

**MINUTES OF THE  
MARYLAND STEM CELL RESEARCH COMMISSION**  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026  
(Virtual Meeting)

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**Members:**

Rachel Brewster, Chair  
Margaret Conn Himelfarb  
Christopher Dreisbach  
David Mosser  
Barbara Nsiah  
Linda Powers  
Alan Regenber  
Avram Reisner  
Ira Schwartz  
David Valle  
Curt Van Tassell

**Staff:**

Ruchika Nijhara, MSCRF  
Ben Antebi, MSCRF  
Sabrina Spinner, MSCRF

**Guests:**

Alex Choi, TEDCO  
Mindy Lehman, TEDCO

The Commission meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

**I. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the November 3, 2025 meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the 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. CY'25 Metrics & Highlights**

An overview of calendar year 2025 performance metrics was presented, highlighting program activity and demand across all MSCRF grant programs. The data highlighted the number of awards issued and budget amount per grant program, application volume, funded disease categories, MSCRF supported translational research, and submitted applications involving artificial intelligence (AI). Several MSCRF funded companies were highlighted as success stories demonstrating the Fund's impact on technology commercialization in Maryland.

**B. R2 FY'2026 Funding Cycle Timeline**

The application deadline for all 7 MSCRF programs was January 12, 2026. A total of 166 applications were successfully submitted – *reflecting a diverse range of applicants from various Maryland academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and biotech companies across Maryland*, totaling \$53.6M in requested funding. The Scientific Peer Review Committee will review the applications March 22-27, 2026 and the Commission Review meeting will be held on May 12, 2026.

**C. New MSCRF Website Update**

Dr. Nijhara indicated that the current MSCRF website is outdated and has functionality challenges and limitations in its ability to share information in a timely manner. With TEDCO currently working with a new website developer to redesign their own website, Dr. Nijhara has been in discussions with TEDCO about redesigning the MSCRF website, including funding considerations. TEDCO has agreed to fund the upgrade, with the budget capped at \$100k. The MSCRF team is planning to meet with TEDCO in upcoming weeks to discuss next steps.

**D. Legislative Hearings**

Dr. Nijhara informed the Commission that TEDCO's budget hearings would be held on February 19 in the House of Delegates and February 23 in the State Senate.

**III. Tuition Remission for MSCRF grants – Discussion**

Dr. Nijhara indicated that currently, MSCRF does not have a formal policy regarding the use of grant funds for tuition remission. While this is not a common occurrence, there were two recent inquiries/requests that prompted the need for further guidance. Following the discussion, there was a consensus of supporting flexibility to allow applicants to include tuition remission requests in their proposed budget. A question was raised regarding establishing a formal cap for this type of expense. Due to evolving compensation structures, the Commission agreed that additional data will be needed prior to establishing a limit or policies. Dr. Nijhara will synthesize the feedback and will share relevant data, for discussion and consideration at a future meeting.

**IV. Statement for Closing the Meeting**

A motion was made and seconded that the Commission go into closed session. The motion stated the following:

STATUTORY AUTHORITY TO CLOSE SESSION

General Provisions Article §3-103(a)(1)(i):

This subtitle does not apply to ... a public body when it is carrying out ... an administrative function.

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:

The discussion will concern a review of operational and related considerations impacting the administration of the MSCRF.

REASONS FOR CLOSING:

The Commission believes that the aforementioned administrative matters do not fall within the scope of coverage of the Open Meetings Act.

General Provisions Article Sec. 3-305(b)(13):

A public body may meet in closed session ... to comply with a specific constitutional statutory, or judicially imposed requirement that prevents public disclosure about a particular proceeding or matter.

TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:

The Commission will discuss specific provisions of the Governor's draft SFY 2027 Operating Budget especially insofar as it pertains to the MSCRF program.

REASON FOR CLOSING:

The Commission believes that conducting this discussion in closed session is essential to avoid compromising the confidentiality of the Governor's proposed Operating Budget pursuant to his entitlement to executive privilege to protect executive communications of a deliberative nature pursuant to, *inter alia*, General Provisions Article Sec. 4-301(a)(1).

The motion passed unanimously. The Commission went into a closed session at 3:38 p.m.

TOPICS DUSCUSSED:

The Commission discussed: (i) the amount of triage required in connection with the large number of applications received during this funding round; and (ii) heard from Mindy Lehman regarding funding levels reflected in the Governor's current draft budget.

ACTIONS TAKEN:

The Commission determined to authorize staff to perform additional triage of grant applications after the March review meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 4:03 p.m.