

## Conflict of Interest Primer

A Conflict of Interest is when, in the course of doing something like judging, a person may gain a personal benefit from judging a person favourably or unfavourably.

This benefit can be real or perceived, direct or indirect.

A **real** benefit is something that will happen if they judge a certain way:

A **perceived** benefit is something where they **may not get a benefit**, but **other people could reasonably think they may get a benefit**. This means that what something **looks like** externally is as important as whether something **actually** happens.

A **direct benefit** is something that directly results from their choice. For example, getting extra money for placing someone well.

An **indirect benefit** is something that may happen as a result of the competition, but isn't direct. For example, improving a relationship with someone or getting positive exposure for a new partnership.

### Risks

**Conflicts of interest, whether real, perceived, direct, or indirect, will negatively affect people's opinions about the ethics and legitimacy of competitions.**

The main risks of **both real and perceived** Conflicts of Interest are as follows:

- Public perception that competitions or BZDC are biased or unfair
- Questions about a specific judge's ethics
- Believing that a certain competitor didn't deserve to win (including the individual themselves questioning their win)
- Believing that a certain competitor did poorly because a judge "doesn't like them" or went overboard in judging them harder to avoid the conflict
- Public arguments directed at the organiser, judge or competition coordinator at the event

It also can take away from an individual's win, even if they really did deserve their placement. In some cases, a judge who judges despite a conflict of interest may, as an overcorrection, judge their "conflict" against a higher standard to avoid the appearance, which may create a fairness issue for the person being judged.

### Balance in Dance Competitions



The dance world is small and close. This means that it becomes more difficult to draw a line about where a conflict of interest should or should not stop someone from judging.

It is important to decide where the line should be drawn in competitions. A general overview of types of Conflict of Interest Risk is as follows:

High Risk:

- Romantic partners/ex-partners;
- Official dance partners/Co-organisers;
- People you have a public problem with;
- Organisers competing at their own events.

Medium Risk:

- Unofficial partners;
- Protégés;
- Close friends.

Lower Risk:

- General Students;
- Casual Friends.

This may not apply the same way to self-judged divisions (All-star/Champion/Invitational), as this is a collection of peers judging each other who share a common understanding of their role within the competition.

- High Risk situations should be avoided completely, as there is a large chance that complaints about the legitimacy of competition results may be raised.
- Medium Risk situations should be avoided where possible, and judges should be coached to identify where it may be a potential issue. In preliminary rounds, they should judge the opposite role of their conflict. In finals, if there is a possible replacement judge that does not have a conflict, it would be a best practice to utilise that individual instead.
- Lower Risk situations are less of an issue on an individual scale. However, in some communities, it may be a best practice to mitigate the appearance of favouritism. For example, if there are three main schools whose students will be competing, it would be best to avoid all the judges being from a single school in the area, or even using non-local judges wherever possible.

Generally speaking, judges should be in the habit of self-declaring possible conflicts as soon as they become aware it exists.



**Having a conflict of interest is not a bad thing.** Declaring a conflict is actually something that shows awareness that the perception of a conflict can be as damaging to the competition's reputation as an actual conflict. **At the end of the day, a conflict of interest is less about whether a judge can judge fairly, and more about whether a person may question if they have reason to not judge fairly.**