

FoRK toolkit

Title of Project:		Date:
Organisation:	Name of person completing form:	

FoRK Guidance and Toolkit

TOOL A: RISK ASSESSMENT

Please complete *both* Parts 1 and 2 before assessing level of risk in Part 3. For guidance on where to find answers to the risk questions, see the section at the end of Tool A for suggestions.

PART 1: RISK ASSESSMENT OF FOOD COMPANY OR RELATED ORGANISATION

If the food organisation¹ is owned or funded by another commercial organisation please answer the following questions based on the product portfolio of the parent company or organisation.

Assessment criteria	Questions to ask	Indicative Risk Rating: answer yes/no (numerical score in brackets)
1) Perform background checks* and assess food organisation profile*	a) Does the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violate international human rights conventions or health-related international, national or regional laws or agreements (e.g. The WHO International Code of Marketing of breast-milk substitutes or the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) - Own or is owned by, or has other structural links to a tobacco or arms company. 	No = low risk (1) Yes = very high risk (4) ²
	b) Does the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - own or is it owned by, or have other structural links to a company that produces other commodities harmful to health (e.g. alcohol, gambling). 	No = low risk (1) Yes = high risk (3)

¹ The term 'food organisation' is intended to include both food and beverage companies and any closely associated organisations (e.g. philanthropic foundations funded by the food industry, food and beverage retailers, trade associations or research institutes funded by the organisation or organisations).

² Many will consider that if the answer here is YES, then you should not proceed with this interaction due to the certainty of reputational damage.

Assessment criteria	Questions to ask	Indicative Risk Rating: answer yes/no (numerical score in brackets)
	c) Does the organisation produce, manufacture or retail any food or beverages considered 'unhealthy'? (i.e. products that are not recommended for healthy diets, as per national dietary guidelines).	No = low risk (1) Yes, a small proportion of their sales volume or product range ³ (e.g. 1-25%) = medium risk (2) Yes, a larger proportion of their sales volume or product range (e.g. more than 25%) = high risk (3)
2) Collect in-depth information about the food organisation to characterise the food organisation's risk profile*	a) Does the organisation promote through marketing strategies any products or eating practices considered 'unhealthy'? (i.e., products that are not recommended for healthy diets).	No = low risk (1) Yes, a small proportion of their sales volume or product range (e.g. 1-25%) = medium risk (2) Yes, a larger proportion of their sales volume or product range (e.g. more than 25%) = high risk (3)
	b) Has the organisation actively lobbied or petitioned against public health policies to improve healthy eating choices? ⁴	No = low risk (1) Unknown = medium risk (2) Yes = high risk (3)
	c) Does the organisation have a direct commercial interest in the research topic or intervention? (i.e. does the organisation stand to gain financially from the outcomes of the research?)	No = low risk (1) Yes = high risk (3)
OVERALL RISK PROFILE ASSESSMENT	<i>Summarise your ratings (add up the scores in brackets) in the right-hand column to describe the total risk rating of the food organisation. Use this assessment in the Overall Risk Rating in Part 3 below.</i>	Low risk = 6 Medium risk = 7 High risk = 8 or more

PART 2: RISK ASSESSMENT OF TYPE OF INTERACTION

³ Sales volume is a stronger measure of the proportion of a company's portfolio that is represented by unhealthy foods. However, in the absence of such data, information on the proportion of the product range devoted to unhealthy foods can offer a proxy measure

⁴ One way of determining whether an organisation has actively lobbied or petitioned against public health policies to improve healthy eating choices is to check responses to public consultations on public health policy measures

Not all of these will apply to your research interaction. Only assess against those criteria that are relevant

Which of the following types of interaction are you considering?	Indicative Level of Risk
Dialogue	
1. Formal dialogue (e.g. discussions to improve and/or change internal policy within an organisation). No funding received.	Low risk
2. Participation in an independent/government-led scientific or policy expert group with industry involved. No funding received.	Low risk
3. Participation in an industry-led or funded scientific or policy expert group. No funding received.	Medium risk
Conducting research within or with a food organisation	
4. Accessing data or information from an organisation with unrestricted access and research use	Low risk
5. Accessing data or information from an organisation with unreasonable restrictions on access and research use	Medium risk
6. Developing an intervention within or with a food organisation with involvement from the food organisation	Medium risk
7. Accepting in-kind resources to support research e.g. food products with no involvement from the food organisation in the research process	Medium risk
8. Accepting in-kind resources to support research e.g. food products with involvement from the food organisation	High risk
9. Evaluating an intervention within or with a food organisation with no involvement from the food organisation	Low risk
10. Evaluating an intervention within or with a food organisation with involvement from the food organisation	High risk
Accepting a prize and/or sponsorship	
11. Accepting a prize or award from a food organisation (e.g. at a conference)	Medium risk
12. When organising a conference or scientific meeting, accepting <i>unconditional or unrestricted</i> sponsorship for the conference or scientific meeting from a food organisation	Medium risk
13. When organising a conference or scientific meeting, accepting <i>conditional or restricted</i> sponsorship for the conference or scientific meeting (e.g. sponsorship is conditional on the organisation having a speaker in the program)	High risk
14. Endorsement of food organisation product or brand by a university or a researcher (e.g. co-branding)	High risk
Conference presentation	
15. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is unrestricted. No funding is received.	Low risk
16. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is unrestricted. Payment of out of pocket expenses (e.g. travel and/or accommodation to the event).	Medium risk

17. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is unrestricted. Travel cost <i>and speaker fee paid</i> (e.g. honorarium).	High risk
18. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is restricted and/or needs approval from conference sponsor. No funding is received.	Medium risk
19. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is restricted and/or needs approval from conference sponsor. Payment of out of pocket expenses (e.g. travel to the event).	High risk
20. Accepting an invitation to speak at a conference or symposium sponsored and/or organised by a food organisation/s. Content you can speak on is restricted and/or needs approval from conference sponsor. Travel cost <i>and speaker fee paid</i> (e.g. honorarium).	High risk
Grant or other funding	Level of Risk
21. Accepting funding from a food organisation for out of pocket expenses (e.g. travel costs) for participation in any research-related activity (e.g. scientific advisory committee).	Medium risk
22. Accepting funding from a food organisation in the form of honorarium for participation in any research-related activity (e.g. scientific advisory committee).	High risk
23. Accepting direct grant funding from a food organisation with no involvement from the organisation (e.g. unrestricted grant).	High risk
24. Accepting direct grant funding from a food organisation with some form of involvement from the organisation (i.e. conditional award).	High risk
25. Accepting direct grant funding from a food organisation with restrictions on publication of results.	High risk
<i>In the right hand column identify your risk rating for the above types of interaction. Note that different interactions might have different risk ratings – consider these separately and, rather than ‘averaging’ them, identify the <u>highest</u> level of risk determined by the assessment. Use this risk assessment in the overall risk assessment below (Part 3)</i>	

PART 3: OVERALL RISK

Add the risk assessment rating from **1) Overall risk profile of the organisation + 2) Type of interaction** risk rating in the risk matrix below

		Overall Risk Profile of Organisation		
		Low	Medium	High
Interaction Risk	High	Medium	High	High
	Medium	Low	Medium	High
	Low	Low	Low	Medium

If the overall risk is 'High' = Consider carefully the overall risk of proceeding with this interaction. Many may prefer not to proceed with a proposed interaction if any of the answers are 'high risk', unless the specific risks can be clearly mitigated.

If the overall risk is 'Medium' or 'Low' = go to **Risk and Benefit Assessment Tool B** to balance risks and benefits.

* To determine who owns a food company you can perform an internet search. Documents filed by companies, such as annual reports, articles of incorporation and tax filings will typically include the name of a company along with the name of the owners. If the organisation you are assessing is not a public limited company, it can make some of the risk assessment activities in Tool A difficult to complete. However, company websites can sometimes be a good source of information as can national (federal) and regional (state) business databases. This information will tell you about the present status of the organisation, you may want to also investigate their past record. To collect further in-depth information about the food company you can perform an internet search. If you can access library databases there are some specific ones available for researching market and industry news, these include:

- Factiva searches thousands of local and international newspapers, trade journals and magazines. Detailed searching by company, industry, or region is possible. www.factiva.com
- ABI/Inform Trade & Industry includes in-depth coverage of companies, products, executives, trends and other topics. https://about.proquest.com/en/products-services/abi_inform_trade
- ProQuest news databases– allow you to do a broad search of international news sources including newspapers and news wires. www.proquest.com

There are also country-specific databases which hold leading newspapers and television shows online, speak with your research librarian or information scientist for help with this. While news coverage may not be impartial, it can help to direct us to areas of concern which can then be investigated further. If you can't access these databases, a general internet search of the organisation name plus the search terms 'ethical' or 'conduct' is encouraged. While a large amount of content may be produced using this method, if you skim through it and notice any news reports about the negative activities of the organisation, take note of this and investigate further.

Another source of information is the Oxfam Behind the Brands Scorecard www.behindthebrands.org which examines and scores company policies in seven areas critical to sustainable agricultural production: women, small-scale farmers, farm workers, water, land, climate change, and transparency. Incorporated into these seven areas is reporting of lobbying and adherence to the UN Human Rights.

Another checklist is the Access to Nutrition Index <http://www.accesstonutrition.org> which assesses and ranks the world's largest manufacturers on their nutrition-related commitments, practices and performance globally.

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TOOL B: RISK and BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Identify the risks and benefits of interacting with the food organisation⁵ and the likelihood of these risks and benefits occurring. Some examples have been given below, but you may identify further risks and benefits. Judgements about the balance between risks and benefits can be complicated, may involve many factors, and are often subjective. If you are having trouble balancing the risks and benefits, you may find it helpful to discuss the risks and benefits critically with colleagues to reach a consensus. You may also wish to acquire an independent assessment from a professional colleague who is not a direct collaborator or a university advisory committee (e.g. ethical committee) not familiar with your research to gain a perspective from another angle.

Benefits	Will you or your organisation benefit in this way? (Yes/No/unsure)	Likelihood* (unlikely, possible, probable)	Risks	Will this risk affect you or your organisation ? (Yes/No/unsure)	Likelihood* (unlikely, possible, probable)
1. Access to data needed to conduct your research is available from a commercial partner.			1. The organisation may not deliver on conditions agreed to for interaction.		
2. Access to sites needed to deliver interventions for the research are available from a commercial partner.			2. Your interaction may provide a food organisation with a 'health halo' (i.e. increases the perception that they produce 'healthy' food/drinks) or be perceived as endorsement of their product.		

⁵ The term 'food organisation' is intended to include both food and beverage companies and any closely associated organisations (e.g. philanthropic foundations funded by the food industry, food and beverage retailers, trade associations or research institutes funded by the organisation or organisations).

Benefits	Will you or your organisation benefit in this way? (Yes/No/unsure)	Likelihood* (unlikely, possible, probable)	Risks	Will this risk affect you or your organisation ? (Yes/No/unsure)	Likelihood* (unlikely, possible, probable)
3. Ability to influence food organisation policies and/or practices that are scalable and can lead to healthier changes to healthier food products or environments.			3. Your collaborative research could be used by a food organisation to divert attention from pressing public health issues.		
4. Access to research funding from a commercial partner.			4. The interaction may have a negative impact on your personal or institutional reputation.		
5. Unique opportunity to evaluate commercially led intervention			5. The interaction may have a negative impact on your perceived independence as a researcher.		
6. Opportunity to learn from the commercial sector			6. The interaction may have a negative impact on your perceived integrity as a researcher.		
<i>List other benefits that you can identify:</i>			7. The interaction with an organisation may lead to weakening or dilution of the research idea or intervention proposals which may undermine the research		
			<i>List other risks that you can identify below:</i>		

If the benefits are unclear or marginal, consider whether you should proceed with the interaction.

If you have identified that there are clear benefits for your research then you'll need to consider whether and how you can mitigate the risks identified above. This may include the use of a binding legal agreement (contract) that outlines the terms of engagement that specifically address the risks above. Guidance for this is found in **Tool C: Negotiating Interaction** which will help to ensure effective governance processes are established prior to commencing the interaction to minimise threats to scientific integrity.

*Likelihood Scale

Unlikely	Is not expected to occur
Possible	Might occur at some time
Probable	Will probably occur

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TOOL C: NEGOTIATING INTERACTION

For research projects involving *direct or in-kind funding or participation in an industry-led or funded scientific or policy expert group* use checklist 1.

For interactions involving *sponsorship, formal dialogue and/or conference presentations* please use checklist 2. We recognise that some activities might involve both checklist 1 and 2.

Checklist 1: For research projects involving *direct or in-kind funding with a food organisation*⁶ or *participation in an industry-led or funded scientific or policy expert group*, complete the checklist below *before* formal interaction commences. For all cases with direct funding or where there are intellectual property issues, this will require a written contract to protect the interests of both parties. Please seek guidance from your research institute on this issue

Task	Comments	Completed
1. Have you clearly stated agreed goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities and accountability of each 'partner' in a shared, written document?		
2. Have you explained to the food organisation why they should not be involved in study design, analysing and/or interpreting scientific findings due to their conflict of interest? ⁷		

⁶ The term 'food organisation' is intended to include both food and beverage companies and any closely associated organisations (e.g. philanthropic foundations funded by the food industry, food and beverage retailers, trade associations or research institutes funded by the organisation or organisations).

⁷ There may be circumstances where it is appropriate to discuss aspects of study design with a food organisation – for example, when researchers aim to deliver an intervention in a retail environment and this requires negotiation with the commercial food organisation, or when the commercial organisation is required to provide data. In such circumstances, care should be taken to avoid any potential for undue influence of the commercial partner over the study design, which may lead to a conflict of interest.

Task	Comments	Completed
3. Have you established up-front control and ownership of the research data (including all types of personal and biological data) by the researchers, irrespective of the funding source?		
4. Have you established your, and your institution's independent right to comment publicly on the food organisation's policies or practices that are unrelated to your interaction with them?		
5. Are you able to provide open access to anonymised data and analyses once your results are published? Does this require negotiation with your commercial partner?		
6. Have you considered whether it is possible to have independent oversight of your research by an independent third party e.g. an individual or committee with relevant expertise who is not working with research team?		
7. Have you agreed how both parties are permitted to describe interactions? Will you allow the food organisation to co-brand (e.g. use their logo) on research project materials, including web sites? What are the risks and benefits associated with this?		
8. Have you agreed with your commercial partner that all of their presentations and media releases regarding the research project to which they have contributed direct or in-kind funding, require endorsement by the research team?		
9. Have you ensured that the research team retains full rights to publish all results without embargo, including those unfavourable to the food or beverage organisation you are interacting with? [See also Tool E: Communicating Findings].		
10. Will you provide the food organisation with either the abstract or the full paper: a) prior to submission (only to clarify technical details of the organisation's involvement); or b) prior to publication (to give the organisation prior notification)?		
11. Do you have a transparent system to identify, assess and manage the interests of all stakeholders, which specifies the range of interests and the period of time over which those interests need to be disclosed?		
12. Have you established clear guidelines ensuring researchers do not accept invitations from the commercial partner to social events or hospitality, such as offers for lunch or gifts.		
13. Have you established clear exit mechanisms for the research team and commercial partner to use when disagreements cannot be resolved?		

Checklist 2: For interactions involving *sponsorship, formal dialogue and/or conference presentations*, please complete the checklist below before formal interaction with a food organisation commences

Task	Risks identified and comments	Completed
14. Have you clearly stated mutually agreed goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities and accountability of each party?		
15. Have you ensured content for any proposed conference or for guest presentations will not be restricted or require approval from the industry sponsor?		
16. Have you established your, and your institution's independent right to comment publicly on the commercial partner's policies or practices that are unrelated to your interaction with them?		
17. Have you agreed how both parties are permitted to describe interactions?		

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TOOL D: RESEARCH GOVERNANCE and INTEGRITY

For research projects involving *direct or in-kind funding or participation in an industry-led or funded scientific or policy expert group* - Once the project commences you should adhere to the usual standards of research reporting as per standards published in the www.equator-network.org, and consider the additional questions below.

Task	Risks identified and action taken	Date Completed
1. Have you considered involving independent oversight in governance arrangements, which might include members of the public, to ensure ongoing critical scrutiny for your research?		
2. Have you publicly reported funding arrangements, governance structures, research frameworks and findings?		
3. Have you established mechanisms to continuously monitor for conflicts of interest among your research team? For example, establishing a conflict of interest register which needs to be updated every 3 to 6 months.		
4. Have you established the principle that stakeholders (i.e. those who might have an interest in the research findings, such as, research funders, food organisations ⁸) should remove themselves from decision-making bodies in relation to the research (e.g. advisory groups), when there may be a conflict of interest?		

⁸ The term 'food organisation' is intended to include both food and beverage companies and any closely associated organisations (e.g. philanthropic foundations funded by the food industry, food and beverage retailers, trade associations or research institutes funded by the organisation or organisations)

For interactions involving *sponsorship* and/or *conference presentations*, consider the following questions when the interaction commences

Task	Risks identified and comments	Date Completed
5. Have you publicly reported the funding received by you or your organisation for the event? Have you made the governance structures for the event and funding transparent?		
6. For conferences or workshops, have you asked all presenters to provide a declaration of interests on a slide near the start of their presentation? Have you asked authors to provide a written statement on poster presentations?		

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TOOL E: COMMUNICATING FINDINGS

Task	Risks identified and comments	Date Completed
1. Consider which journal you will publish in. Some journals receive considerable funding from food organisations or associated organisations and this may be a factor you may want to investigate. You should take into consideration the risk associated with publishing with a journal that receives food industry funding.		
2. Have you disclosed your interests relevant to the research over at least the last five years?		
3. Have you declared the role the funder played in the design, implementation, interpretation and/or reporting of the research?		
4. Have you been comprehensive when disclosing your interests? These may include: financial relationships with entities that could be perceived to influence your research activities (e.g. employment, honoraria, research support, investment interests); non-financial relationships that could be perceived to influence your research activities (e.g. member of professional or other associations, advocacy or pressure group, board memberships).		
5. When presenting findings at a conference or public talk, do you have a slide to declare your interests near the <i>start</i> of your presentation?		
6. Do you fully disclose your research funding sources and financial and non-financial interests in media releases of research findings?		

Task	Risks identified and comments	Date Completed
7. In all your published outputs, including journal articles, reports, policy briefings or other materials, do you list all of your potential conflicts of interests, including full affiliation as well as disclosure of all sources of funding and affiliations with commercial organisations? Where possible, are these made clear on the title page or near to the front of the report?		