

## Interview Phase Reviewer Guidelines

### Life Sciences Discovery Fund 2010 Program Grant Competition

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) expert reviewers will use these guidelines for the LSDF 2010 Program grant competition **interview phase** of external evaluation.

Please read the Request for Proposals (at <http://www.lsdfa.org/apply/competitions/program-grant>) before starting your evaluations. The review panel is tentatively scheduled to meet from Sunday evening, March 27 through the early evening of Monday, March 28, 2011.

If you have questions at any point during the evaluation, please contact:

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#### A. Introduction and Background

**Overview of the Life Sciences Discovery Fund.** LSDF was created by the Washington state Legislature to invest in life sciences research. The mission of LSDF is to support innovative research in Washington to improve health and health care, stimulate economic activity, and promote life sciences competitiveness.

**Board of Trustees.** LSDF is governed by a board of trustees, which has final funding authority. The board is considerably informed by the expert evaluation process, but uses additional criteria in making award decisions. Your evaluation comments should not assume that a proposal will or will not be funded.

**Expectations of Reviewers.** LSDF achieves its mission by funding proposals through a competitive granting process, the success of which depends upon superb expert evaluation. As a reviewer evaluating LSDF proposals, you are expected to protect the confidentiality of the proposals and of the evaluation process itself and to abide by a strict standard in avoiding any conflict of interest. Any concerns you may have about a proposal or the ability to evaluate it impartially should be communicated in confidence to AAAS.

1. *Confidentiality.* The proposals and the evaluation process are confidential. Other than in the direct conduct of the interview, you must not contact research team members or

the LSDF Board of Trustees. You will be asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement prior to your participation in the evaluation of LSDF proposals.

**2. Conflict of Interest.** A perceived or actual conflict of interest in expert evaluation exists when a reviewer has an interest associated with a grant proposal that may bias his or her evaluation of it. There are several bases for a conflict of interest: employment, financial arrangements, personal or professional relationships, or other personal interests. Any one condition may serve to disqualify a reviewer from participating in the evaluation of a proposal. If you believe that there may be a conflict or a perception of conflict, notify AAAS, who will make the determination about your ability to evaluate a proposal without conflict. As part of your duties as an LSDF expert reviewer, you will be expected to sign a declaration that you have disclosed all conflicts of interest that you may have with the proposals.

## B. Competition Goals

**Overview of the LSDF 2010 Program Grant Competition.** This competition will award up to \$10 million for the launch and development of new broad-based research initiatives that will help Washington research organizations advance their strategic priorities and leadership/competitive positions in health and health-care research.

**What is a Fundable Program?** Programs are collaborative, scientifically rigorous research initiatives that address major problems within a field of study.

- **New for 2010 is eligibility of proposals for programs to help solve problems in health or health care by providing an enabling research resource for Washington investigators.** Such a resource must have the power to catalyze numerous research efforts, readily serve a significant number of intrastate users, and have broad applicability.
- **Proposed programs must be built upon an applicant organization's strengths and have clear strategic importance for the applicant organization.** Principal investigators must describe their plans to launch and build the program, the ways the program will advance the applicant organization's strategic direction, and the resource commitments that will be in place to support and sustain the program's growth and development. LSDF expects that applicant organizations will make significant resource commitments (cash and/or in-kind) to support the proposed programs and help them grow to sustainability. Organizational resource commitments may include but are not limited to:
  - support for key research, technical, or administrative personnel;
  - recruitment of and start-up support for program researchers;
  - absorption of institutional facilities and administration ("indirect") charges;
  - provision of laboratory, clinical, or office space that is newly or specifically designated for program activities;
  - support for renovation of program facilities; and
  - purchase of new equipment or supplies, or dedication of existing equipment or supplies to the program.

- **Proposed programs must have a long-term vision and be designed to endure.** The program must not be structured around research questions that will be answered within a few years, or without long-term plans for expanding program activities or evolving to meet new challenges.
- **Programs will create new synergies among participating researchers and organizations.** Synergy results from the interchange among participants with complementary strengths and perspectives who are able to develop new programmatic research directions because of the collaboration. In this context, the opposite of synergy would be an assembly of research projects operating in parallel with no added value to each other.
- **Programs must include a well-detailed plan of research.** The research may be either led by the principal investigator or conducted by other Washington investigators using a research resource provided by the principal investigator through the program. In all cases, principal investigators must describe the program's research activities – including the research focus/agenda and metrics for assessing success – such that reviewers can understand the research priorities and the methodologies to be used.

Proposals that seek only to develop research resources in the absence of clearly articulated research initiatives will not be considered for funding. Similarly, a program to implement an innovation (e.g., an improved clinical method) or to train a cadre of professionals in the absence of research questions is not fundable. Translation of innovations to broader practice must be accompanied by investigation of research questions.

- **LSDF desires to fund teams that show a commitment to translating the results of their research into widespread use.** "Translation" includes transitions from the laboratory into practice and/or expanding local practice into broad acceptance and use. Translation can involve intra- or inter-organizational adoption of research results into practice, public policy initiatives, and commercialization.

Proposals with the capacity to attract additional resources to enable translation or broader implementation of the research are especially desirable. Such additional resources may include follow-on research and/or investor funding; recruitment of scientific talent or companies to Washington; commitments to commercialization of research discoveries through the formation of a new company or licensing to an existing company; and commitments from research partners or others to adopt a successfully demonstrated strategy or technology.

- **Proposals with the potential to have near-term impact on improving health and health care are of particular interest.** All proposals are expected to provide health-related returns to the state. Such returns may include, but are not limited to, enhancement of disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, or management; and improved efficiencies in health and health-care systems.

Restructuring of existing resources within an organization without developing new resources or capabilities does not meet LSDF's definition of a "program." Rather, LSDF support is meant to assist with the launch of new initiatives that represent innovative thinking within the participating organizations and the field.

- **Proposals Must Serve the LSDF Mission.** As a reviewer, you will not be expected to be familiar with the particular environment of Washington. It is the principal investigators' responsibility to articulate that environment clearly and to define convincingly the specific benefits their research is designed to produce.

Examples of funded programs and cumulative returns to Washington from LSDF investments are at [http://www.lsdfa.org/about\\_grantees/grants](http://www.lsdfa.org/about_grantees/grants).

### C. Interview Process

**Proposal Rating Process and Evaluation.** The interviews that you will be conducting complete a two-phase expert evaluation process convened by AAAS for LSDF. The first phase, or "mail evaluation," resulted in consensus summaries of individual proposals prepared by expert panels according to the evaluation criteria described in the 2010 Program Grant Competition RFP and summarized in the [Appendix](#).

**Purpose of the Interview.** The proposals proceeding to the interview phase were chosen by the LSDF Board of Trustees. The interview phase will gather more information on the application, including that which is only possible through direct interaction with the proposal team. The interview is not intended as a repetition of the first-phase evaluation. The outcome will be a funding recommendation from the interview panel that represents the panel's overall impressions of the proposal, based on both the first-phase evaluation and the additional information obtained from the interview process. The LSDF Board of Trustees will consider the interview panel's recommendations in making awards.

**Technical Commentary.** If you believe that additional scientific or technical expertise is necessary to evaluate a proposal, you should not solicit it yourself, but instead notify AAAS to make arrangements for outside assistance.

**Resubmissions.** Proposals may be resubmitted to LSDF, and principal investigators are responsible for including previous evaluation comments and a response. Resubmissions are treated as new proposals, *i.e.*, they are neither penalized nor "fast-tracked" simply because they are a resubmission.

**Preparation for the Interview.** Through AAAS, you have received proposals and comments from the first phase of evaluation. Supplementary information (a response to the first-phase evaluation and an update on the development of their programs) submitted by principal investigators will be forwarded to AAAS on approximately February 21.

All members of the review panel will meet for dinner on Sunday, March 27 at the Hotel Deca (near where you'll be staying), Seattle ([http://www.hoteldeca.com/deca\\_hotelinfo.aspx](http://www.hoteldeca.com/deca_hotelinfo.aspx)) to prepare for the interviews, including identifying key issues to be addressed for each proposal.

**Composition of the Review Panel.** The panel is composed of expert reviewers chosen by AAAS to represent the expertise required to evaluate the proposals and interview the teams. Some of you may have participated in the first phase of evaluation. Additionally, LSDF Board of Trustees members may participate in the interviews. Board members will typically ask questions that relate to the impact of the proposal within Washington state but may ask any question that will help the board make its funding decisions.

**Interview Logistics.** You will separately receive information on arranging your travel. The panel will conduct interviews on Monday, March 28 at the Watertown Hotel in Seattle (<http://www.watertownseattle.com/>).

**Interview Process.** Your identity will not be confidential; interviewees will receive a review panel roster and short biographies, so introductions of the panel will not be necessary. Proposal teams are not allowed to contact you before or following the interview. Panelists will receive a list of proposal team members attending the interview in advance.

The review panel will have approximately 10 minutes before each interview for final discussions and preparations. Proposal teams will then have five minutes to queue up an optional presentation. Proposal teams will have a maximum of 15 minutes to present information that they think is critical to an understanding of the strengths and benefits of their program to Washington state.

Following this, the review panel, starting with questions from the assigned lead reviewer, will have a maximum of 45 minutes to:

- question the team about issues raised in the comments from the first-phase reviewers;
- question the team about any issues or concerns that the panel has identified from the supplementary information provided in advance of the interview; and
- evaluate the strength of the research team, as suggested by their interactions during the interview.

Typical questions cover, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- science and technology (including details of research plans);
- budget, including non-LSDF sources of revenue, the resource contribution of the applicant organization, and how the proposed LSDF monies are to be allocated;
- program organization;

- synergy; *i.e.*, how the program as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts;
- plans for long-term sustainability;
- plans for translating program outcomes into widespread use, *e.g.* through commercialization, practice adoption, or policy implementation;
- potential impacts on health and health care and the economy within Washington state; and
- appropriateness of and necessity for LSDF support.

AAAS staff will be the timekeeper and indicate when discussions need to wrap up or end. Following each interview, the review panel will then meet privately for a maximum of 15 minutes to discuss the interview and assign preliminary ratings.

Proposal teams may bring tangible objects to show the panel during their interview, but cannot assume that they will be passed among the panelists. Proposal teams are not to bring reprints or other materials to pass out at the interview. AAAS will intervene if teams bring excessive material.

After all interviews have been conducted, the review panel will finalize its ratings and evaluations of the proposals in a closed-door session. Proposal teams' presentations will be available to the review panel for these evaluations.

#### D. Overall Rating and Evaluation

**Proposal Rating and Consensus Evaluations.** Your objective, following the interview, is to place each proposal into the rating category that reflects your collective recommendation for funding, supported by consensus comments. The review form is completed by the lead reviewer after the interview panel session and circulated among the other panelists for consensus. Use the following general guidelines to rate proposals:

**Highly Recommended:** outstanding, deserves highest priority for funding

**Recommended:** good, worthy of consideration for funding

**Not Recommended:** poor, lacking in one or more critical areas; funding not recommended

The overall rating must consider **all** aspects of the proposal. A very strong proposal will address important issues through a well-structured initiative that meets LSDF's definition of a "program;" generate confidence that the proposed research will make a significant impact; and contribute significantly to LSDF's core goals of improving health and health care, stimulating economic development, and enhancing the competitiveness of the life sciences sector in Washington state.

The remainder of the review form consists of:

1. *Overall Comments.* Give your overall impressions of the proposal and team and describe the rationale for the overall proposal rating. Do not simply repeat points made during the first-phase evaluation. Include in your discussion how well the issues and concerns outlined in the first-phase evaluation were addressed and, as appropriate, the

rationale for any discrepancies between the first-phase and interview-phase evaluations or ratings.

2. *Overall Strengths and Overall Weaknesses.* List the major strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, putting each in perspective by indicating its relative magnitude.
3. *Key Criteria.* Provide constructive comments regarding how well the proposal met each of several review criteria. All proposals met reviewers' criteria for a "program" in the first phase of review; if your consensus following the interview is otherwise you should rate the proposal "Not Recommended" overall, unless there are compelling compensating factors or if the issue is resolvable through an award stipulation.
4. If the overall proposal rating is "Not Recommended," describe the key issues that resulted in the lowering of the proposal's rating after the interview. Note areas or issues that should be addressed if the proposal is not funded and the principal investigator resubmits the proposal for a later competition.

Following the competition, principal investigators will receive the panel's written consensus evaluations of their proposals. Thus, these evaluations must be constructive and written with care, accuracy, and respect. Neither principal investigators nor LSDF will receive individual reviewers' comments on proposals, nor should reviewers or board members be identified in the review comments.

**Funding.** The Board of Trustees will take the consensus evaluations into account in making award decisions, but will have state-specific interests to consider as well.

**Outliers.** LSDF understands that proposal quality will vary across the core evaluation criteria. For example, a proposal that may not be scientifically innovative may offer a major opportunity to impact health-care cost effectiveness. Similarly, a mid-level proposal in the scientific and health care categories could have outstanding economic potential. LSDF asks reviewers to make special note in consensus evaluations of compelling opportunities within proposals that might otherwise be considered ordinary.

### Appendix – 2010 Program Grant Competition First-Phase Evaluation Criteria

*The information below, adapted from the 2010 Program Grant Competition RFP and the instructions to the first-phase reviewers, is essential to review, particularly if you did not participate during the first phase of evaluation. Although you are not repeating the evaluation conducted in the first phase, it is important to familiarize yourself with the criteria used to advance the proposal to the interview phase.*

The principal evaluation criteria for this grant competition are derived from the Fund's mission. You will evaluate proposals with regard to their (1) scientific, technical, and organizational merit, (2) importance to health and health-care, and (3) future economic returns. In addition, you will be asked to specifically address (1) the appropriateness of and necessity for LSDF funding, (2) whether the proposal meets the LSDF's definition of a program, and (3) any

budgetary issues. Further, you will be asked to list any areas or issues that should be addressed in a resubmission.

Please note that if a proposal includes application of a technology platform (e.g., a drug delivery technology or a diagnostic tool), you must evaluate both the application and the platform with regard to all of the criteria described below.

#### *Scientific and Technical Merit*

The proposed program must be of high scientific and technical merit. Merit will be judged by how well the proposed program demonstrates the following qualities:

- it is innovative, possessing or fostering scientific and technical originality;
- it builds upon the established strengths of the applicant organization;
- the applicant organization commits significant resources to enhance the probability of the proposed program's success;
- its proposed research studies, methodologies, and metrics for success are clearly described;
- its proposed research outcomes are clearly defined, significant, and realistic;
- it has the potential to establish the applicant organization and any co-applicants as leaders in the field;
- the principal investigator and any co-investigators demonstrate the commitment, experience, and ability to execute the proposed program successfully;
- for proposals that involve the development of research infrastructure to enhance commercialization, the principal investigator presents a clear description of the commercial opportunities that the program will address, the potential for industrial participation in the program, and the plans for selecting research projects for the program, fostering commercialization of multiple projects on a self-sustaining basis, monitoring progress, and addressing various types of potential delays and difficulties;
- for proposals to provide a research resource, it meets a demonstrated need, has a credible plan for attracting users from across the state, and has a plan for establishing priority of access; and
- the budget is appropriate to the scope and goals of the proposed program.

#### *Organizational Merit*

The proposed program must be of high organizational merit. "Organization" refers to the structure and governance of the program itself, not the applicant organization. Merit will be judged by how well the proposed program demonstrates the following qualities:

- investigators demonstrate a history of effective collaboration and an appropriate plan to manage the collaborative process;
- it is organized in a clear way that facilitates communication among participants, decision-making, and future growth;
- procedures exist to coordinate and prioritize the work of the program;

- a coherent decision-making structure (governance) exists;
- its objectives are consistent with the strategic priorities of the applicant organization;
- it establishes a research or operational framework with strong potential to achieve novel and important results; and
- for proposals to provide a research resource: it has a plan to sustain itself and to keep user access fees reasonable, and has adequately considered issues such as data sharing, intellectual property rights, human subject protection and confidentiality.

### *Impact on Health and Health Care*

The proposed program must have the potential to benefit health and health care of Washington residents. The program's impact on health and health care will be judged by how well the proposal demonstrates the following qualities:

- it addresses a significant problem in health or health care for Washington residents;
- it has excellent potential to make substantial, beneficial, and measurable contributions to improving health and health care in areas such as:
  - improved diagnosis, treatment, prevention, or management of disease;
  - better management of health-care delivery environments and systems;
  - promotion of healthy patient behaviors and patient compliance with care-givers' recommendations;
  - better integration of care-givers, patients, and health-care systems; or
  - accomplishing any of the above in a more cost-effective manner.
- it proposes a credible mechanism for how research results will be translated into benefit, e.g., through practice adoption, policy implementation, or commercialization.

Principal investigators may propose a broad range of improvements in health or health care, and the impact of the proposed program may be near- or long-term, with near-term benefit being especially desirable. LSDF will give priority to proposals that address widespread health and health-care problems and that provide compelling evidence that they have the potential to yield benefits for the greatest number of Washington residents.

### *Future Economic Returns*

The proposed program must have the potential to benefit Washington's economy. Principal investigators must clearly state the proposed benefits of the program to the state's economic environment. Benefits may include, but are not limited to:

- providing direct economic activity through the conduct of program research;
- producing measurable gains in cost-effective health care due to the application of research results through practice adoption, policy implementation, or commercialization;
- contributing to future economic gains through program-induced improvements in health or health care; e.g., through restoring work time that would otherwise be lost;
- fostering new training and employment opportunities through program research;
- attracting life sciences researchers, companies, and jobs to Washington;

- creating new Washington companies and jobs and attracting investment capital to Washington;
- creating new or enhancing existing intellectual property that presents attractive licensing opportunities;
- obtaining future life sciences research funding enabled by the LSDF grant.

### *Additional Evaluation Criteria*

Your evaluation must also address the following questions directly:

*Does the proposal adequately justify the appropriateness of and necessity for LSDF funding? (or, "Why is LSDF funding appropriate and necessary for this program?") (See Section 1.2 of the RFP.)*

Reviewers should assess how well principal investigators establish the particular appropriateness and necessity of LSDF funding for their proposals. LSDF support is intended to play a catalytic role in helping investigators and their organizations apply their strengths in various areas of research. Principal investigators should explain how the program's purpose and scope make LSDF a particularly appropriate source of funding.

*Does the proposal describe a "program," as defined by LSDF?*

Principal investigators should clearly detail how the proposed work meets the LSDF definition of a "program" – a strategic, synergistic research initiative, broad in scope, that is designed to endure over time and address problems within a field of study and to position an organization for future competitiveness and leadership. One of the characteristics that defines a program is significant institutional commitment. This is not measured by a minimum cost-sharing percentage or other formulaic, quantitative criterion, but rather should be judged as significant in the context of the applicant and co-applicant organizations' resources. **If the answer to this question is "no" then the proposal should be rated Not Recommended overall.**

### *Program budget*

Principal investigators provided complete funding plans with their submissions, detailing the sources of revenues for the first five years of the program or LSDF grant period, whichever is longer, and how those revenues will be allocated. Reviewers are urged to evaluate the budgets carefully and suggest any modifications that they think appropriate, and indicate if any of the suggestions are essential in an award.

*If your overall proposal rating is "Not Recommended," please note any areas or issues that should be addressed if the proposal is not funded and the principal investigator resubmits the proposal for a later competition.*

These can include issues that simply need clarification as well as recommendations for substantive changes to the proposal.

## Interview Comment Form

Life Sciences Discovery Fund 2010 Program Grant Competition

Proposal Title:

Principal Investigator:

Applicant Organization:

Request ID:

### Rating Scale

**Highly Recommended:** outstanding, deserves highest priority for funding

**Recommended:** good, worthy of consideration for funding

**Not Recommended:** poor, lacking in one or more critical areas; funding not recommended

Overall proposal rating:        Highly Recommended  
       Recommended  
       Not Recommended

**Give your overall impressions of the proposal and team and describe the rationale for the overall proposal rating.** Discuss:

- How well the issues and concerns outlined in the first-phase evaluation were addressed;
- As appropriate, the rationale for any discrepancies between the first-phase and interview-phase evaluations or ratings; and
- The main strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

Overall comments:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

**Key Criteria:** Evaluate the proposal according to each criterion and provide constructive comments:

#### Organizational Merit

To what extent is the program organized and governed in a manner that will allow it to effectively carry out its work and grow?

Comments:

Impact on Health and Health Care (including whether near-term benefits are likely)

Comments:

Future Economic Returns

Comments:

How well does this proposal describe a "program," as defined by LSDF?

Comments:

Describe any budgetary issues that should be explored if the program is selected for an award.

Comments:

If your overall proposal rating is "Not Recommended," describe the key issues that resulted in the lowering of the proposal's rating after the interview. Please note any areas or issues that should be addressed if the proposal is not funded and the principal investigator resubmits the proposal for a later competition.

Comments: