



PolyColumbus Multiple Interests in a Matter Policy

last updated June 2, 2015

Background

Human beings are complex, with a variety of interests and motivations. Ethical non-monogamy allows us to have multiple simultaneous intimate relationships, increasing the enjoyment we can share in this lifetime. Accordingly, board members and officers often have current or past relationships with those whose matters come before the board of directors. Additionally, board members and officers are often recruited to serve PolyColumbus based upon their experience and expertise leading other non-profits or businesses. Often the work of those other organizations intersect with the interests of PolyColumbus.

At the same time, board members and officers are required to take seriously their obligation to PolyColumbus. We serve PolyColumbus, and not the other way around.

A bright line of “anyone with a conflict of interest, regardless how trivial, shall be completely segregated off from the matter” would be simple, easy, and wrong. Those with multiple interests in a matter often have critical facts and unique perspective to share. To say that the only witness to an incident cannot disclose their interests and then share their experience — but instead must be silenced due to “a conflict of interest” — is to suffer the absurd.

A more modular approach is necessary.

The Four Levels of Multiple Interests

To create a more modular approach, PolyColumbus recognizes four levels of multiple interests:

- 1. Minor**, such as a prior relationship to persons, places, organizations, or other things where the relationship has ended without incident.

Interests of a Minor level warrant disclosure, but do not require any change in the affected person’s discussion, lobbying, or voting on the matter. The disclosure of Minor multiple interests shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

- 2. Moderate**, such as a current relationship to persons, places, organizations, or other

things that have minimal impact on decision making. Typical examples would include being peer-level co-workers or casual intimate relationships.

Interests of a Moderate level warrant disclosure and abstention from the vote. However, those with a Moderate multiple interest may still share relevant information they have, answer questions raised by others, and recommend a course of action. The specifics of the Moderate multiple interest will determine if and when the affected person should leave the (metaphorical or actual) room so that deliberations can occur outside of their presence.

- 3. Significant**, such as a current interdependent relationship to persons, places, organizations, or other things that have significant impact on decision making. Typical examples include workplace reporting relationships and intimate relationships of a non-casual character.

Interests of a Significant level warrant disclosure and abstention from the vote. However, those with a Significant multiple interest may still share relevant information they have, answer questions raised by others, and, if requested by disinterested persons, recommend a course of action. The specifics of the Significant multiple interest will determine if and when the affected person should leave the (metaphorical or actual) room so that deliberations can occur outside of their presence.

- 4. Acute**, such as a direct and substantial financial benefit from a person, place, organization or other thing resulting from the transaction. Typical examples include ownership interests, board membership in a relevant organization, or intimate relationships of a live-in or financially commingled character.

Interests of an Acute level warrant disclosure and abstention from the vote. By default, those with Acute multiple interests should be fully segregated off from the matter. However, such persons may still have relevant information to share in answer to questions from disinterested persons. The specifics of the Acute multiple interest will determine if and when the affected person should leave the (metaphorical or actual) room so that deliberations can occur outside of their presence.

Handling Difficulties in Classification

In the event consensus cannot be reached on the level of a multiple interest (e.g. Minor or Moderate) and how to manage it, the board of directors (less the person holding the multiple interest) should preliminarily vote on classifying and managing the multiple interest. Those who believe they have Minor multiple interest(s) or above shall abstain from that vote, but may ask and answer questions or recommend a course of action.

In the rare case that two or fewer board members lack such multiple interests, the spirit of the

“law of necessity” shall allow those with Minor but not Moderate or above multiple interests to take part in the preliminary vote on managing the classification-disputed multiple interest. This process may repeat itself at the Moderate level in the exceptional case if two or fewer board members remain without Minor multiple interests.

Example: Angela discloses a multiple interest in the matter. She asserts the interest is Minor-level, but a few fellow board members disagree and feel it is Moderate-level. Bob and Charlie each have Minor multiple interests (and no one disputes that characterization). No one else has a multiple interest. The full board of directors, less Angela, Bob, and Charlie, should vote to determine the level of Angela’s multiple interest, and then move forward accordingly. Angela, Bob, and Charlie may take part in discussions and lobbying (but not voting) to determine the level of Angela’s multiple interest.

Further Example: The same situation as above, only now the entire board of directors has Minor-level multiple interests, except for Diana (who has no multiple interest) and Angela (who has a multiple interest of disputed level). As Diana is two or fewer board members, under the “law of necessity” those with Minor-level multiple interests may take part in the vote to determine the level of Angela’s multiple interest.

Transactions Involving Multiple Interests

Even if consensus is immediately reached on managing a multiple interest, any transaction or vote involving any multiple interest of Moderate level or above shall be approved only when a majority of board members lacking Moderate level or above multiple interests determine that it is in the best interest of PolyColumbus to do so.

The minutes of meetings at which such votes are taken shall record the details of such multiple interest(s), what disclosures were made, and the plan that was agreed to for resolving the matter (e.g. allow others to ask questions of the person with multiple interests but otherwise keep them segregated from the matter). The minutes shall also include a brief rationale underlying the final vote on the matter.

As a special case, any board member may unilaterally choose to completely segregate themselves from a matter without further explanation.



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The core of the PolyColumbus Mission is empowering individuals that either self-identify as polyamorous, open, or ethically non-monogamous, or are exploring such possibilities. Part of this empowerment comes from serving organizations with similar goals by documenting best practices and creating other resources for successfully running such an organization.

Good policies facilitate the orderly and sustainable growth of communities and events that advance the PolyColumbus Mission, whether in the Columbus, Ohio area or elsewhere.

PolyColumbus does not claim a monopoly on wisdom. What we do claim is fifteen years (and counting) as an organization, and leadership with relevant and valuable education, experience, and training. We have confidence in the policies we draft, as well as the humility to revise them when necessary in light of experience.

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