

The logo features a blue background with a grid pattern and a stylized image of a microscope lens on the left. The text is in a white, serif font.

# NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD FOR BIOSECURITY

## Codes of Conduct Working Group

Progress Report  
March 30, 2006



# Working Group Charge

- **Goal:** To foster a culture of responsibility among life scientists who are potentially conducting dual use research.
- **Premise:** Codes of conduct are an important tool in promoting professionalism and responsible behavior and thus a key element of the NSABB charge.

# Working Group Charge

**“To provide recommendations on the development of a code of conduct for scientists and laboratory workers that can be adopted by professional organizations and institutions engaged in the performance of life science research.”**

- **To identify issues pertinent to the conduct of DUR that a code should address.**
- **To develop standards and principles that can be included in a formal educational and training program to promote appreciation for codes of conduct in the life sciences.**

# Working Group Participants

## Voting Members

- Murray Cohen
- Claire Fraser
- John Lumpkin
- Mark Nance
- Diane Wara

## Ex Officios

- Jason Boehm (OSTP)
- Jamie Fly (DoD)
- Robert Mikulak (DoS)
- Jan Nicholson (CDC)
- Stuart Nightingale (DHHS)
- Gerald Parker (DHHS Alt.)
- Kerry Patterson (DoD)
- Caird Rexroad (USDA)
- Scott Steele (DoJ)
- Helen Quill (NIH)

# Working Group Findings

- **Codes are not procedural guidelines.**
- **Codes provide general guideposts for responsible and ethical behavior.**
- **Codes are useful in promoting a “culture of responsibility,” one of the NSABB aims.**
- **Codes can be international in scope.**

# Working Group Findings

- **Codes are typically adopted by societies and associations to instill and promote a sense of professionalism.**
- **Adherence to a code may be voluntary, but is often a mandatory condition of membership in a society or association.**
- **Broad input from the research community, especially intended adherents and thought-leaders, promotes acceptance and support for a code.**

# Working Group Analysis

- **Existing codes were surveyed to identify core values and standards relevant for a code that emphasizes biosecurity concerns.**
- **These elements were prioritized and organized.**

# Working Group Analysis

## The Working Group then considered:

- **Target audience**
- **The value of contextual information, such as:**
  - **What are the concerns associated with DUR?**
  - **How valuable is education in preventing misuse of DUR information?**
  - **How will a Code be used?**
- **Structure and format:**
  - **Other codes, such as the GE “Spirit and Letter,” were used as models for a logical and accessible presentation of concepts.**



# Proposed Approach

**The draft code will consist of three major sections:**

- **Preamble**
  - Provides an introductory overview of “dual use” research
  - Describes the utility of codes.
  - Suggests how this code may be used.
- **Core Guiding Principles**
  - States the fundamental tenets of responsible behavior
- **Body of the Code**
  - Articulates additional principles consistent with the core tenets
  - Maps to various phases of the research process.

# Proposed Approach

## **Major principles identified to date include:**

- **Awareness about dual use research;**
- **Forethought in research planning and conduct;**
- **Consideration for the safety and security of others;**
- **Training and educating students and technicians;**
- **Compliance with applicable guidelines and rules;**
- **Responsible communication practices.**

# Public Input on the Proposed Approach

**The proposed approach must be tested and then benefit from more robust input from the research community**

- **Focus Groups;**
- **Publication and dissemination (NSABB Web site, Listserv, other means);**
- **Regional townhall-style forums;**
- **Participation at annual conferences of key scientific groups.**

# **Initial Evaluation of Proposed Approach: Focus Groups**

- **Focus groups were organized to provide feedback to the Codes Working Group that could be used to further refine the development of a draft code.**
- **Participants included practicing scientists, administrators, leaders in scientific and professional organizations, local oversight personnel, and ethicists.**

# Focus Groups Cont'd

- **Each session was structured to last approximately 3 hours with questions and discussions targeted toward the types of participants involved.**
- **General attitudes towards codes and dual use research concerns were sampled.**
- **The group was also asked to comment on the draft set of core principles.**

# Focus Group Responses

## Codes in General

- **Most participants had experience with codes and found that they had a positive impact personally.**
- **Participants discussed the distinctions they perceived between a code of conduct, a code of ethics, guidelines, and regulations.**
  - **In particular, discussion contrasted prescriptive guidelines with the more general behavioral standards articulated by codes.**
  - **Mixed views about the level of detail helpful in a code of conduct.**

# Focus Group Responses

## Codes in General

- **Opinions varied regarding the ability of codes to influence behavior.**
  - **Those who intend to do wrong will not be deterred by a code.**
  - **Codes often express behavioral standards that ought to be self-evident.**
  - **A code can be helpful in clarifying or reinforcing behavioral principles, particularly**
    - **For those inexperienced in research,**
    - **Where standards may not be obvious,**
    - **Where ethical choices benefit from clearly articulated standards.**
  - ***“A code can make good people better”***

# Focus Group Responses

## Dual Use Research

- **A clear understanding of the term “dual use research” is pivotal to assessing the value and impact of a code of conduct.**
- **Many individuals agreed that a code would be an effective tool to raise awareness about “dual use” research concerns in the life sciences; a code will**
  - **Catalyze discussion in the community about dual use**
  - **Serve as an educational tool for individuals**
  - **Enhance sensitivity to the possible misuse of research results**



# **Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach**

- **In general, the NSABB code of conduct should:**
  - **Include principles unified by a clear underlying philosophy regarding the dual use research concern**
  - **Add value and not redundancy to the body of existing codes in the life sciences**
  - **Have a clear scope**
  - **Have a clear audience**

# **Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach**

- **In general, the NSABB code of conduct should also:**
  - **Be concise and compelling**
  - **Articulate realistic expectations**
  - **Have a peer-oriented voice, speaking to scientists as professionals**
  - **Be positive in tone and convey the value of the scientific endeavor**

# **Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach**

- **Participants agreed with the Working Group's aim to:**
  - **Emphasize the importance of public trust to the research enterprise**
    - **Codes can demonstrate scientists' concern for the quality, ethics, and safety of their activities**
    - **Codes can show that organizations are attending to the oversight of their activities**

# **Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach**

- **Additional concerns**
  - **The scientific community must be a part of the process in developing a code; essential for:**
    - **Appropriate content**
    - **Broad acceptance**
  - **Implementation of an NSABB code may necessitate a commitment to increased educational efforts and the resources necessary to support them.**

# **Next Steps – Finish Drafting Code**

- **Evaluate all focus group suggestions; develop draft code accordingly.**
- **Take into account the work products of the other NSABB working groups (e.g., Criteria and Communications).**

# **Next Steps – Ensure Broad Public Input**

- **Publication and dissemination inviting input**
  - **NSABB Web Site**
  - **Federal Register**
  - **Listserv**
- **Hold Regional Townhall Style Meetings**
  - **Targeting Summer 2006**
  - **Will explore themes developed through the Focus Groups**
  - **Widely publicized to encourage broad participation by the life sciences community**

# **Next Steps – Ensure Broad Public Input**

**The Working Group invites suggestions on:**

- **Ensuring ample vetting of the code; and**
- **Promoting acceptance within the scientific community.**