



## Interview Stage Reviewer Guidelines

### Life Sciences Discovery Fund (LSDF) 08-02: Innovative Research Programs to Improve Health and Health Care

The following guidelines apply to LSDF 08-02 and are for AAAS expert reviewers to follow in conducting the interview stage of expert review (also known as a reverse site visit).

If you have not already done so, please read the 08-02 request for proposals (RFP) (at [http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/08-02/LSDF\\_08-02.html](http://www.lsdfa.org/grants/current/08-02/LSDF_08-02.html)) before starting your reviews. Proposal requirements and review criteria are also summarized in the [Appendix](#) of this document.

If you have questions at any point prior to or during the interview panel meeting, please contact:

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#### A. Introduction to the LSDF and the 08-02 Interview Stage

**Overview of the Life Sciences Discovery Fund.** LSDF was created by the Washington State Legislature to receive approximately \$350M in tobacco settlement bonus payments over a period of 10 years to invest in life sciences research. The mission of LSDF is to support innovative research in Washington State to promote life sciences competitiveness, enhance economic vitality, and improve health and health care.

**Board of Trustees.** The LSDF is governed by a board of trustees, who have final decision-making authority, including funding. They are considerably informed by the expert review process, but use additional criteria in making award decisions.

**LSDF 08-02 Goals.** The purpose of this funding opportunity is to foster the growth of innovative and enduring new programs that will help Washington research organizations advance their strategic priorities in health and health-care research. It is expected that the programs funded by LSDF will be characterized by a dynamism and synergy among participating researchers that would not exist but for the organization of their efforts into the program. LSDF 08-02 funded programs will be expected to advance the core goals of LSDF: to promote life sciences competitiveness in Washington, benefit the state's economy, and improve health and health care for its citizens. LSDF expects to distribute \$18-20 million in



grants in this competition. There are no restrictions on the dollar amounts or duration of funded grants.

**08-02 Proposal Evaluation.** The interviews that you will be conducting complete a two-stage expert review process convened by AAAS for LSDF. The first stage, or “mail review,” resulted in consensus summaries of individual proposals prepared by expert panels according to the evaluation criteria described in Sections 1.2 and 4.2 of the 08-02 RFP and summarized [below](#).

**Purpose of the Interview.** The applicants proceeding to the interview stage were chosen by the LSDF Board of Trustees. The purpose of the interview stage is to gather more information on the application, including that which is only possible through direct interaction with the applicant team. The outcome will be a set of recommendations from the interview panel that the LSDF Board of Trustees will consider in making awards in this competition.

**Expectations of Reviewers.** LSDF achieves its mission by funding proposals through a competitive granting process, the success of which depends upon superb expert review. As a reviewer considering LSDF proposals, you are expected to protect the confidentiality of the applicants’ proposals and of the review 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 review it impartially should be communicated in confidence to AAAS.

**1. Confidentiality.** The proposals and the review process are confidential. If you believe that additional scientific expertise is needed to review a proposal, you should not solicit it yourself, but instead notify AAAS to make arrangements for outside assistance. Outside of the actual interview itself, you must not contact applicants or the LSDF Board of Trustees under any circumstances. You will be asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement prior to your engagement to review LSDF proposals.

**2. Conflict of Interest.** A perceived or actual conflict of interest in scientific expert review 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 you from participating in the review of a proposal. If you feel that there may be a perception of conflict, notify AAAS, who will make the determination about your ability to review a proposal without conflict. As part of your duties as an LSDF expert reviewer, you will be expected to sign a declaration(s) that you have disclosed all conflicts of interest that you may have with the proposals.

## B. Interview Stage Process

**Preparation for the Interview.** Through AAAS, you have received proposals and comments from the mail review stage, and you have been assigned as lead reviewer for some proposals. Applicants are preparing a limited amount of supplementary information: a response to the mail review and an update on the development of their programs. The deadline for applicants to submit supplementary information to LSDF is October 7, 2008. Supplementary information



will be forwarded by LSDF to AAAS for distribution to reviewers. Please review all assigned proposals, review comments, and supplementary information thoroughly according to the evaluation criteria described in Sections 1.2 and 4.2 of the 08-02 RFP and summarized [below](#). **For the proposals for which you have been designated as lead reviewer, please be prepared to ask the first question(s) during the question-and-answer portion of the interview (see [Interview Process](#) below).**

All members of the review panel will meet before the beginning of the interviews at the Watertown Hotel, Seattle (see [Interview Logistics](#) below) to prepare for the interviews, including identifying key issues to be addressed for each proposal. This will be either during dinner on November 11 or breakfast on November 12. More detailed information will be provided closer to the interviews.

**Composition of the Review Panel.** The panel is composed of expert reviewers chosen by AAAS to represent the expertise required to review the proposals and interview the teams. Some of the reviewers will have participated in the mail review stage. 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 meeting will start with a pre-interview preparation meeting on the evening of November 11 or the morning of November 12, followed by interviews on November 12 and 13. It will be held at the Watertown Hotel near the University of Washington ([www.watertownseattle.com](http://www.watertownseattle.com)).

**Interview Process.** Interviewees will receive a panel roster and short biographies, so introductions of the review panel will not be necessary. Your identity will not be confidential, but applicants are not allowed to contact you before or following the interview. Please be objective and respectful of applicants during the interview, as the interview process reflects on LSDF and AAAS. Panelists will receive a list of applicant team members attending the interview in advance.

The review panel will have approximately 5 minutes before each interview for final discussions and preparations. The interview will begin with a brief introduction of the applicant team. Applicants will then have a maximum of 15 minutes to highlight information that they think is critical to an understanding of the strengths and benefits of their program to Washington State. PowerPoint presentations are optional.

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

- question the team using the “Detailed Proposal Review Criteria” reproduced [below](#) from the mail-review stage;
- question the team about issues raised in the comments from the mail-stage reviewers (if not already or sufficiently addressed); and



- evaluate the strength of the research team, as suggested by their interactions during the interview.

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 using a standard form.

LSDF board and staff members in attendance will meet separately to summarize their own impressions of the interview.

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

After all interviews have been conducted, the review panel will finalize its ratings and reviews of the proposals in a closed-door session. Applicants' PowerPoint presentations will be available to the review panel during the interview and in the final closed door session.

### C. Overall Scoring and Rating

**Proposal Rating and Evaluations.** Your objective, in the interview stage, is to place each proposal into the rating category that reflects your collective recommendation for funding.

Following the competition, applicants will receive the panel's consensus reviews of their proposals (not to include the comments of LSDF board members). Thus, these evaluations must be constructive and written with care, accuracy, and respect. Neither applicants nor LSDF will receive individual reviewers' comments on proposals.

The overall evaluation should consider all aspects of the proposal but does not need to repeat points made during the mail review stage. It is important that applicants have thorough and detailed comments. Explain how the interview informed the rating of the proposal according to each of the three core review criteria of the LSDF: (1) scientific, technical, and organizational merit, (2) the potential to improve health and health care, and (3) the future economic potential. Weigh each of the criteria equally. Consider how well applicants addressed the issues and concerns described in the mail reviews. Put strengths and weaknesses in perspective by indicating their relative magnitude. A very strong proposal will be innovative, address important issues, 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, fostering economic development and enhancing the competitiveness of the life sciences sector in Washington State.

**Funding.** This is a highly competitive fund. Twenty-nine proposals (from 64 letters of intent) were received for the LSDF 08-02 competition, and funds available will be sufficient for no



more than four to six awards. The Board of Trustees will take the consensus reviews 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 review 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. As reviewers prepare consensus reviews, LSDF asks them to make special note of compelling opportunities within proposals that might otherwise be considered ordinary.

**Rating.** Note that you should rate the proposal as presented by the applicant and not on the basis of its theoretical potential, i.e., in the absence of its likelihood of success. For example, a proposal may propose to cure a devastating disease affecting many Washingtonians but have a poor approach to doing so. In the “Importance to Health and Health Care” criterion, even though this disease is very important and its cure would be extremely valuable, if the proposal’s approach is flawed, the rating for this criterion should not be high.

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

### Appendix – Reviewer Instructions

The information below, adapted from the 08-02 RFP and the instructions to the mail reviewers, is essential to review, particularly if you did not participate during the mail-review stage. In particular, please read sections 1.2, 2, 3.4.4, 3.4.5, and 4.2 in the RFP for further context.

### Proposal Requirements

LSDF 08-02 is a “program” competition. “Programs” are strategic research initiatives, broad in scope, designed to address problems within a field of study and to position an organization or organizations for future competitiveness and leadership. In a separate RFP process, LSDF also funds “projects,” which are typically individual scientific studies, investigator-initiated, relatively limited in scope with a sharply defined research focus and accomplished during the term of the grant.

**What is a fundable program?** All proposed research must be scientifically rigorous. Programs will be evaluated according to their scientific, technical and organizational merit and their potential to benefit health and health care and the economy in Washington State. A fundable proposal will be innovative, address important issues, and generate confidence that the proposed research will make a significant impact. (Further discussion of anticipated returns on the state’s investment in life sciences research is included in the 2006 LSDF Report to the Washington State Legislature found on the LSDF website [[http://www.lsdfa.org/about/files/12-01-06\\_Report\\_to\\_the\\_Legislature.pdf](http://www.lsdfa.org/about/files/12-01-06_Report_to_the_Legislature.pdf)].)



- **Proposed programs must be built upon an applicant organization's strengths and have clear strategic importance for the applicant organization.** Applicants must describe their plans to launch and build the program, the ways the program will advance their 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 to support the proposed programs. Such resource commitments demonstrate that the proposed program is of strategic importance to the applicant organization and that the organization is invested in helping the program grow to sustainability.
- **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 a long-term plan for expanding program activities or evolving to meet new challenges.
- **New synergies will be created among participating researchers and organizations.** This is essential to a program but is not straightforward to measure. Synergy results from the interchange among researchers with complementary strengths and perspectives who are able to develop new programmatic research directions because of the collaboration. In this context, the converse of synergy would be an assembly of research projects operating in parallel with no added value.
- **LSDF desires to fund teams that show a commitment to translating the results of their research into widespread use.** "Translation" includes from the laboratory into clinical practice and/or expanding clinical practice into broad acceptance and use. Translation can also involve intra- or inter-organizational adoption of research results into practice, public policy initiatives and commercialization.
- **Proposals with the potential to have near-term impact on improving health and health care and/or the capacity to attract additional resources to enable broader implementation of the research are especially desirable.** Such additional resources may include follow-on research funding and/or investor funding; 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 other interested parties to adopt a successfully demonstrated strategy or technology.

Program proposals may request support for many kinds of activities, including:

- establishing new centers for research;
- creating new multi-institutional consortia;
- recruiting outstanding scientists to lead new research programs; and
- acquiring major equipment to accelerate advances within a new research program.



Restructuring of existing resources within an organization does not constitute a new “program,” as that term is envisioned within the 08-02 RFP. Nor is an applicant’s need for infrastructure development a sufficient basis for a program proposal. Rather, LSDF support is meant to assist with the launch of new initiatives that represent innovative thinking within the participating organizations and the field.

A program to implement an innovation (e.g., an improved clinical method) or to train a cadre of professionals in the absence of a research question is not fundable. Translation of an innovation to broader practice must be accompanied by testing of a hypothesis.

### Detailed Proposal Review Criteria

**Proposals Must Serve the LSDF Mission.** The Life Sciences Discovery Fund is an investment on behalf of the citizens of Washington State. Competitive proposals will serve all three principal review criteria ([below](#)). As a reviewer, you will not be expected to be familiar with the particular environment of Washington State. It is the applicants’ responsibility to articulate that environment clearly and to define convincingly the specific benefits their research is designed to produce.

**Specific Criteria for LSDF 08-02.** The principal review 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, there are several related criteria you will be asked to specifically address in your reviews.

**Review Criteria in Detail.** Each criterion, paraphrased from sections 1.2 and 4.2 of the RFP, is intended to guide you in evaluating and rating proposals.

#### *Scientific and Technical Merit*

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

- it is innovative, with scientific and technical originality;
- it meets LSDF’s definition of a “program” and offers the likelihood of synergistic outcomes;
- it builds upon the established strengths of the applicant organization;
- its objectives are consistent with the strategic priorities of the applicant organizations;
- it focuses on a significant problem or complex set of problems and provides promising new approaches or ways of thinking;
- it establishes a research framework with strong potential to achieve novel and important results;
- it has the potential to establish the applicant organization and any co-applicants as leaders in the field;



- it has the potential to increase the life sciences competitiveness of the applicant organization and of Washington State;
- its proposed research outcomes are clearly defined and realistic;
- it has the potential to generate significant outcomes;
- the principal investigator and any co-investigators demonstrate the experience and ability to execute the proposed program successfully;
- the applicant organization commits resources to enhance the probability of the proposed program's success;
- the budget is appropriate to the scope and goals of the proposed program; and
- the applicant makes a clear case for why an investment from LSDF (as compared to other potential sources) is appropriate and necessary to the success of this program.

### *Organizational Merit*

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

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

### *Importance to Health and Health Care*

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

- it addresses a significant issue in health or health care in Washington State;
- it will move the current state of knowledge in health or health care forward;
- it has the potential to make substantial, beneficial and measurable contributions to improving health and health care in Washington;
- its research results will be translatable to a larger population and a translation plan will be evident; and
- it will achieve benefits 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



- o accomplishing any of the above in a more cost-effective manner.

The range of possible proposed improvements in health or health care is understood to be broad, and the intended impact of the proposed program may be near- or long-term, with near-term benefit being especially desirable. Priority will be given to programs 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*

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

- providing direct economic activity through the conduct of program research and operations;
- producing measurable gains in cost-effective health care due to the application of research results;
- contributing to future economic gains through program-induced improvements in health;
- 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 intellectual property that presents attractive licensing opportunities;
- obtaining future life sciences research funding enabled by the LSDF grant.

Your evaluation of proposals is expected to be based on your judgment of the extent to which a proposal meets each of the criteria listed above. However, your review must also address the following issues directly.

*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 the applicants established the particular appropriateness and necessity of LSDF funding for their proposals. LSDF intends to provide grant support that is not readily available from other sources. Its purpose is to play a catalytic role in helping investigators and their organizations apply their strengths in various areas of research. Proposals should clearly detail why the program is not necessarily appropriate for other funding opportunities. They should explain how their program's purpose and scope make LSDF a particularly appropriate source of funding.



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

Applicants should clearly detail how the proposed work meets the LSDF definition of a “program” – a strategic research initiative, broad in scope, that is designed to address problems within a field of study and to position an organization or organizations for future competitiveness and leadership. Programs are expected to exhibit a dynamism and synergy among investigators that would not exist but for the organization of their efforts into the program.

*Program budget*

Applicants provided complete funding plans with their initial submissions, detailing the sources of revenues for the first five years of the program (from LSDF and other sources) and how those revenues will be allocated. Reviewers are urged to review the budgets carefully and suggest any modifications that they think appropriate, and indicate if any of the suggestions are essential in an award.

*Areas or issues to address if the proposal is not funded by the Board of Trustees*

Reviewers should detail any items or questions that should be addressed if the applicant chooses to resubmit the proposal for a future competition.