

**Empire State Stem Cell Board**  
**Funding Committee Meeting**  
**Minutes**  
**May 13, 2008**

The Empire State Stem Cell Board Funding Committee held a meeting on Tuesday, May 13, 2008, in Concourse Meeting Rooms 2 and 3 in the Empire State Plaza in Albany, New York. Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D., presided as Chairperson.

**Funding Committee Members Present:**

Dr. Richard F. Daines, Chairperson  
Mr. Kenneth Adams  
Dr. Bradford Berk  
Dr. Richard Dutton  
Mr. Robin Elliott  
Dr. David Hohn, Vice Chair  
Dr. Bruce Holm  
Dr. Hilda Hutcherson  
Dr. Michael Stocker

**Ethics Committee Members Present:**

Fr. Thomas Vincent Berg  
Dr. Samuel Gorovitz  
Dr. Robert Klitzman  
Rev. H. Hugh Maynard-Reid

**Department of Health Staff Present:**

Dr. David Anders  
Ms. Bonnie Brautigam  
Mr. Thomas Conway  
Ms. Judy Doeschate  
Ms. Connie Gardner  
Mr. Michael Heeran  
Mr. Robert Keefe  
Dr. Jerroo Kotval  
Ms. Susan Mantica  
Ms. Marti McHugh  
Ms. Amy Nickson  
Mr. Kenneth Peek  
Dr. Tia Powell  
Ms. Beth Roxland  
Dr. Lawrence Sturman

Ms. Mary Szesnat

**Observers Present:**

Ms. Kyle Alexy  
Dr. Michelle Cissell  
Mr. Ed Ellison  
Ms. Jean Ellison  
Ms. Kathleen Gallagher  
Mr. Thomas Irwin  
Ms. Summer Johnson  
Mr. Richard Marlin  
Ms. Barbara Meara  
Dr. Janet Paluh  
Dr. Glenn Monastersky  
Ms. Kelly Ryan

**Approval of Minutes for the March 28, 2008 Funding Committee Meeting**

Chairman Daines called the meeting to order at approximately 2:30 P.M. Dr. Daines directed Committee members to the draft minutes for the March 28, 2008, meeting of the Funding Committee that were included in the agenda books and asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 28, 2008, meeting of the Funding Committee. Dr. Stocker so moved and Dr. Hohn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Priorities for Development of Future Requests for Applications**

Dr. Daines noted that all seven Requests for Applications (RFAs) approved by the Funding Committee to date are consistent with the goals set out in the draft Strategic Plan. He advised members that to keep the funding flowing, the Committee needs to begin to plan now for the next round of RFAs that should be issued before the end of the year. He noted that the Strategic Plan provides many options for the next round of funding and that NYSTEM staff was interested in soliciting input from the Committee regarding any RFAs they should prepare for the Committee's consideration. He then turned the floor over to Dr. Sturman.

Dr. Sturman first provided members with an update on the RFAs and Request for Proposals (RFPs) approved thus far. He advised members that the contract with the American Institute for Biological Sciences is awaiting the Comptroller's approval and execution. He stated that if the current schedule holds, the Funding Committee will be voting on applications from the recently issued RFAs in July, September and November. Dr. Sturman advised members that RFPs are being developed for a coordinator for the 2010 annual grantee conference and for a contractor to undertake the assessment of economic and other benefits of the NYSTEM program referred to in the draft Strategic Plan. He noted that due to timing constraints, the 2009 meeting will be organized by NYSTEM staff.

Dr. Sturman advised members that the independent peer review panel can perform a maximum of eight peer review assessments per year. He suggested that the Funding Committee should consider a continuous funding mechanism to support investigator-initiated research, possibly by using a standard RFA with automatic, semi-annual due dates. He advised members that staff will be developing an RFA to fund consortia. He noted the Board has also expressed an interest in funding high school educational programs. Dr. Sturman mentioned that training is also important and was interested in members' thoughts on how much they wanted to rely on consortia to provide training versus providing separate funding for fellowships. Dr. Sturman also suggested that the Board may want to consider awards for young investigators, outstanding investigators, targeted RFAs or possibly funding groundbreaking science with an expedited review process. Dr. Sturman then asked the Board for their thoughts on future funding priorities.

Fr. Berg noted that he had recently written an article about what is occurring in California's program, potentially precluding funding of very promising research because it did not involve embryonic stem cells and asked whether a researcher in New York State interested in working on adult stem cells would have equal footing with other researchers. Dr. Sturman responded saying that California's statute and purpose is different from New York State's statute and that New York's program was purposefully designed to be very broad to allow the State to fund the very best science. He stated that would include supporting research using stem cells from a variety of sources, as well as plant and animal stem cell research.

Dr. Berk observed that the Funding Committee explicitly discussed not spending a lot of money on buildings and that most of the equipment that people applied for could be justified under the consortia or investigator-initiated grants. He suggested that the Board would get the best applications if it focused on a limited number of funding mechanisms that are offered on a routine basis because people will understand the process better. He also expressed support for "fellow-to-faculty transition" awards. He explained that these types of awards provide a funding commitment to post doctoral fellows who have a commitment from an institution to be supported as an assistant professor if they also receive a research funding commitment. Dr. Berk also noted that the consortia grants will be very competitive and the most outstanding investigators will be funded as part of those consortia. He stated the training component that will occur in consortia grants is a good place to start and that the Board may want to invest in specific training grants down the road.

Dr. Sturman noted that the "fellow to faculty" awards reminded him of the Markey Foundation awards that Dr. Fischbach had mentioned, which involve sizeable five year awards for young investigators coming out of post doctoral training positions who are highly recommended by their institutions. Dr. Dutton noted that most stem cell researchers are probably underfunded at this point and expressed support for regular funding of investigator-initiated grants. He also expressed concern that funding for outstanding investigators could create a winner-take-all scenario and that it was better to spread the resources over a bigger base. Dr. Hohn concurred with Dr. Dutton and stated he favored funding new faculty awards over outstanding investigator awards because it is hard for a bright young investigator to get started. Dr. Dutton also expressed support for a new faculty award.

In response to questions from members about funding commitments over multiple years, Dr. Sturman advised members that the Department expects to commit \$133 million over the next five years from the currently approved RFAs, which leaves \$17 million out of the \$150 million available from the first two years of funding.

The issue of targeted funding versus general funding was raised and several members expressed a preference for funding investigator-initiated research awards without targeting them to specific research areas. Some members suggested that the Committee should not rule out targeting specific areas and that the Committee may want to take into consideration what it learns about research being conducted in New York State from the applications submitted in response to the currently posted RFAs.

Dr. Berk raised the issue of funding clinical trials in the future. These types of initiatives are very expensive and since it takes a minimum of three years for an idea for clinical trials to be formulated and approved, the Committee may want to consider setting aside funds now to support that type of activity. Dr. Holm commented that the Committee should be cognizant of the need to balance the relative budgets for each funding mechanism since some of them are very expensive.

Fr. Berg inquired about the ability of members to know what types of research are being funded and when that information can be made public. Dr. Sturman responded by stating he expected lay abstracts for research supported in the first round of funding will be included in the annual report and that information regarding the types of research funded generally can be made available once there is an executed contract. Dr. Sturman responded to concerns from some members about the need for flexibility in funding investigator-initiated and targeted research proposals. The Funding Committee will have some flexibility to move funding from one category of research to another in the current round of RFAs to ensure the Committee is funding the best science. In response to concerns about the limited number of peer reviewers available to the NYSTEM program, Dr. Sturman noted that staff has already been working with the peer review contractor and some members of the Funding Committee to begin to line up reviewers.

## **Adjourn**

Dr. Daines then asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Elliott so moved; Dr. Stocker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

*Approved: June 27, 2008*