Grant Application Information – Public Disclosure Request

Introduction

The Life Sciences Discovery Fund Authority (LSDF), a Washington state agency established in May 2005, makes grant investments in innovative life sciences research to benefit Washington and its citizens. These investments focus on strengthening the life sciences sector, improving people’s health, and enhancing economic vitality in the state. LSDF awards grants through an application process initiated by a Request for Proposals (RFP). For commercialization and opportunity grants, applicant responses to an RFP involve a two-step electronic application: a pre-proposal followed by a fully developed proposal. For project and program grants, only a full proposal is required.

Because LSDF cannot fund all the proposals it receives, applicants compete against one another for funding. The competitive nature of the grant-making process encourages applicants to submit the highest-quality proposals and is essential to LSDF funding the highest caliber of research.

LSDF has a responsibility to identify and fund research with the potential to maximize the returns on the state’s investment, while maintaining a process that is open to public scrutiny. The following description outlines the rationale and means through which LSDF addresses its public disclosure responsibilities.

The Role of Confidentiality in the Grant-making Process

Applicant responses to an LSDF RFP include detailed descriptions of the proposed research. Applications encompass information that is unpublished and not generally known to the public, such as research data, hypotheses, experimental plans, business plans, and potentially valuable intellectual property. The information within a grant application is of significant competitive value to the applicant. It is the unique currency through which the applicant obtains the financial resources necessary to accomplish his or her research.

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1 Letters of intent were also required for the 2007-2009 project, program, and commercialization grant competitions.
Applicants often submit the same plans and ideas to multiple potential grantors, either simultaneously or sequentially. Submitting this information carries risk for the applicants, in that they share their best ideas with no guarantee of obtaining funding. These ideas could be of value to other individuals who, given the opportunity, might use them to enhance their own competitiveness for funding. Disclosure to third parties of information within unfunded LSDF applications would put applicants in a less competitive position for funding from other sources. Thus, applicants would likely suffer private loss by losing the exclusive right to their ideas. Additionally, their ability to attract the financial resources necessary to perform their research could be compromised.

After a grant application has been funded and the researcher is no longer competing for financial resources to accomplish a specific work plan, he or she is still likely to be involved in a competition to be the first to solve the research problem or to test a hypothesis. In this context, a researcher’s competitive advantage is usually attributable to the novelty of his or her approach to accomplish the work plan. That novelty may lie in a unique insight, an innovative methodology, a fresh way of framing a problem, an astute business plan, or any of a myriad of other factors in which the researcher’s creativity is uniquely evident. If the researcher were to lose a competitive advantage, it could greatly influence his or her ability to receive subsequent research funding, attract high quality students and colleagues, publish in prestigious journals, and attain career advancement. Therefore, even after funding has occurred, confidentiality is still necessary and essential for certain critical elements in the grant application, the disclosure of which would be likely to result in losing a competitive advantage or other private loss.

**Washington State’s Public Disclosure Law as it Applies to LSDF**

LSDF is subject to Washington State Public Records Act RCW 42.56. In enacting the legislation that created LSDF, legislators understood that valuable and proprietary information would be submitted in grant applications and that premature release of this information would reasonably be expected to result in private loss to its providers. Therefore, the Washington State Public Records Act was amended specifically to exempt the following from public inspection and copying:

> Financial, commercial, operations and technical and research information and data submitted to or obtained by the life sciences discovery fund authority in applications for, or delivery of, grants under chapter 43.350 RCW, to the extent that such information, if revealed, would reasonably be expected to result in private loss to the providers of this information. RCW 42.56.270 (14)
**LSDF Public Disclosure Practices**

Information contained in grant applications received by LSDF is used or disclosed solely for evaluation of the applications or as required by law. All applications are kept confidential in accordance with LSDF's confidentiality policy and are subject to the public disclosure laws of Washington state. In compliance with the Washington State Public Records Act, LSDF withholds information covered by its exemption. Accordingly, LSDF has implemented the following disclosure practices:

**For unfunded applications:**

The following information will generally be disclosed in response to requests for public records related to unfunded applications:

- information regarding the grant’s principal investigator (e.g., name and contact information);
- the title of the research project or program;
- information regarding the applicant organization (e.g., organization name, type of organization, organizational contacts, address, county and legislative district);
- research start and end dates;
- amount of funding requested from LSDF; and
- general information that is not likely to result in private loss to its providers (e.g., whether human subjects or vertebrate animals will be used in the proposed research).

The following information will generally be deemed exempt from disclosure and withheld in response to requests for public records related to unfunded applications:

- the abstract describing the research and key words associated with the research;
- the names of research collaborators and collaborating organizations;
- a roster of personnel, including their biographical sketches, working under the grant; and
- the narrative, budget, supporting letter and attachment sections.

**For funded applications:**

The following information will generally be disclosed in response to requests for public records related to funded applications:

- information regarding the grant’s principal investigator (e.g., name and contact information);
- the title of the research project or program;
- information regarding the applicant organization (e.g., organization name, type of organization, organizational contacts, address, county and legislative district);
- research start and end dates;
- amount of funding requested from LSDF;
- general information (e.g., whether human subjects or vertebrate animals will be used in the research).
research);

- the names, addresses and contact information for collaborating organizations and individuals;
- a roster of personnel, including their biographical sketches, working under the grant, to the extent that release of this information is not reasonably expected to result in private loss to its provider(s); and
- portions of the application’s abstract describing the research and the narrative, budget, supporting letter and attachment sections and key words associated with the project or program, to the extent that their release is not reasonably expected to result in private loss to the provider(s) of this information.

**Submitting a Public Disclosure Request to LSDF**

All public disclosure requests for LSDF grant applications must be in writing. The request must include the following:

- first and last name of requestor
- address
- telephone number
- email address
- specific description of the document(s) requested

The request can be submitted by mail, courier, fax, or email (recordsrequest@lsdfa.org). LSDF will respond to the request within five business days of receipt.

If LSDF receives a public disclosure request for a grant application (pre-proposal and/or proposal), it will notify the named applicant organization in a timely manner in order to allow that organization the opportunity to assert objections to disclosures in any applicable proceeding.