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2 November 2007

75 Innovative Research Programs Vie for Life Sciences Funding

SEATTLE— The Life Sciences Discovery Fund (LSDF) announced today that 75 Washington research programs are competing for millions of dollars in state health research support. The programs are designed to promote the competitiveness of Washington's life sciences industry, improve health and health care, and foster economic growth in the state. Those selected for funding will receive \$18-20 million of Washington's tobacco settlement bonus dollars to implement their research initiatives.

Named "Innovative Programs to Advance Health Research," LSDF's grant competition drew applications last week from universities, private research institutions, public health organizations, hospitals, government research entities, and other health-related organizations. Fifty-four of the program proposals involve multi-organizational partnerships. Twenty-six include for-profit companies joining nonprofits in new collaborative research enterprises. Sixty-three of the proposals were submitted by Puget Sound applicants; twelve applications came from organizations outside the Puget Sound region.

"The lead investigators, their collaborating teams, and the organizations they represent have submitted blueprints for creative new advances in health research," says Lee Huntsman, executive director of LSDF. "At the same time, their programs represent strategic innovations for the applicant organizations." According to Huntsman, this is one of the Fund's goals, "to help Washington's life sciences institutions and companies build on their strengths to become more successful."

LSDF emphasizes that this competition is designed to fund the development of programs of research. It is focusing on proposals that are broader than individual scientific projects. In order to build institutional life-sciences capacity for the future, the Fund aims to foster new synergies among researchers, and it is looking for programs that will have enduring effectiveness. So it has asked applicants to demonstrate how the initiatives they propose will position them and their partners for future competitiveness and leadership.

The range of proposals that have been received is expansive. Some outline research involving regenerative medicine, vaccines, predictive and preventive medicine, advanced diagnostic methodologies, surgical robotics, and advanced orthopedic implants. Other proposals target autoimmune disease, tobacco-related disease, several forms of cancer, infectious diseases, and heart and brain diseases. Some researchers describe new approaches to combat premature birth, mental illness, hearing loss, diabetes, and obesity.



All the programs delineate plans for participating organizations to commit their own resources to the sustainable success of the proposed program.

According to John Des Rosier, LSDF 's director of programs, this institutional engagement is one of the most distinctive features of the competition. "All applicant organizations are asked to make resource commitments to ensure the success of the new initiatives. So the investment of the state in these efforts will be complemented by the investment of the applicant organizations as well."

Proposals, which were due October 24, will now be evaluated by national panels of expert reviewers convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Selected applicants will be interviewed by an additional panel of peer experts. Award recipients will then be chosen by the LSDF Board of Trustees from proposals recommended for funding by reviewers. Announcement of the awards is expected in April of 2008.

This is the second LSDF grant competition of 2007. It follows an earlier one, completed in September and funded by private donors, which focused on projects applying technology to health care in beneficial new ways. Together, these first LSDF grant programs are inaugurating a ten-year state investment aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Washington's life sciences community, improving the health and health care of citizens, and promoting economic growth.

"The receipt of these new proposals marks an important next step in Washington's public investment in the life sciences," says Huntsman. "Thanks to the decision by the legislature and governor to commit public dollars to research, the state is enabling scientists, health-care providers, entrepreneurs, and investors to build a healthier future for its citizens."

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Established in May 2005, the Life Sciences Discovery Fund is a Washington State agency that supports innovative research to enhance life sciences competitiveness, improve health and health care, and foster economic growth. Information about its history, purposes, organization, current funding opportunities, and review process is available on its website at www.lsdfa.org. Announced in May as LSDF 07-02, letters of intent for the current grant competition were due on August 8, 2007, with full proposals received by October 24, 2007. Award decisions are expected in April, 2008.

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