



**SRNT**

---

SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH ON NICOTINE & TOBACCO • 2424 American Lane • Madison, WI 53704-3102  
Tel: 1-608-443-2462 • Fax: 1-608-443-2474 • E-Mail: [info@srnt.org](mailto:info@srnt.org) • Website: <http://www.srnt.org>

## **STRUCTURE & PARTICIPATION WORK ADVISORY GROUP**

### **FINAL REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SRNT BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

#### **Structure & Participation Work Advisory Group (WAG) Members**

Chair: Jennifer McClure, Kaiser Permanente, US  
Members: Lisa Fucito, Yale University, US  
Olivia Maynard, University of Bristol, UK  
Darlene Brunzell, Virginia Commonwealth University, US  
Jaimee Heffner, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, US

## **Section 1: WAG Meetings Overview**

### **Meeting 1: Identifying Issues, Discussion, Outcomes**

The WAG members held initial discussions about two Key Issues identified by the Board:

- Membership (Composition, Representation, Expectations)
- Participation (Annual Conference, SRNT Branches- SRNT-U, Networks, Journal)

#### **Discussion**

##### *Membership*

Discussions were in context to a broader perspective to decide what will be in the best interests of the Society and its members. The term ‘Future Proof’ was coined: SRNT needs to make decisions knowing there will be unknowns going forward, and recommendations and/or decisions must encompass what the future might bring. The rules or standards SRNT sets must be future-oriented.

The SRNT Board has had much discussion about representation of the basic science community. Basic science is not a small group in SRNT, but it is not as large as it once was or as the groups that align with policy and treatment. The Board wants to make sure that SRNT continues to be a Society where basic science has a home, while also ensuring integration of the disciplines (policy, clinical, and basic science) to promote science and cross-collaboration.

The WAG recommended an outreach survey to Basic Scientists in addition to the Membership Survey.

### *Participation*

The primary discussion revolved around identifying resolutions to SRNT's "rules of engagement" for members, with funding sources being a primary issue for determining participation.

The WAG members discussed participation from multiple industries (i.e., Tobacco, ENDS, Pharmaceutical, and others) and whether and/or how all industries should be considered (equally or not) as relates to membership. The Work Group's task is to develop recommendations that address these issues.

### **Meeting 2: Member Survey Results, Discussion, Outcomes**

Survey results showed a division of views among SRNT members on the important issues of Membership and Participation that have been part of the Society since its inception. If employees from the Tobacco and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) Industries are allowed to continue participating in the Annual Meeting, then full disclosure is critical. The same can be said for individuals who consult with these industries. It will be important to establish a balance between concerns that Tobacco and ENDS Industries participation may have a negative influence on the Annual Meeting, and concerns that excluding researchers could stifle the science.

It is the role of SRNT leadership to set standards (e.g., requiring disclosures, establishing participation limitations) that establish a middle ground respectful of members on all sides of this divisive issue, one that provides a neutral as well as advantageous ground for presentation, discussion, and debate of the science.

### **Discussion**

The WAG members had a deep discussion about boundary considerations for Tobacco and ENDS Industries employee/consultant participation in the a) Society, b) Annual Meeting, and c) Journal (as reviewers or authors), noting that the only current rule is that employees of the Tobacco and ENDS Industries cannot be members. Any researcher accepting funding from the Tobacco and ENDS Industries can present at the Conference and must disclose funding sources. Submission is open to all with disclosure of funding sources; all science is reviewed for acceptance for submission. Additionally, all researchers except those employed by the Tobacco Industry can be involved in Networks, vote, and be in leadership positions.

One option discussed was to expand the definition to all industries to clarify lines for participation and to take future industries into consideration. However, WAG members agreed that a majority of members favored Pharma membership over the Tobacco and ENDS Industries.

The challenge is defining 'Tobacco and ENDS Industries' and an approach based on that definition. There is inherent conflict of interest in selling harmful products as well as products that claim to have the 'solution' to the harmful product.

Questions considered were:

WHO: What are the subgroups and their definitions or descriptions?

WHAT: What are the general ‘rules of engagement’?

WHY: What is the rationale for excluding or not, and the concerns about participation?

In clarifying the ‘rules of engagement’, there can be different ways of creating transparency without restricting participation. Survey responses showed that most wanted to see a higher level of scrutiny for those participants who had a commercial interest.

In addition to transparency, there needs to be a higher bar set, i.e., a higher level of peer review that is a clear step above what is done now. And perhaps set limits on how much Tobacco and ENDS Industries science gets presented.

### Outcomes

As a scientific society, SRNT does not want to censor the science, but guardrails are necessary to preserve the integrity of the Society. All may come into the tent, but must be willing to meet a higher standard of disclosure. The goal is to find compromise.

SRNT must define the ‘rules of participation/engagement’ and membership for Tobacco and ENDS Industries employees, and for consultants accepting research funds from these two Industries.

### **Meeting 3: Member Comments Results, Discussion, Recommendations**

Seventy-nine (79) members provided comments, representing responses from 7% of the SRNT Membership (compared to the 29% response rate from the Member Survey); and 91% of the total number of responses received (86) during the Member Comment Period.

Although there were miscellaneous comments on individual Principles or Standards, two topics identified through the Member Comments specific to Tobacco and ENDS Industries participation were addressed:

- Tobacco and ENDS Industries Employee Membership
- Membership for Consultants

### Tobacco and ENDS Industries Employee Membership

The WAG members considered the following options:

Option 1 (presented to the members for comment): The ENDS industry WILL BE considered to be the same as the Tobacco Industry in all facets of SRNT, therefore employees of any ENDS company would be ineligible for membership and any new rules around participation in the Annual Meeting (attending as well as presenting) would apply.

Option 2 (alternative for WAG discussion): Only ENDS companies that are wholly or partially owned by the Tobacco Industry will be considered to be the same as the Tobacco Industry. ENDS companies that have no financial connection to the Tobacco Industry will not be considered to be part of the Tobacco Industry, therefore non-Tobacco Industry-affiliated ENDS employees will be eligible for membership and full participation in the Conference.

Option 3 (alternative for WAG discussion): ENDS companies, regardless of ownership, WILL NOT BE considered to be part of the Tobacco Industry, and therefore all ENDS employees will be eligible for membership and full participation in the Conference.

**WAG RECOMMENDATION:**

***Option 2***

Option 2 (alternative for WAG discussion): Only ENDS companies that are wholly or partially owned by the Tobacco Industry will be considered to be the same as the Tobacco Industry. ENDS companies that have no financial connection to the Tobacco Industry will not be considered to be part of the Tobacco Industry, therefore non-Tobacco Industry-affiliated ENDS employees will be eligible for membership and full participation in the Conference

**Discussion/Rationale:**

The Society already has a policy of excluding Tobacco Industry employees from membership, so by extension the WAG members agreed that employees of companies owned by the Tobacco Industry should be excluded.

The risk of including/excluding companies not associated with the Tobacco Industry was also discussed. While these companies can be viewed as different from the Tobacco Industry, there is some risk that, as these industries grow, allowing their membership could change the culture and direction of the Society. If the Board would like to consider additional “guardrails” for future membership, it was felt that non-Tobacco Industry owned ENDS companies which produce devices that have been approved and regulated as therapeutics could be considered for membership; those not producing therapeutic ENDS products could be excluded. This would provide consistency with the current policy which allows members of the Pharmaceutical Industry to join the Society (based on their production of therapeutic products for tobacco cessation). In cases where a company produces multiple products (some regulated therapeutics and some not), the majority of products produced should be taken into consideration.

**Tobacco and ENDS Industries Consultants Discussion**

The WAG members considered the following options:

Option 1 (presented to the membership for comment): Individuals who consult for the Tobacco and ENDS Industries remain eligible for membership pending an additional level of review. (NOTE: the parameters and process for additional level of review will be determined during Phase II: Implementation).

Option 2 (alternative for WAG discussion): Individuals who consult for the Tobacco and ENDS Industries WILL BE considered to be the same as employees of the Tobacco Industry and will, therefore, be ineligible for membership in SRNT.

Option 3 (alternative for WAG discussion): Individuals who consult for the Tobacco and ENDS Industries WILL NOT BE considered to be the same as employees of the Tobacco Industry and will, therefore, remain eligible for membership in SRNT.

**WAG Recommendation:**

**Option 1**

***Individuals who consult for the Tobacco and ENDS Industries remain eligible for membership, pending an additional level of review. (NOTE: the parameters and process for additional level of review will be determined during Phase II).***

**Discussion/Rationale**

The WAG members agreed that, given the split in the membership on this issue, compromise is in the best interests of the Society and its membership. There was also agreement that implementation of this Guiding Principle is fraught with challenges, and will need to be well-run with clear guidance about eligibility.

Clear, objective criteria that set a definitive threshold must be established and applied consistently across all members who consult with Tobacco and ENDS Industries. There was additional agreement that current consultant-members should not be ‘grandfathered’ in; all consultants should be evaluated for membership.

The members did provide ideas for implementation based on creating a rubric with different categories for consideration, and with different levels for each category, such as:

- Which Tobacco and ENDS Industries;
- How much money are people bringing in;
- When the consulting work was performed (how recent);
- Purpose of the consultation;
- Conflict of Interest (real, perceived);
- The amount of effort devoted (days or hours; notably this would be a more vague criterion).

There was agreement that funding seems to be a guiding factor. If a particular funding level needs to be established, it was recommended that the Board consider a threshold of \$5k, as is consistent with the U.S. Public Health Service’s threshold for required reporting based on a significant financial conflict of interest.

## ***Section 2: Recommended Guiding Principles and Boundary Standards, Final***

### **Guiding Principle 1: Membership in the Society**

Consistent with existing SRNT policy regarding Tobacco Industry employee ineligibility for membership in the Society, ENDS companies that are wholly or partially owned by the traditional tobacco product manufacturers will be considered to be the part of the Tobacco Industry and therefore ineligible for membership.

ENDS companies that have no financial connection to the Tobacco Industry will not be considered to be part of the Tobacco Industry, therefore non-Tobacco Industry-affiliated ENDS employees will be eligible for membership.

Individuals who consult for the Tobacco and ENDS Industries remain eligible for membership, pending an additional level of review.

### **Boundary Standard 1A: Responding to New Information**

Per SRNT Bylaws, the Board of Directors may change membership eligibility as necessary, based on new information.

**Boundary Standard 1B: Tobacco and ENDS Industries Consultants**

Individuals who consult with, but are not employed by, the Tobacco and ENDS Industries are eligible for membership in SRNT. However, Tobacco and ENDS Industries consultants will be subject to an additional level of review at the time of membership application or annual renewal. Applications will be considered through a transparent process, based on standards to be developed for determining eligibility/ineligibility that will be applied consistently for all applicants. The review process will take into account the nature of the consulting work and the nature of the consultant's relationship with the Tobacco and/or ENDS Industries.

**Boundary Standard 1C: Articulating the “Why”**

When considering engagement levels across SRNT programs and activities on the part of individuals who consult with Tobacco and ENDS Industries, the Board will make decisions based on the current or future problems posed by such engagement—to the science, to the members or Conference attendees, and to the Society itself. Decisions will be based on clearly articulated and transparent rationales. Any new policies that result in a negative impact on current members of SRNT will require additional review and consideration on the part of the Board.

**Boundary Standard 1D: Conflicts of Interest Regarding Participating in SRNT Membership Activities**

Individuals who consult with the Tobacco and ENDS Industries and who are members of SRNT are eligible to fully participate in membership activities. In keeping with existing Board policy, the SRNT President will carefully consider members' conflicts of interest when considering appointments to committee or other leadership positions. Likewise, when considering the makeup of SRNT workgroups or other project participation, conflicts of interest will be carefully considered.

**Rationale**

*The Membership Survey did not provide clear direction one way or the other as to the difficult question of Tobacco and ENDS Industries consultants – are they or are they not part of the Tobacco and ENDS Industries for which they consult? While many survey respondents believe that individuals who consult for Tobacco and ENDS Industries should be treated no differently than those who are actually employed by Tobacco and ENDS Industries, many others felt strongly that the reason(s) researchers might choose to consult, as well as the percentage of time/resources spent on consulting, needed to be carefully considered when determining levels of participation with SRNT. Therefore, the Work Advisory Group's recommendation is to focus on impact and threats (current or future) rather than on the emotion of this particular issue, and to do so through an ongoing process of transparent review.*

**Guiding Principle 2: Submission, Presentation, and Publication of Research**

In support of the Society's intention to provide a multi-disciplinary platform where diverse viewpoints are presented and discussed, SRNT allows Conference and Journal submissions regardless of funding source. All Conference submissions are subject to peer review. Funding sources will not be the basis for decisions to accept or reject submissions. All presenters and authors must comply with SRNT policies regarding disclosure of funding sources and conflicts of interest.

**Boundary Standard 2A: Peer Review**

Per feedback provided throughout the SRNT 2025 review process, research funded by any Tobacco and ENDS Industries will be subject to a higher level of peer review, to be determined by the Board of Directors in consultation with Program Committee representatives and the Journal editorial team.

**Boundary Standard 2B: Presentation Eligibility**

In codifying SRNT's current informal policies regarding presentation of accepted Tobacco and ENDS Industries-funded abstracts at the Annual Meeting, authors will be considered for poster presentation only; they will not be considered for presentation in oral sessions. The SRNT President, with input from the Program Committee chairs and the Board of Directors, may waive this provision if a particular Tobacco and ENDS Industries submission is deemed to be of significant importance to the broader research community.

**Boundary Standard 2C: Clearly Identifying Tobacco and ENDS Industries-funded Research**

SRNT will establish guardrails that preserve the integrity and transparency of research presented. To that end, Tobacco and ENDS Industries-funded posters will be clearly identified and may be grouped together.

**Boundary Standard 2D: Acceptance is Not Endorsement**

The presentation of research at the SRNT Annual Meeting or publication through the SRNT Journal does not, in any way, suggest endorsement or validation of the findings of a given abstract or paper. Acceptance of an abstract or paper simply means the submission has been subjected to and passed the peer-review process. Disclaimers to that effect will be clearly stated as appropriate.

**Rationale**

*Member Survey responses did not provide clear direction for SRNT to ban Tobacco and ENDS Industries research from being presented at the Annual Meeting. The Work Advisory Group stressed the need for a higher level of peer review and transparency of funding sources and conflicts of interest for research submitted by any Tobacco and ENDS Industries. This Principle and related Boundary Standards also represent a compromise – allowing the presentation of Tobacco and ENDS Industries peer-reviewed research, but not in the highly visible paper or symposium format.*

**Guiding Principle 3: Annual Meeting Participation**

SRNT will not preclude individuals from participating in the Annual Meeting based on Tobacco and ENDS Industries affiliation or source of research funds. However, all Annual Meeting participants are subject to SRNT's codes of conduct. Transparency regarding conflicts of interest and thoughtfully enacted participation parameters will be enforced.

**Boundary Standard 3A: Restrictions on Conference Attendance and Participation in Specific Scientific Sessions**

In an effort to find a reasonable compromise on the subject of Tobacco and ENDS Industries participation in the SRNT Annual Meeting, and based on feedback from the 2019 [Membership Survey](#) – which indicated both a desire for open scientific discussion and concerns related to Tobacco and ENDS Industries participation – the SRNT Board may limit or otherwise restrict

Tobacco and ENDS Industries attendance and participation in some aspects of the Annual Meeting.

Likewise, the Board will require that the affiliations of all attendees be clearly identified in order to maintain transparency in all interactions, whether one-on-one or in scientific sessions.

### **3B: Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest**

Per existing Board policy, all Annual Meeting presenters must fully disclose funding sources and conflicts of interest.

#### **Rationale**

*Membership Survey responses did not provide clear direction for SRNT to ban participation from those employed or funded by the Tobacco and ENDS industries. There was, however, clear direction regarding the desire for transparency and higher standards for participation by Tobacco and ENDS Industries representatives. Feedback from the 2019 Membership Survey and additional feedback provided by key stakeholders and others interviewed as part of the SRNT 2025 planning process did not indicate a collective will to change current policy for participation by individuals from the Pharmaceutical Industry. The key to appropriate compromise is transparency and the Board's authority to place appropriate limitations that support an open scientific forum while respecting attendees who favor restricting interaction with Tobacco and ENDS Industries representatives.*

### **Guiding Principle 4: Financial Support of SRNT**

SRNT does not engage in quid pro quo with organizations that provide funding to support SRNT, including direct or grant-funded support of the Annual Meeting. Financial support of Society programs does not entitle an organization to special dispensation.

SRNT's current policies prohibit receipt of funds from the Tobacco and ENDS Industries.

#### **Boundary Standard 4A: Transparency**

SRNT will be transparent when accepting funds from external organizations — including the purpose of the financial support as well as the amount of financial support. Acceptance of financial support from any organization will meet the requirements (and limitations) outlined in the SRNT Board Policy 1.7, Receipt of Funds.

#### **Boundary Standard 4B: Undue Influence on SRNT**

SRNT will make every reasonable effort to avoid the perception of undue influence on the part of organizations that contribute funding in support of SRNT's mission or specific initiatives. Funding organizations will not be consulted when issues of concern to the general membership arise.

#### **Rationale**

*As a membership association, one member equals one vote. SRNT aims to maintain the highest ethical standards when engaging with external funders on behalf of the membership.*

## **Section 3: Phase II and Implementation of SRNT 2025**

### **Next Steps**

1. Seat a Board-appointed Task Force to
  - a. Develop clear, objective criteria that sets a definitive threshold to determine membership for all consultants;
  - b. Set the ‘rules of engagement’ for attendance and participation at the SRNT Annual Meeting for Tobacco and ENDS Industries.
2. Develop and launch an outreach survey to Basic Scientists to better identify needs and opportunities.

## **Section 4: Final Recommendations**

### **Recommendations to the Board**

#### Recommendation 1:

With changes noted as a result of Meeting 3, the Structure and Participation WAG recommends adoption of the Structure and Participation Guiding Principles and Boundary Standards as written.

#### Recommendation 2:

The Structure and Participation WAG recommends adoption of the tasks cited for the Implementation Phase.