

**MINUTES OF THE
MARYLAND STEM CELL RESEARCH COMMISSION**
Monday, November 6, 2023
Virtual Meeting

Members:

Scott Bailey, Vice Chair
Margaret Conn Himelfarb
Diane Hoffmann, Chair
Debra Mathews
Linda Powers
Avram Reisner
Ira Schwartz
Curt Van Tassell

Staff:

Ben Antebi, MSCRF
Troy LeMaile-Stovall, TEDCO
Ruchika Nijhara, MSCRF
Sabrina Spinner, MSCRF

The Commission meeting was called to order at 2:09 p.m.

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the September 11, 2023, and September 20, 2023, meetings. A motion was made and seconded to approve both sets of meeting minutes as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Executive Director Report

Dr. Ruchika Nijhara presented the Executive Director's Report, which focused on the following:

A. New MSCRF Commissioner Appointment - Update

Ms. Liza Fues was appointed by Maryland's Speaker of the House to serve on the Maryland Stem Cell Research Commission (MCSRC). However, upon further reflection, Ms. Fues has decided not to move forward with the position and serve on the Commission.

B. Metrics/Impact Committee - Update

The Metrics/Impact Committee (*Diane Hoffmann (Chair), Debra Mathews, Barbara Nsiah, and Mary Armanios*) met to discuss various metrics, and what data, including demographic data and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) information, to collect from potential applicants starting in the upcoming application cycle (submission deadline, January 22, 2024). Collecting metrics will be an ongoing effort. Dr. Nijhara will keep the Commission informed.

C. Revisions to Request for Applications

As approved by the Commission, the 2024 RFAs were revised to include the updated funding levels for the Validation, Discovery, and Commercialization programs. In addition, the Commercialization and Validation RFAs include details on supplemental funding opportunities for applications including collaboration between academic institutions and a commercial entity in Maryland.

The MSCRF team made various revisions to all current RFAs to simplify, standardize, and optimize language related to eligibility and funding objectives. Dr. Nijhara and Dr. Antebi are working with the Scientific Review Officer (SRO) to ensure the new updates are reflected during the upcoming application process. The RFAs will be revised accordingly.

D. Scientific Review Officer – Renewed Contract

Dr. Nijhara indicated that the current SRO has agreed to serve for the upcoming scientific peer review meeting (March 2024). The SRO contract has been renewed for 1-year, effective June 30, 2023 – June 30, 2024.

III. Discussions:

Criteria For Defining a Maryland-Based Company for MSCRF Grant Programs

The discussion centered on the criteria for defining a Maryland-based company to determine eligibility for funding under MSCRF RFAs for the next grant cycle (R1 2025). Following extensive discussion, there was a consensus that: (i) MSCRF should remain flexible in its criteria and, should not preclude eligibility for out-of-state companies, as long as the MSCRF-funded activity occurs, and MSCRF funds remain, in Maryland; and (ii) Drs. Nijhara and Antebi should triage Commercialization applications such that non-Maryland companies could be reviewed for funding if they demonstrate significant economic impact in the State, including evaluation of factors such as the hiring of employees or retaining services from local contractors like a CRO, etc.

Expanding The Scope of Funding to Other Regenerative Medicine Applications

The Commission resumed its previous discussions regarding the eligibility for MSCRF funding of research involving the use of cell types such as CAR-T cells, CAR- NK or CAR-M cells. After discussion, there was a consensus to fund only research that involves the use of 'stem cells and their derivatives, or other technologies supportive of stem cells. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Commission voted unanimously to approve funding only for projects involving stem cells, stem cell derivatives (including extracellular vesicles) or other technologies supportive of stem cells, and to deny funding for research on CAR-T or related cells that does not involve stem cells.

Legislative Budget Hearing & Strategy

Following discussion on potential legislative strategy issues, the Commission determined to form a 2024 Legislative Strategy Working Group to be comprised of Commissioners Margaret Himelfarb, Diane Hoffmann, and Debra Mathews, and directed Commissioner Himelfarb to reach out to TEDCO's Mindy Lehman regarding forthcoming budget hearings before the Maryland General Assembly.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:54 p.m.