th. Who makes the judgment on whether a conflict is real or perceived is often organization leadership, who may have conflicts as well. Greater transparency in the decision making process needed for all organizations in the food and nutrition sphere.

Committee members should also send Sarah Ohlhorst the names of individuals useful for the group to hear from at their April 25th meeting. A portion of the agenda will include the broad spectrum of opinions on this issue. ASN can also arrange calls with individuals the committee would like to hear from, although not all members will be able to join all calls. A draft agenda for the April 25th meeting will be made available to committee members in advance, which will make it easier for the committee to provide advice on possible speakers. ASN will send a draft agenda by early April. The meeting will have an early start time (around 9:00am Eastern) and will finish no later than 5:00pm Eastern. There will be 2 to 2 ½ hours allocated for outside speakers. Those outside of the DC-area should plan to fly in the night before or have a very early flight on the morning of April 25th.

It was noted that the FDA Food Advisory Committee uses [extensive reporting guidelines](#) that cover the waterfront, including financial interests of members and their family members. It could be useful to look at their requirements. The Consumers Union also has useful requirements to look into. The Institute of Medicine published a report specific to medical research that includes many relevant portions for the committee – principles, general findings, policy recs regarding disclosure, management. There is information in that report which defines issues very clearly, so this committee doesn't need to reinvent the wheel (see attachment). The International Committee on Medical Editors also has a uniform format for disclosure of competing interests that should be made available to committee members (which can be found

[online](#)). If committee members would like hard copies of any materials, they can let Sarah Ohlhorst know.

All funding for the Advisory Committee comes from the general purpose budget of ASN, and staff resources devoted to this are part of ASN infrastructure. The ASN budget will be up for review on April 25th – including sources of external funding, expenditures, revenue, etc. At April 25th meeting, committee members should also plan to share all potential conflicts of interest. ASN leadership will be asked to do the same prior to the meeting. It is likely that some members of the committee will have professional or personal relationships that may present real and/or potential conflicts of interest. That expectation underscores the need for their management rather than a need to avoid them completely. Their successful management requires that the committee and ASN be aware of them. It will be up to the committee to determine which of those relationships, if any, should be shared more broadly, beyond ASN and the committee members.

The committee has two deliverables – a white paper to be published in a high-profile journal that provides a critical analysis of best practices for broad-based organizations like ASN, where public trust is essential – where do these organizations currently fall short and where are they meeting best practices. The September ASN Board of Directors meeting provides an opportunity to bring them up-to-date on the Advisory Committee’s activities and share a draft of the report, if available. The ASN Board of Directors will provide input as an advisory body on the report before it is published, i.e. their approval is not a prerequisite to the report’s dissemination. A second report for the ASN Board of Directors is to align ASN’s current practices with best practices identified by the committee. Those recommendations would be voted on by the ASN Board. The Advisory Committee will be advisory to ASN in this way, although ASN is not required to abide by the committee’s input - it will be up to ASN to determine which best practices should be incorporated into ASN practices.

Regarding agenda item #5, this lists major sources of public mistrust that the committee must be able to address. Numbers 1 and 2 (under agenda item #5) refer to the ASN organization, while 3 is broader. A negative event is most often the driver of public mistrust.

ASN is considering a kick-off editorial to a media outlet like the New York Times and the committee was divided on whether this was a good first step or not. The purpose would be to make others aware of this initiative, as ASN thinks it is important and of use for society as a whole, and not just ASN, and invite comments as we proceed – to be proactive, rather than reactive. Some suggested it may be more effective to have someone independent of ASN write such an editorial on this endeavor. Some felt an editorial would be a promissory note now, as there is nothing to say at this point; at end of process will have much more to say. ASN will provide a draft and seek committee input. While the decision is ultimately up to ASN, by April 25th we hope to have a good idea of where committee members stand on this.

The call adjourned at 2:05pm.

