

# Acknowledging contributions from pharmaceutical companies

Traffic light guidelines  
for MS organisations



# Introduction

**These guidelines are to support MS organisations when deciding and negotiating how to acknowledge financial contributions from pharmaceutical companies (referred to here as Companies). They do not apply to paid advertisements (which are legal in some countries). These guidelines should be read alongside MSIF's 'Policy and practices in relationships with the healthcare industry'.**

Whilst MS organisations need to comply with national (marketing/sponsorship) regulations, these guidelines are designed to help MS organisations further consider how best they can provide information in a transparent and independent manner whilst acknowledging the financial support they receive from pharmaceutical companies.

To safeguard against undue (perceived or real) influence by companies, MS organisations need to retain control and independence over the content, design and development of the information they produce.

The guidelines can apply to a wide range of information materials such as...



printed and  
digital resources



websites



event banners  
or posters



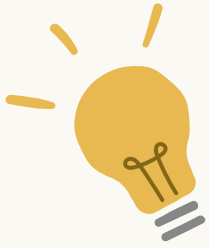
live-stream  
events



webinars



videos



## Top tips for maintaining independence when working with Companies

- Understand the national (marketing/sponsorship) regulations in your country.
- Have a consistent approach to branding. This will make it easier for you explain your preferences to the Company, using real examples from your work.
- Plan your activities early!
- Try to have more than one Company funding a project, where possible, to help maintain your independence.
- Ensure you have a written agreement with the Company to outline what you have agreed.
- Have early discussions with your funders about branding. This should include detail about the size, prominence and location of your logo and theirs.
- Demonstrate your ownership by always ensuring your own logo is on the material.
- Do not use Companies' channels or video conferencing accounts – use your own account, even if you fund it through a Company grant. This will help to maintain editorial control and independence, and build trust with your audience.
- It is best that you get a grant and produce the materials yourself rather than delegating to the Company to produce part or all of the materials.



## Traffic light guidelines



### Ideal

This is the ideal situation to aim for.



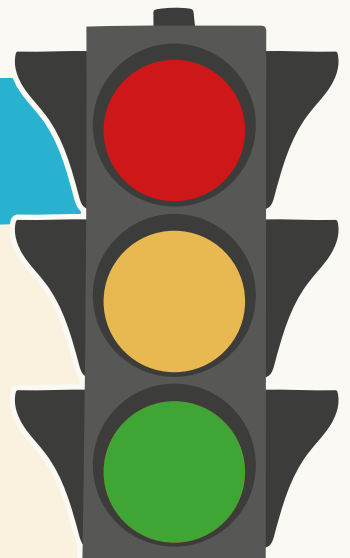
### Acceptable

This isn't the best situation but it's still acceptable, at the discretion of the MS organisation.



### Avoid

This situation should be avoided at all costs.





# Ideal

**Acknowledge the Company with a message of thanks at the end of the webinar, video or document. Write the name of the Company in plain text, instead of using their logo.**



By using a Company's logo, you are providing marketing for their brand so it's best to avoid this where possible.



**A few wording suggestions for crediting Companies:**

'The publication of this [booklet/resource/video] was made possible by a grant from [Company 1, Company 2 and Company 3].'

'This webinar was supported by a grant from [Company 1 and Company 2].'

'We thank [Company 1 and Company 2] for their support.'

Include a disclaimer to demonstrate your independence from the Company. For example, this text may say: 'Acceptance of financial support from [Company 1 and Company 2] does not constitute endorsement by [MS organisation] of any of the Companies' products or services'.



## Example:

The screenshot shows a webpage with a blue header and footer. The main content area is white. On the left, there is a section titled 'Further resources' with a link to 'www.msif.org/findsupportnearyou/'. Below this is an image of a laptop displaying the MSIF website. On the right, there is a section titled 'Useful links' with several links. A large magnifying glass is positioned over the 'Acknowledgments' section, which contains the following text:

**Acknowledgments**

We are very grateful to Company 1 and Company 2 for their support of this booklet.

Acceptance of this support does not constitute endorsement by our MS organisation of these Companies' products.



# Acceptable

**In some situations you may find you need more flexibility when negotiating this acknowledgement. At your discretion, you may want to agree to use the logo of the Company, alongside a message of thanks for their financial support.**

Even if you do decide to use the Company's logo, you as the MS organisation will have the final decision about the relative prominence, size or dominance of the Company's logo and your own.

As a guideline, you should aim to ensure that the Company logo is smaller and less prominent than your own logo. This will help to avoid the misconception that the Company had editorial control over the material.

Example:

The graphic depicts a webinar advertisement on a screen. The main title is "Webinar on life with MS" in white text on an orange background. Below the title, there is a white speech bubble icon and a small video inset showing a woman wearing a headset. The text on the screen includes "Join us on 12 October to discuss strategies for managing some of the most common symptoms that people with MS miss out - it's..." and "Don't miss out...". A large magnifying glass is positioned over the bottom section of the advertisement, which features the Multiple Sclerosis Organisation logo (an orange square) and the text "MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS ORGANISATION". Below this, it says "With thanks to the following Companies for their support of this webinar:" followed by three logos for "PHARMA COMPANY".




# Avoid

**There are a few situations that should be avoided when acknowledging a Company.**

- The Company should not promote its products or services as part of the acknowledgment or anywhere in the material.
- Do not allow the Company to have any influence over the content or editing of the material.
- Do not include the Company's logo in the materials on its own, without accompanying text to make clear that they supported the project rather than led it.
- Do not include text that recommends the Company or its products to people with MS (unless it is for paid advertisements, which are legal in some countries).
- Do not send out joint invitations from you and the Company. Even if you have full control and independence over the content, this can be perceived as co-design and collaboration, which can damage your organisation's reputation.



 **Text is needed to clarify that the company supported the project rather than led it.**

# Glossary

**Various terms can be used to describe funding agreements with Companies. This section gives a few definitions for some of these terms, however it is important to be aware that they may have different meanings in different sectors, organisations, regions and countries. If in doubt, always ask for clarification.**

- **Sponsored by**

A commercial arrangement where a Company pays to support an event, product, project or other initiative in return for some sort of commercial benefit, usually branding or prominence of some kind. In many countries there are tax implications of this kind of arrangement.

- **Restricted or charitable grant**

A grant from a donor that must be spent on the project or initiative for which it was intended, often with other project-specific requirements (e.g. expected deliverables). Most grants from companies to patient organisations fall into this category, usually as a charitable grant. Please also note that some companies refer to their contracts as 'sponsorship agreements' even though they are charitable grants.

- **Unconditional grant**

MSIF suggests avoiding this term, as it can be misleading. It refers to there being no requirement to promote the Company or its products through the project or initiative it is funding. However, in reality, there are still conditions because the money must be used for the project or initiative for which it was intended (which is the same as a restricted grant).

- **Donation**

An unrestricted grant to a non-profit organisation, for use in whatever way the organisation decides is appropriate in line with its goals.

- **Funded by**

A project or initiative that is *fully* funded by the named donor.

- **Supported by**

A project or initiative that is at least *partly* funded by the named donor.

- **In collaboration with**

A project or initiative that is co-designed and delivered by the patient organisation and the Company, in partnership.



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 [www.youtube.com/msinternationalfederation](http://www.youtube.com/msinternationalfederation)

