

# Life Sciences

## DISCOVERY FUND

### AAAS Guidelines for Proposal Evaluation of Life Sciences Discovery Fund Opportunity Grants

Please read the opportunity grant description and the Proposal Submission Requirements (PSR) (at [http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/2010/Opportunity\\_Grants/](http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/2010/Opportunity_Grants/)) before starting your evaluations. Any revisions or additions to the guidelines will be posted on this website and sent to reviewers through the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

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).** LSDF is funded by monies from the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement of 1998 to invest in the state's life sciences sector. Its mission is to improve health and health care, stimulate economic activity, and promote life sciences competitiveness in Washington.

All activities performed under LSDF grants must have the potential to improve health and health care in Washington state—that is, not merely continuing current practice, but changing it demonstrably for the better. Such improvements may include, but are not limited to, new approaches to:

- provide tools that have the potential to lead to breakthroughs in health-related research;
- diagnose, treat, prevent or manage disease;
- manage health-care delivery environments and systems;
- promote healthy patient behaviors and patient compliance with care-providers' recommendations;
- better integrate care providers, patients and health-care systems; or
- accomplish any of the above in a more cost-effective manner.

**Board of Trustees.** LSDF is governed by a board of trustees, which has final decision-making authority. The board is considerably informed by the expert evaluation process, but uses additional criteria in making award decisions.

**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 considering 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 your ability to evaluate it impartially should be communicated in confidence to AAAS.

### *(1) Confidentiality*

The proposals and the evaluation process are confidential. You must not contact applicants, principal investigators, or members of LSDF's Board of Trustees under any circumstances. You will be asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement prior to your engagement to evaluate 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. Opportunity Grant Goals and General Proposal Evaluation**

**LSDF Opportunity Grant Goals.** Opportunity grants allow the LSDF Board of Trustees to consider extraordinary proposals outside of its calendar-driven competition cycles that have the potential to advance life sciences research or research infrastructure within Washington's non-profit and public institutions. "Opportunities" are expected to arise infrequently, and only the most compelling proposals will be funded.

**Proposals Must Serve the LSDF Mission.** Opportunity grants support activities that have a high potential to address all three of LSDF's primary strategic goals—improving health and health care, stimulating economic activity, and promoting life sciences competitiveness in Washington. As a reviewer, you will not be expected to be familiar with the particular environment of Washington. It is the principal investigator's responsibility to articulate that environment clearly and to define convincingly the specific benefits that the proposed activities are designed to produce.

**What is a Fundable "Opportunity"?** Compelling proposals will include all of the following:

- the "opportunity" must be of an urgency or nature that cannot be aligned with LSDF's annual competition cycles;
- LSDF must be able to significantly leverage its investment against funding from other sources;
- there must be a high probability that LSDF investment will attract future financial resources, lead to commercialization of research discoveries, or improve the quality and cost effectiveness of health care; and
- there is a strong potential for statewide benefit.

Regardless of the subject matter, the hallmark of an opportunity grant is that it is of such an urgency or nature that funding under other LSDF offerings is not feasible. An “urgent” opportunity is generally one that is time-limited and thus likely to disappear within a relatively short period of time if not acted upon.

To be competitive for funding, applicant organizations must make a tangible commitment of resources that directly support and sustain the proposed activities. Organizational commitment may be in the form of either cash or in-kind contributions (e.g., equipment, research tools, software, supplies, or services).

**Proposal Rating Process and Evaluations.** The expert evaluation process consists of an individual preliminary evaluation of proposals and a consensus evaluation developed during an evaluation panel discussion. The objective is to place proposals into one of three rating categories (Highly Recommended, Recommended, or Not Recommended). This placement will reflect the reviewers’ collective recommendation for funding.

You will first evaluate proposals individually through the AAAS evaluation website, according to your assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. Once all of the proposal evaluations are complete, you and the other expert reviewers will participate in a phone meeting, and a consensus evaluation will be written. If any member of the panel has an opinion that diverges markedly from the consensus, that divergence will be noted and explained.

Neither principal investigators nor LSDF will receive individual reviewers’ preliminary comments on proposals. The Board of Trustees and principal investigators will receive the consensus evaluations, so all comments provided must be constructive, accurate, and respectful. You should provide sufficient feedback and detail to assure principal investigators that their proposals were evaluated thoroughly, to help formulate a resubmission should their proposals not be funded, and to inform the board in making its decisions.

**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. If you evaluate a resubmitted proposal, consider how the new proposal addresses the comments from the prior evaluation.

### C. Detailed Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Please read the opportunity grant description at:

[http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/2010/Opportunity\\_Grants/](http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/2010/Opportunity_Grants/) and sections 3.2.4, 3.2.5 and 4.2 in the PSR for further context.

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.

The principal evaluation criteria for opportunity grants are derived from LSDF's mission. As such, you will evaluate proposals with regard to: (1) scientific and/or technical merit, (2) impact on health and health care, and (3) future economic returns. Further, you will be asked to list any areas or issues that should be addressed in making an award, in execution of the proposed activities if funded, or in a resubmission should the proposal not be funded.

Reviewers should assume that because the principal investigator was invited to submit a full proposal, the basic requirements regarding the proposal's urgency and its potential for leverage and statewide benefit have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, LSDF invites the reviewers to comment on the magnitude of possible leverage that might be attained.

### *Overall Comments*

In the Overall Comments section of your review, briefly describe the goals of the proposal and highlight the most significant strengths and weaknesses. Discuss any other significant issues, such as modifications to the budget, that are not part of the key evaluation criteria below.

### *Scientific and/or Technical Merit*

The scientific and/or technical merit of the proposal will be judged by how well it demonstrates the following qualities:

- the proposed activities are innovative, possessing or fostering scientific and technical originality;
- it establishes a framework with strong potential to achieve novel and important results;
- its proposed outcomes are clearly defined, significant, and realistic;
- its objectives are consistent with the strategic priorities of the applicant organization;
- the applicant organization commits significant resources to enhance the probability of success of the proposed activities;
- it builds upon the established strengths of the applicant organization;
- it has the potential to establish the applicant organization and any co-applicants as leaders in the field;
- its activities are organized in a clear way that facilitates communication among participants, decision-making, and future growth (applies when new organizational structures are proposed);
- it has the potential to increase the life sciences competitiveness of the applicant organization and of Washington state;
- the principal investigator and any co-investigators demonstrate the commitment, experience and ability to execute the proposed activities successfully;
- the principal investigator makes a clear case for why an LSDF investment is appropriate and necessary to the success of the proposed activities;
- investigators demonstrate a history of effective collaboration and an appropriate plan to manage the collaborative process; and
- the budget is appropriate to the scope and goals of the proposal.

Principal investigators may request the budget amount and duration that are appropriate for the activities.

LSDF desires to fund teams that show a commitment to translating the results of their activities into widespread use, e.g., through commercialization, practice adoption, or policy implementation.

### *Impact on Health and Health Care*

The impact on health and health care of the proposed activities in Washington state will be judged by how well the proposal demonstrates the following qualities:

- it addresses a significant problem in health or health care for residents of Washington state;
- it has excellent potential to make a substantial, beneficial and measurable contribution to improving health and health care in areas such as:
  - improved tools that have the potential to lead to breakthroughs in health-related research;
  - 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; and
- it proposes a credible mechanism for how research or other 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 activities 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 citizens.

### *Future Economic Returns*

Principal investigators must clearly state the benefits of the proposed activities to the state's economic environment. Benefits may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the ability of the opportunity grant to leverage significant additional funding;
- direct economic activity entailed in the conduct of the proposed activities;
- measurable gains in cost-effective health care due to the application of the results of the proposed activities through practice adoption, policy implementation, or commercialization;
- future economic gains due to improvements in health or health care induced by the results of the proposed activities, e.g., through restoring work time that would otherwise be lost;
- new training and employment opportunities fostered by the proposed activities;
- attracting life sciences researchers, companies, and jobs to Washington;
- creating new companies and jobs and attracting investment capital to Washington; and

- creating new or enhancing existing intellectual property that presents attractive licensing opportunities.

Finally, your evaluation should note any areas or issues that should be addressed either by LSDF in making an award or by the principal investigator executing the proposed activities. 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. This can include issues that simply need clarification as well as recommendations for substantive changes to the proposal.

#### D. Clarification of Issues that May Arise During Evaluation

**Budget.** Principal investigators must provide cumulative budgets for the proposed grant period, with costs broken down by category; a budget justification; a written description of organizational commitments; and a resource/expenditure summary form that quantifies the monetary value of the committed resources. If any changes in the budget are recommended, please explain what changes should be made and why.

**Indirect Costs.** LSDF grants pay the full costs of conducting the proposed activities (*i.e.*, including what are typically called “indirect” costs, and noted on LSDF budget forms as “Administration” and “Facilities” charges) with all costs expressed as direct costs. Principal investigators are not to apply their federally negotiated indirect cost rate to their “direct” costs to derive Facilities and Administration (F&A) charges. You are not expected to determine how the principal investigator arrived at the F&A charges.

**LSDF Participation in Consensus Evaluation.** An LSDF program staff person may listen in during the consensus evaluation phone call. The program staff person is not acting as a reviewer.

#### E. Overall Rating

**Outliers.** LSDF understands that proposal quality will vary across the core evaluation criteria. For example, a proposal that may be less innovative scientifically may offer a major opportunity to make an impact on health-care cost effectiveness. Similarly, a mid-level proposal in the economic return and health-care categories could have outstanding scientific innovation. LSDF asks reviewers to make special note of compelling opportunities within proposals that might otherwise be considered ordinary or overly risky.

**Rating.** Please 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



Please rate the proposal's responsiveness to the following key criteria and provide constructive comments:

**Scientific and/or Technical Merit**

- Highly Recommended
- Recommended
- Not Recommended

Comments on strengths and weaknesses (Include your assessment of the scientific competency of the principal investigator and team):

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

**Impact on Health and Health Care**

- Highly Recommended
- Recommended
- Not Recommended

Comments on strengths and weaknesses (Include whether near-term benefits are likely):

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

**Future Economic Returns**

- Highly Recommended
- Recommended
- Not Recommended

Comments on strengths and weaknesses (Include possibilities for attraction of future funding either in the near- or long-term):

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

**Issues that Should be Addressed by LSDF or the Principal Investigator**

Please note any areas or issues that should be addressed by LSDF in making an award, or by the principal investigator in execution of the proposed activities. 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.

Comments: