



Bio 21 and the Origins of the Life Sciences Discovery Fund

The Life Sciences Discovery Fund (LSDF) is a historic step forward for Washington State. By turning the ambitious, bi-partisan vision of Bio 21 into law, the Legislature and the Governor committed Washington to an economic development strategy with health and science at its core. Thanks to their efforts, the state is engaged in growing life sciences competitiveness, creating new jobs and economic opportunity, and advancing health and health care for its citizens.

The idea for this innovative enterprise was spawned in 2002 by then Governor Gary Locke. He convened research and business leaders to develop a strategic vision for Washington in the 21st century and asked the Technology Alliance to coordinate the effort. Called Bio 21, this strategic initiative involved the collaboration of representatives from industry, government, higher education, and the community for more than two years.

Some of the Bio 21 work groups developed ideas for integrating life sciences and information technology, as well as promoting productive research and commercialization partnerships between public and private organizations. Other teams proposed ways that laboratory research could more readily contribute to prediction, prevention, early detection, and cost-effective treatment of disease. Entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and leaders of various incubation programs in Washington suggested innovative ways to bridge research and business and move breakthrough science more rapidly to market.

The results of this imaginative, interdisciplinary undertaking are summarized in a report published by the Technology Alliance in October 2004—*Bio 21: Implementing Washington State's Initiative in 21st Century Health* [www.lsdfa.org/about/timeline/files/bio21execsum101904.pdf]. The report presents a comprehensive analysis of challenges and opportunities facing Washington. Many other states and nations are investing heavily in life sciences research, creating a growing challenge to Washington's domestic and global competitiveness. At the same time, the state has a decided advantage in the research and technology assets it already possesses, what the report calls its "world-class universities and non-profit institutions, innovative companies and world-renowned scientific talent." Capitalizing on the opportunity presented by the \$350 million tobacco settlement Strategic Contribution Fund, the Bio 21 report recommends a strategic initiative in health—"a program of targeted, strategic investment in research and commercialization in 21st century medicine, in order to build upon our existing assets; address strategic gaps; and generate economic and health benefits to our state's citizens."

In early January 2005, Governor Christine Gregoire proposed to turn this sustained effort into Washington State law. The combination of science, jobs, and health, she said, has "vast potential for our state." The Bio 21 Steering Committee agreed, calling for "bipartisan support of its enactment in the 2005 state legislative session." Later that spring, after constructive modification and compromise in both houses of the Washington legislature, the Life Sciences Discovery Fund was authorized by statute. Today, carrying out the work of its early planners, it is the embodiment of the vision of Bio 21.