



AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of HOD BACKGROUNDER of HOD BACKGROUNDER Dietetics Professionals and ADA Organizational Units Relations with Industry

Today, organizations are under pressure to address increasingly complex problems, adapt to rapid changes in technology, work faster, and produce more with limited resources. In response to these demands many are combining resources and expertise with other organizations, agencies and corporations. Relationships with industry and other types of organizational alliances are being formed, dissolved, and re-formed at an unprecedented pace to achieve success. Many organizations want to increase involvement with industry.

It is not uncommon in organizations where members have limited involvement with industry that any relationship is perceived as too commercial and therefore not to be trusted. However, industry relations play a role in keeping an association vital by defraying costs, allowing for synergy, and allowing professionals to ensure accuracy of information provided to the public. The issue is not whether or not ADA should have relations with industry since this practice will continue. Rather it is that dietetics professionals (as individuals, employees, and leaders of organizational units) need guidance in order to ensure that when industry relations are established, that they are done in a prudent manner so that a positive outcome is achieved.

MEGA ISSUES QUESTION: What is needed to ensure that when dietetics professionals and ADA organizational units collaborate with industry, they do so in a prudent manner?

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Identification of critical components and key elements to consider in examining the risks, benefits, and opportunities of industry relationships.

Nonprofit organizations have traditionally viewed the private sector with suspicion because they fear that their altruistic values and independence will be compromised by close association with businesses driven by the profit motive. Representatives of business, agriculture, and other areas that traditionally have not been perceived as sharing public health interests are now seeking relationships and are being sought for joint projects. Industry partners value the access to opinion leaders, communication channels, scientific credibility, and other resources that professional organizations can bring to a project. Relationships can have a mutually beneficial goal even if motives differ.

The list of potential benefits for entering relationships with industry is long and includes: expansion of the scope and depth of projects, services, and communications; funding for professional education and development; and ensuring messages from industry are based on sound science. The list of risk is shorter but carries more weight. The biggest risk to health professionals in relationships with industry is the appearance of compromised credibility. Perceptions or allegations of impropriety affect us as individuals as well as our organizations, and can adversely affect our credibility with the public as unbiased sources of information about health.

There is little research investigating dietetics professionals' knowledge and attitude in regards to industry relations. Members believe it is important to maintain a balance between the optimism of health/business joint efforts and the healthy skepticism that in the end there may be different agendas. Members have supported both sides of the issue, noting that the 'support' of industry is helpful in alleviating fiscal pressures and facilitating activities that would otherwise be limited due to prohibitive costs, but that ADA should not opt for revenue over health.

In June 2005, the HOD Governance Team conducted a survey of affiliate and delegate leaders to obtain information about how these organizational units utilize and view industry relations (Appendix B). Both affiliate and DPG leadership stated the importance of balance between the positive and negative aspects of receiving sponsorship from industry with the majority of respondents supporting relationships with industry.

There are increasing opportunities for dietetics professionals to work in corporate America. Eight to ten percent of ADA members work in business and consultation where most of the dietetics professionals employed by industry classify themselves. Potentially 70% of dietetics professionals in this classification work for industry. The 2004 Dietetics Professionals Needs Assessment Survey reported that the third most popular reason to attend FNCE was to visit exhibits. This survey also indicated that sixty-five percent of respondents desire more materials on ethical issues in practice, which could include guidance on relations with industry; however, this was not specifically mentioned.

The need for new revenues will drive associations to become more innovative in seeking out new partners and nontraditional sources of income. Survival may depend on being open to different ways of operations including entering relationships with industry. For non-profit professional organizations in 2003, industry related revenues (exhibit booth fees and registration, periodical and Web site advertising, and meeting sponsorship revenue) accounted for approximately 13% of revenue. Industry funding to ADA represents up to approximately 20% of all revenue. The majority of industry funds are categorized in the grants and donations segment and the programs and meeting segment. Collaborations with industry generally fall in the grants and donations segment while the majority of industry funding in the programs and meeting segment come from FNCE registration for exhibitors.

From the very first meeting as an association, in 1917, ADA benefited from the support of a handful of exhibitors, such as Royal Baking Powder, Mellin's Food, and Fleischmann's Yeast Company.

ADA has established general requirements for acceptance of industry projects, such as fit with ADA strategic goals; scientific accuracy; editorial control of all content in materials bearing the ADA name and logo; clear separation of ADA messages and content from brand information or promotion; and no endorsement of any particular brand or company product. ADA strives to communicate healthful eating messages to the public that emphasize the overall pattern of food eaten, rather than any one food or meal. ADA's relationships with industry are generally with large food corporations; however, those relationships are limited to specific parts of those companies. ADA ensures that the values of that segment of a company are aligned with the values and goals of ADA. Several policies have been adopted to provide guidance to the Association in regards to relationships with industry. Policies are continually reviewed and revised.

Other professional organizations in the health fields and their members have grappled with the issue of relations with industry. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) acknowledges that one of the issues that is likely to create change in AAP structure, programs and services is the changing role of industry/industry relations with medical societies. To raise awareness, the American Medical Association offers four on-line continuing medical education models for physicians that address the AMA's national initiative on the "Communication of Ethical Guidelines for Gifts to Physicians from Industry".

The ADA/CDR Code of Ethics should be considered when contemplating relations between dietetics professional and industry. The operant principles embodied in the code of Ethics relevant to decisions about conflict of interest are: furthering scientific knowledge, presenting substantiated information without personal bias, recognizing and exercising professional judgment, making referrals as appropriate, providing information to enable clients to make their own informed decisions, and providing professional services with objectivity. The ethical concerns expressed in the backgrounder are suggestive of corresponding legal issues. A practitioner whose relationship to industry is found to be unethical in its disregard of professional duties in favor of industry interests might easily result in some type of educational intervention.

Pre-Meeting Activities for Delegates:

Delegates will be requested to provide input to the following two questions:

1. What is one unsuccessful industry relationship that you personally experienced either as a dietetics professional or as a leader of an ADA organizational unit? Why was it unsuccessful?
2. What is one successful industry relationship that you personally experienced either as a dietetics professional or as a leader of an ADA organizational unit? Why was it successful?

The complete backgrounder, references and appendix is available at www.eatright.org/Member/85_22575.cfm on the ADA member only Web site.