

Empire State Stem Cell Board
Funding Committee Meeting Minutes
June 27, 2008

The Empire State Stem Cell Board Funding Committee held a meeting on Friday, June 27, 2008, at the Department of Health offices, 90 Church Street, New York, 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
Mr. Robin Elliott
Dr. Hilda Hutcherson
Dr. Michael Stocker
Ms. Madelyn Wils

Ethics Committee Members Present:

Fr. Thomas Berg
Dr. Samuel Gorovitz
Dr. Robert Klitzman

Department of Health Staff Present:

Dr. David Anders
Ms. Bonnie Brautigam
Ms. Judy Doeschate
Mr. Michael Heeran
Ms. Marti McHugh
Ms. Sharon Johnson
Ms. Amy Nickson
Dr. Tia Powell
Ms. Beth Roxland
Dr. Lawrence Sturman
Ms. Mary Szesnat

Observers Present:

Dr. Michelle Cissell
Ms. Barbara Meara
Dr. Glenn Monastersky
Ms. Kelly Ryan

Approval of Minutes for the May 13, 2008 Funding Committee Meeting

Chairman Daines called the meeting to order at approximately 3:20 P.M. Dr. Daines asked for a motion to approve the draft minutes for the May 13, 2008, meeting of the Funding Committee. Ms. Wils so moved, and Mr. Adams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

It was agreed that the Funding Committee would take a five-minute recess before continuing the meeting. Dr. Stocker and Ms. Wils left during the break. Dr. Daines advised members that since the Funding Committee did not have a quorum, the meeting would be held for information and discussion purposes only.

Proposal Development Discussion: Assessing the Economic and Other Benefits of the NYSTEM Initiative

Dr. Daines reminded members that as part of the Strategic Plan the Board agreed to conduct regular assessments of the economic and other benefits of the NYSTEM initiative. Dr. Daines advised members that a concept paper for a Request for Proposals (RFP) to retain a contractor to perform the assessment was included in their agenda books under tab 11. He then turned the floor over to Dr. Sturman to solicit members' comments.

Dr. Sturman provided the Board with a brief overview of the concept paper and noted that the draft included components mostly taken from the Board's Strategic Plan. He noted that the assessment could be done by a number of entities, potentially including a unit of state government. Dr. Sturman then asked members for their thoughts and suggestions.

Mr. Elliott suggested the Board and staff should refer to two relevant documents. One is a policy analysis on stem cell research in New York State that was done in connection with the University of Rochester three or four years ago. The other is a report prepared by the Office of the State Comptroller on the economic development aspects of bio-medical research in New York State. Mr. Adams agreed and suggested staff contact Mary Louise Mallick who worked on that report and is a well known expert in this area. He noted that Ms. Mallick is currently the First Deputy Comptroller for Comptroller DiNapoli. Mr. Adams also recommended staff engage in broad outreach to experienced consulting firms that have done this type of work before and mentioned a Boston consultant group that was currently doing similar work.

Mr. Elliott suggested the benchmark for the recruitment of scientists in the concept paper should be amended to include the retention of scientists as well. He noted that with California's large investment, it has been hard to retain great stem cell scientists and this is as important as recruiting new stem cell scientists to New York State.

Mr. Adams suggested that the concept paper should ask the contractor conducting the assessment to include more benchmarks of the program's success, such as related and coordinated actions of other state agencies that the NYSTEM initiative might inspire. He mentioned the Empire State Development Corporation, Department of Labor, State Education

Department, and State University of New York as examples. He also reiterated his prior suggestion that the assessment should include an evaluation of private sector funding and new commercial funding coming into the State for biotech and other public-private partnerships that are strengthened or emerge from the Board's work.

Dr. Gorovitz commented that increased collaborations among institutions may be the most beneficial consequence of the Board's work. He suggested the document should include an assessment of the collaborations that have been catalyzed by this initiative, including keeping track of collaborative relationships that are maintained even after a funded project has ended.

Dr. Daines advised the Board that staff will develop an RFP taking into consideration members' comments.

Discussion: An Open Request for Applications and Other Funding Mechanisms

Dr. Daines reminded members that they had expressed an interest in considering regular postings of Requests for Applications (RFAs) to fund investigator initiated research projects. He directed members to the concept paper for an open RFA included in their agenda books under tab 12. He noted that members were also provided with two other concept papers for proposals that would support the career development of young investigators and the development of consortia. Dr. Daines then turned the floor over to Dr. Sturman.

Dr. Sturman noted that the Board had received a high volume of responses to the Investigator Initiated Research RFA issued in May and would not be able to fund most of them. He suggested that given the level of response, the Board will likely want to fund more of these types of proposals soon. The proposed open RFA would provide opportunities for investigators to apply for investigator initiated research grants in January and July of each year. Dr. Sturman asked Board members for their thoughts on this proposal.

Members expressed support for regular solicitations for investigator initiated research grants and for keeping the research topics open to encourage innovation. Dr. Berk suggested this would facilitate the recruitment of stem cell scientists to New York State because scientists would know that there will be an ongoing opportunity to garner state resources for their stem cell biology research. However, several members expressed concerns about the size of the commitment proposed and its impact on the availability of funds for other funding initiatives. Mr. Elliott noted that this proposal would lock up almost half of the money available each year and inquired what percentage of the funds would be left after funding the pending submissions and this regular solicitation. Several members suggested that the number of awards or amounts may need to be reduced in some solicitations or that the Board should defer decisions on specific amounts until it has more information about the quality of the current submissions and the amount of funding committed to the pending grants. Dr. Sturman acknowledged the proposal committed a substantial portion of the funding and that the amounts may need to be modified, but stated that he was hopeful that additional funding may be made available with the program's progress and a good response from the public and various communities.

Dr. Berk stated he thought it was important to put a fair amount of money into the open RFA in the next few years to encourage researchers in New York State to move into stem cell research. He suggested increasing the number of smaller innovative, exploratory grants because they are a great way to bring scientists with expertise in related fields into stem cell science research. Dr. Sturman informed members that the RFA will be written to provide flexibility in funding in case the Board wanted to fund other concepts or priorities.

Dr. Klitzman inquired whether the open RFA could be used to target research to certain diseases or issues. Dr. Sturman advised members that the proposal is not written that way, but the Funding Committee could decide to modify it and target it to certain areas of research. Members of the Ethics Committee who were present at the Funding Committee meeting noted that the proposal, as written, would appear to allow funding of Ethical, Legal, Social Implications and Education (ELSIE) proposals. It was noted that combining ELSIE submissions with scientific research submissions could create problems because of the differences in the criteria that would need to be used in the evaluation.

Dr. Sturman then provided Board members with an overview of the fellow-to-faculty or young investigator awards and consortia proposals that were distributed at the start of the meeting. The fellow-to-faculty or young investigator proposal would provide support for up to two years of continued post-doctoral training and then the transition to a faculty position, for a potential combined total support of up to five years. Dr. Sturman stated this would be one way to help keep the most promising young researchers at New York State institutions. Dr. Sturman noted the suggested dollar amount, the number of awards, and the conditions are all subject to discussion.

Dr. Sturman gave a brief overview of the consortia proposal and California's approach to consortia through disease teams. In considering what New York's approach will be, Dr. Sturman suggested members should think about what will stimulate collaboration in the formation of a consortia, what the appropriate milestones might be, and how the consortia should be overseen. He noted the proposal was flexible and could be used to support a number of research teams and projects that are not necessarily closely related to a disease. He stated the intention is to create a center with flexibility to see how the entity wants to develop with core facilities, community outreach, educational plans, and training and career development opportunities. He noted that the proposal would fund two consortia for up to five years, with two million dollars available the first year, three million dollars in the second, and four million dollars in years three through five. The potential total support for each consortia would amount to seventeen million dollars plus indirect costs.

In response to concerns expressed about the level of commitment and members' interest in seeing what the quality of the current applications are before developing the concept further, Dr. Sturman called members' attention to the fact the proposed date of issuance is November of 2009. He noted that this date is coordinated with the expected responses from the recipients of the pending planning grants and this would give members more time to consider the proposal after the review of the pending submissions. Dr. Berk suggested that after seeing the submissions, members may want to support more consortia at

smaller dollar amounts which would force people to leverage both more institutional and private funds to fully achieve the program. Dr. Daines closed by encouraging members to continue to provide staff with their comments and ideas.

Adjourn

Dr. Daines then asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Funding Committee. Dr. Berk so moved. Mr. Elliott seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approved: September 19, 2008