
Georgia State Medical Association Board of Trustees Adoption of Policy on Association/Corporate Partnerships

Georgia State Medical Association recognizes that standards need to be set for relationships/partnerships developed with Business/Corporations. The following principles are based on the premise that in certain circumstances, GSMA should participate in corporate arrangements when guidelines are met, which can further GSMA's core purpose, retain GSMA's independence, avoid conflicts of interest, and guard our professional values.

Overview of Principles

GSMA's principles to guide corporate relationships have been organized into the following categories: General Principles that apply to most situations; Special Guidelines that deal with specific issues and concerns; Organizational Review that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, Executive Director and other staff units; and Operational Issues. These guidelines should be reviewed over time to assure their continued relevance to the policies and operations of GSMA and to our business environment. The principles should serve as a starting point for anyone reviewing or developing GSMA's relationships with outside groups.

General Principles

GSMA's vision and values statement should provide guidance for externally funded relationships. Relations that are not motivated by the association's mission threaten GSMA's ability to provide representation and leadership for the profession.

1. GSMA's vision and values must drive the proposed activity.

GSMA's vision and values ultimately must determine whether a proposed relationship is appropriate for GSMA. GSMA should not have relationships with organizations or industries whose principles, policies or actions obviously conflict with GSMA's vision and values. For example, relationships with producers of products that harm the public health (e.g., tobacco) are not appropriate for GSMA. In general, rather than responding to others, GSMA will proactively choose its priorities for external relationships and participate in those that fulfill these priorities.

2. The relationship must preserve or promote trust in GSMA and the medical profession.

To be effective, medical professionalism requires the public's trust. Corporate relationships that could undermine the public's trust in GSMA or the profession are not acceptable. For example, no relationship should raise questions about the scientific content of GSMA's health information publications, GSMA's advocacy on public health issues, or the truthfulness of its public statements.

3. The relationship must maintain GSMA's objectivity with respect to health issues.

GSMA accepts funds or royalties from external organizations only if acceptance does not pose a conflict of interest and in no way impacts the objectivity of the association, its members, activities, programs or employees. For example, GSMA will not exercise exclusive relationships with manufacturers of health-related products marketed to the public that could impair GSMA's objectivity in promoting the health of America. GSMA's objectivity with respect to health issues should not be biased by external relationships.

4. The activity must provide benefit to the public's health, patients' care, or physicians' practice.

Public education campaigns and programs for GSMA or its members are potentially of significant benefit. Corporate-supported programs that provide financial benefits to GSMA but no significant benefit to the public or direct professional benefits to GSMA or its members are not acceptable. In the case of member benefits, external relations must not detract from GSMA's professionalism.

Special Guidelines

The following guidelines address a number of special situations where GSMA cannot utilize external funding. There are specific guidelines already in place regarding advertising in publications.

1) GSMA will provide health and medical information, but should not involve itself in the production, sale, or marketing to consumers of products that claim a health benefit.

Marketing health-related products (e.g., pharmaceuticals, home health care products) undermines GSMA's objectivity and diminishes its role in representing healthcare values and educating the public about their health and healthcare.

2) Activities should be funded from multiple sources whenever possible.

Activities funded from a single external source are at greater risk for inappropriate influence from the supporter - or the perception of it, which may be equally damaging. For example, funding for a patient education brochure should be done with multiple sponsors if possible. For the purposes of this guideline, funding from several companies, but each from a different and non-competing industry category (e.g., one pharmaceutical manufacturer and one health insurance provider), does not constitute multiple-source funding. GSMA recognizes that for some activities the benefits may be so great, the harms so minimal, and the prospects for developing multiple sources of funding so unlikely that single-source funding is a reasonable option. Even so, funding exclusivity must be limited to program only (e.g., asthma conference) and shall not extend to a therapeutic category (e.g., asthma). The Board should review single-sponsored activities prior to implementation to ensure that: a) reasonable attempts have been made to locate additional sources of funds (for example, issuing an open request for proposals to companies in the category); and b) the expected benefits of the project merit the additional risk to GSMA of accepting single-source funding. In all cases of single-source funding, GSMA will guard against conflict of interest.

3) The relationship must preserve GSMA's control over any projects and products bearing the GSMA name or logo. GSMA retains editorial control over any information produced as part of a corporate/externally funded arrangement.

When a GSMA program receives external financial support, GSMA must remain in control of its name, logo and GSMA content, and must approve all marketing materials to ensure that the message is congruent with GSMA's vision and values. A statement regarding GSMA editorial control as well as the name(s) of the program's supporter(s) must appear in all public materials describing the program and in all educational materials produced by the program. (This principle is intended to apply only to those situations where an outside entity requests GSMA to put its name on products produced by the outside entity, and not to those situations where GSMA only licenses its own products for use in conjunction with another entity's products.)

4) Relationships must not permit or encourage influence by the corporate partner on the GSMA.

A GSMA corporate relationship must not permit influence by the corporate partner on GSMA policies, priorities, and actions. For example, agreements

stipulating access by corporate partners to the Board of Trustees or access to GSMA Executive Director would be of concern. Additionally, relationships that appear to be acceptable when viewed alone may become unacceptable when viewed in light of other existing or proposed activities.

5) Participation in a sponsorship program does not imply GSMA's endorsement of an entity or its policies.

Participation in sponsorship of a GSMA program does not imply GSMA approval of that corporation's general policies, nor does it imply that GSMA will exert any influence to advance the corporation's interests outside the substance of the arrangement itself. GSMA's name and logo should not be used in a manner that would express or imply GSMA endorsement of the corporation or its policies.

6) To remove any appearance of undue influence on the affairs of GSMA, GSMA should not depend on funding from corporate relations for core governance activities.

Funding core governance activities from corporate sponsors, i.e., the financial support for conduct of the Board of Trustees meetings could make GSMA become dependent on external funding for its existence or could allow a supporter, or group of supporters, to have undue influence on the affairs of GSMA.

7) Funds from corporate relations must not be used to support political advocacy activities.

A full and effective separation should exist, as it currently does, between political activities and corporate funding. GSMA should not advocate for a particular issue because it has received funding from an interested corporation. Public concern would be heightened if it appeared that GSMA's advocacy agenda was influenced by corporate funding.

Organizational Review

Every proposal for a GSMA corporate relationship must be thoroughly screened prior to staff implementation. Currently, all proposed corporate arrangements are reviewed by the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee (EC). EC recommendations that meet certain criteria requiring further review are forwarded to the Board of Trustees. The full Board reviews any proposals that meet defined criteria for a heightened level of scrutiny.

1) All GSMA corporate arrangements will be annually reported by the EC of the Board of Trustees at the Annual meeting in June.

It is important for GSMA to have an orderly and predictable reporting process to the Board. The EC will present a summary report to the Board of Trustees each quarterly meeting.

2) Every new GSMA Corporate relationship must be approved by the Board of Trustees, or through a procedure adopted by the board.

Every new GSMA Corporate relationship must be approved by the Board of Trustees, or through a procedure adopted by the Board. Specific procedures and policies regarding Board review are as follows: (1) The Board routinely should be informed of all GSMA corporate relationships; (2) The Board should perform an annual audit of an appropriate sample of GSMA corporate relations activities; (3) Upon request of a dissenting member of the EC, any dissenting votes within the EC, and instances when the EC and the Board committee differ in the disposition of a proposal, are brought to the attention of the full Board; (4) All externally supported corporate activities directed to the public, except patient materials linked to CME, should receive Board review and approval; (5) All activities that have support from only one corporation within an industry should either be in compliance with ACCME guidelines or receive Board review; and; (6) All relationships where GSMA takes on a risk of substantial financial penalties for cancellation should receive Board review prior to enactment.

3) The Executive Director is responsible for the review and implementation of each specific arrangement according to the previously described principles.

The Executive Director is responsible for obtaining the Board of Trustees authorization for externally funded arrangements that have an economic and/or policy impact on GSMA.

4) The EC reviews corporate arrangements to ensure consistency with the principles and guidelines.

The EC is the internal, cross-organizational staff group that is charged with the review of all activities with external funding to assure adherence to the guidelines.

The EC is chaired by the President and composed of the GSMA Executive Director and senior managers.

The review process is structured to specifically address issues pertaining to GSMA's policy, ethics, business practices, corporate identity, and reputation. Written procedures formalize the committee's process for review of corporate arrangements.

All activities placed on the EC agenda have had the Executive Director's review and consent, and following EC approval will continue to require the routine approvals of the Board of Trustees.

The EC reports its findings and recommendations directly to the Board.

5) The GSMA's Executive Director in consultation with the EC will review and approve all marketing materials that are prepared by others for use in the US and that bear the GSMA's name and/or corporate identity.

All marketing materials will be reviewed for appropriate use of GSMA's logos and trademarks, perception of implied endorsement of the external entity's policies or products, unsubstantiated claims, misleading, exaggerated or false claims, and reference to appropriate documentation when claims are made. In the instance of international publishing of GSMA's Magazine and the Archives, GSMA will require review and approval of representative marketing materials in compliance with these principles and guidelines.

Organizational Culture and its Influence on Externally Funded Programs

Organizational culture has a profound impact on whether and how GSMA corporate relationships are pursued. GSMA activities reflect on all physicians. Moreover, all physicians are represented to some extent by GSMA actions. Thus, GSMA must act as the professional representative for all physicians, and not merely as an advocacy group or club for GSMA members.

As a professional organization, GSMA operates with a higher level of purpose representing the ideals of medicine. Nevertheless, non-profit associations today do require the generation of non-dues revenues. GSMA should set goals that do not create an undue expectation to raise increasing amounts of money. Such financial pressures can provide an incentive to evade, minimize, or overlook guidelines for fundraising through external sources. Every staff member in the association must be accountable to explicit ethical standards that are derived from the vision and values of the association. In turn, leaders of GSMA must recognize the critical role the organization plays as the sole nationally representative professional association for medicine in America. GSMA leaders must make programmatic choices that reflect a commitment to professional values and the core organizational purpose.

Requests for GSMAs membership List/Directory

Using the aforementioned guiding principles, the GSMA Executive Director should:

1) Have the requester send their information in a postage-paid ready format and/or electronic ready format and the GSMA office will do a comprehensive membership mailing via standard mail or email at the expense of the requester.

2) If there is an unusual or unclear request, the Executive Director will share the request with the EC for guidance.