

**MINUTES OF THE
MARYLAND STEM CELL RESEARCH COMMISSION**
Monday, March 4, 2024
Virtual Meeting

Members

Mary Armanios
Rachel Brewster, Vice Chair
Mamta Gautam-Basak
Margaret Conn Himelfarb
Linda Powers
Debra Mathews
Avram Reisner
Ira Schwartz
Curt Van Tassell

Staff:

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

The Commission meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m.

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the January 8, 2024 meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the 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. Summary of Applications (January 2024 – R2)

In FY'24 (R2), MSCRF received a total of 91 grant applications, marking a 23% increase compared to the R2 cycle of FY'23. The number of translational applications saw a significant rise of 60%, while there was a 40% increase in applications from companies compared to the previous cycle. Seven applications were rejected due to eligibility requirements, leaving a total of 84 applications designated for peer review. The peer review meeting is scheduled to take place from March 31 to April 4, 2024.

B. SRO Update & R2 FY24 Peer Review Meeting

The MSCRF team is collaborating with the Jungle Lasers team to provide technical support and is communicating with the reviewers to ensure the smooth progression of the review process and the peer-review meeting scheduled from March 31 to April 4, 2024, in the absence of the SRO. Dr. Nijhara is presently engaged in negotiations with a reputable company to secure SRO services and implement a new application submission system for FY25 onwards. company to provide SRO services along with a new application submission system going forward in FY25.

C. 2024 Legislative Session

Mr. Troy Stovall briefed on TEDCO's impact before the Senate and House Subcommittees on February 8 and on February 12, 2024 respectively. Dr. Nijhara attended and arranged for MSCRF awardees to testify at both legislative sessions. Among them were the co-founder and President of Rooster Bio, a company funded by MSCRF through commercialization and manufacturing grants, as well as a patient involved in a clinical trial funded by MSCRF. Their testimonies highlighted MSCRF's impact. The proposed budget for MSCRF for FY'2025 is \$20.5 million, maintaining level funding from FY'2024. Dr. Nijhara will provide updates on the budget as they become available at the end of the legislative session sometime in late March/early April, 2024.

D. TEDCO Economic Impact Report 2023

TEDCO management engaged the University of Baltimore's Jacob France Institute to assess the economic impact of TEDCO programs, including those of MSCRF, in the State of Maryland. Dr. Nijhara noted the report's depiction of the relatively low economic impact of MSCRF. She communicated concerns about this finding to Mr. Troy Stovall, Ms. Tammi Thomas, and the consultant responsible for the report, citing deficiencies in the MSCRF data analysis. These deficiencies included incomplete data analysis without a functional study and insufficient data for the analysis. The consultant acknowledged that the study's findings presented in the report underestimated the actual impact due to these limitations. Dr. Nijhara worked with the consultant to incorporate the rationale for the low economic impact of MSCRF funding into the report.

E. Business Development/Outreach activities

On behalf of the Commission and the Fund, Dr. Nijhara is working to host various stem cell research-focused events aimed at promoting the Fund, enhancing brand awareness, fostering relationships within the industry, and showcasing MSCRF awardees' research. Plans are underway for a Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine Tech Showcase for translational research awardees scheduled for April 25, 2025. Additionally, on May 17th, MSCRF is partnering with UMB and JHU to co-host an event showcasing research from academic institutions, with a particular focus on early career-stage scientists. The third event for FY24, Felicitation Ceremony is scheduled for June 12 to honor and recognize MSCRF FY24 awardees. Details are provided below.

Upcoming events include:

- **The Maryland Stem Cell & Regenerative Medicine Showcase:**
April 25, 2024, at The Rita Rossi Colwell Center, in Baltimore, MD. A collaboration with the MD Dept. of Commerce from 2.45-6.30pm
- **1st Annual Maryland Spring Stem Cell Symposium & Workshop:**
May 17, 2024, at the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus. A collaboration with UMSOM, Johns Hopkins University from 9am-4pm
- **2024 MSCRF Felicitation Ceremony:** June 12, 2024 late afternoon/early evening (exact time to be determined) – Hanover, MD.

The meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.