

Process for Identifying and Updating ELSI Research Priorities

The ELSI R01 Program Announcement (PA) expired in January 2007. This announcement (originally published in 2004) was based on the seven ELSI Grand Challenges identified in the 2003 Vision document and provided examples of research questions appropriate for each area. Like all previous ELSI PAs, it was crafted broadly enough so that other NIH Institutes and Centers could sign on and accept ELSI research applications (Nine other IC's signed on in 2004 and have provided funding for more than a dozen ELSI grants).

Since the expiration of this announcement, the ELSI program has been accepting applications under the NIH-wide R03 and R01 announcements while a new PA has been under development. As with the earlier version, this revised PA is broadly written and built around the seven Grand Challenges, but it includes updated research questions. In addition, it includes a statement acknowledging the rapidly changing nature of genomic and ELSI research and encourages prospective grantees to visit the ELSI website for any updated information on research priorities. The goal is to facilitate the rapid communication of new priority areas as new issues are emerging.

We now are proposing a process to manage continuously the identification and updating of the ELSI research priorities, so that new issues can be promptly identified, taken to Council for approval and placed on the website to notify the community. This process would also allow the identification of issues of such importance that an RFA or other targeted funding opportunity could be developed to stimulate further research in the area.

The proposed process involves three steps: 1) tri-annual review of existing priorities and identification of emerging issues by a small working group of extramural ELSI and genomic staff, plus OD staff; 2) tri-annual review of the priority research areas by a sub-committee of Council; and 3) Council discussion and action at least annually to approve the list of research areas and funding mechanisms to be employed. Each time the list of priority research areas is approved, the existing web list will be replaced with the updated list and an email message will be sent to the ELSI research list serve to alert the subscribers to the updated priorities.

1. **Staff Working Group.** This group would have 6-7 members drawn from the DER ELSI and genomic staff, plus OD policy staff. ELSI staff would be responsible for regularly polling the group to identify emerging issues, developing an initial list of potential research topics, scheduling meetings of the group to prepare the list for discussion by the entire DER program staff, and then bringing it to a Tuesday staff meeting. This list would then be distributed to the Council sub-group for its review (step 2). ELSI staff would also be responsible for preparing a brief annual report analyzing current ELSI research in the context of the priority list. This report would be reviewed by the Council sub-committee and provided to the full Council.
2. **Council sub-committee.** This group would include 4-5 members of council and possibly 3-4 additional outside experts and would meet by teleconference three times a year to review the list of potential priority research areas prepared by staff. The group would also be responsible for reviewing the annual report on current ELSI research to determine whether emerging issues are being adequately addressed through the PA and website or whether there are issues that require more focused attention through an RFA or another mechanism. Finally, the sub-committee would be able to recommend that particularly high priority issues be brought to the next full Council meeting for immediate action.

3. Council discussion. The Council discussion would be held annually at the February Council meeting (or more frequently if staff and the Council sub-committee identify issues that require immediate attention). The purpose of the discussion would be to finalize and approve the list of research priorities and to approve concept clearances for RFAs.