

Communications to the BSI Community
Biosciences Initiative Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
April 29, 2020

Thanks:

My heart and my thanks go out to those on the front lines, our many health care workers, and those in critical supporting roles keeping us fed and keeping us safe, and keeping critical infrastructure intact. I can only assume that there are some among us who may have family members or friends struggling during this challenging time. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear, even to the lay public, how important forward-looking research is to the public health, and even the economy and well-being of the globe. However, given budgetary consequences of this crisis for the University of Michigan, the Biosciences Initiative will take a pause in aspects of our programs in order to protect our most important asset, the students, staff, and faculty of the university. In this message, I will try to provide specific answers to some questions you may have.

Program updates:

Funding of Existing Commitments

Over its first three years, the Biosciences Initiative has already allocated funds to a number of exciting programs, including Scientific Research Initiatives, Exploratory Grants, BSSP awards, and Core Laboratory initiatives. Our general model involves these programs submitting requests for reimbursement of funds spent by the end of each fiscal year. Funds expended in FY20 will be reimbursed by the Biosciences Initiative according to the budgeted amounts. Funds expended **by these programs in FY21 will be subject to the guidelines elaborated in the President's letter of April 20 for as long as those guidelines are in place.** Faculty offers and associated BSSP commitments made before the hiring freeze will be honored, while new recruiting is on hold. Similarly, existing staff salary commitments will be sustained at this time, while new staff hiring is on hold. Of course, these guidelines are subject to future guidance from the president.

2020 RFA – Scientific Research Initiative (SRI) and Exploratory Funding Competition

Just prior to the rise of this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis in Michigan, BSI had announced our third and final round of funding for our annual RFA (<https://biosciences.umich.edu/funding-opportunities/rfa/>) in two categories: Scientific Research Initiative (SRI) and Exploratory Funding opportunities. However, as a result of this pandemic, the BICC has committed to stand up a program in Infectious Disease Threats, in place of the final RFA.

Addressing the COVID-19 pandemic requires the breadth of biosciences and other academic fields at U-M: from engineering, medicine, public health, epidemiology, and biology, to economics, political science, and architectural design. U-M is thus in an important position to do something substantive not only about COVID-19, but also existing infectious disease threats like influenza, and future pandemics. The Biosciences Initiative Coordinating Committee has been meeting over video conferencing with experts across the U-M schools and colleges to create this program. **Biosciences funds allocated and faculty positions provided to this final SRI program will be restricted under the budgetary guidelines announced April 20, as long as those guidelines remain in place.**

Core Lab Funding Program

The rolling RFA for support of core labs is on hold for the time being.

BSSP Program

In parallel with the current hiring freeze, BSSP funds from the BICC are not currently available.

Ideas Labs

Research teams from the Ideas Lab conducted in October 2019 have presented formal research proposals, and the BICC was in the process of approving their budgets when the pandemic began. These teams are being asked to pause initiation of these research programs until the budget restrictions are formally lifted.

Biosciences Staffing and Your Questions

The Biosciences Initiative is managed by four staff members. One staff member is planning to go on temporary furlough, and a second staff member is also considering this opportunity. Please contact Jennifer Ohren with any questions you might have, and she will insure that your questions are answered or targeted to the right staff member or to the BICC.