



## Life Sciences DISCOVERY FUND

### **Life Sciences Discovery Fund Authority Grant Application Information—Public Disclosure**

#### **Introduction**

The Life Sciences Discovery Fund Authority (LSDF), a Washington State agency established in May 2005, makes grant investments in innovative life sciences research to benefit Washington and its citizens. These investments focus on strengthening the life sciences sector, improving people's health, and enhancing the economic vitality in the state. LSDF awards grants through an application process generally initiated by a Request for Proposals (RFP). Applicant responses to an RFP involve a two-step electronic application: a letter of intent followed by a fully-developed proposal. Because LSDF cannot fund all the proposals it receives, applicants in essence compete against one another for funding. The competitive nature of the grant-making process makes applicants strive to submit the highest quality ideas and applications and is essential to LSDF's ability to fund the highest caliber of research.

LSDF has a responsibility to identify and fund research with the potential to maximize the returns on the state's investment, while maintaining a process that is open to public scrutiny. The following description outlines the rationale and process through which LSDF addresses its public disclosure responsibilities.

#### **The Role of Confidentiality in the Grant-making Process**

Applicant responses to an LSDF RFP include detailed descriptions of the proposed research. Applications encompass information that is unpublished and not generally known to the public, such as research data, hypotheses, experimental plans, business plans and potentially valuable intellectual property. The information within a grant application is of significant competitive

value to the applicant. It is the unique currency through which the applicant obtains the financial resources necessary to accomplish his or her research.

Applicants often submit the same plans and ideas to multiple potential grantors, either simultaneously or sequentially, if an application has not been funded. Submitting this information carries risk for the applicants, in that they share their best ideas with no guarantee of obtaining funding. These ideas could be of value to other individuals who, given the opportunity, might use them to benefit their own competitiveness for grant funding. Disclosure of unfunded LSDF applications to third parties would put applicants in a less competitive position for funding from other sources. Thus, applicants would likely suffer private loss by losing the exclusive right to their ideas. Their ability to procure the financial resources necessary to perform their research could also be placed in jeopardy.

After a grant application has been funded and the researcher is no longer competing with others for the financial resources to accomplish a specific work plan, he or she is still likely to be involved in a competition to be the first to solve the research problem or to test a hypothesis. In this context, a researcher's competitive advantage is usually attributable to the novelty of his or her approach to accomplishing the work plan. That novelty may lie in a unique insight, an innovative methodology, a fresh way of framing a problem, an astute business plan or any of a myriad of other factors in which the researcher's creativity is uniquely evident. If the researcher were to lose a competitive advantage, it could greatly influence his or her ability to receive subsequent research funding, to attract high quality students and colleagues, to publish in prestigious journals and to attain career advancement. Therefore, even after funding has occurred, confidentiality is still necessary and essential for certain critical elements in the grant application, the disclosure of which would be likely to result in losing a competitive advantage or other private loss.

### **Washington State's Public Disclosure Law as it Applies to LSDF**

LSDF is subject to [Washington State Public Records Act RCW 42.56](#). In enacting the legislation that created LSDF, legislators understood that valuable and proprietary information would be submitted in grant applications and that premature release of this information would reasonably be expected to result in private loss to its providers. Therefore, the Washington State Public Records Act was amended specifically to exempt the following from public inspection and copying:

*Financial, commercial, operations and technical and research information and data submitted to or obtained by the life sciences discovery fund authority in applications for, or delivery of, grants under chapter 43.350 RCW, to the extent that such information, if revealed, would reasonably be expected to result in private loss to the providers of this information. [RCW 42.56.270 \(14\)](#)*

## **LSDF Public Disclosure Practices**

Information contained in grant applications is received by LSDF with the understanding that it shall be used or disclosed solely for evaluation of the applications or as required by law. LSDF holds all applications confidential in accordance with its **confidentiality policy** and subject to the public disclosure laws of Washington State. In accordance and compliance with the Washington State Public Records Act, LSDF intends to withhold information covered by its exemption.

Therefore, LSDF has adopted the following disclosure practices:

### For unfunded applications:

The following information will generally be disclosed in response to requests for public records related to unfunded applications:

- information regarding the grant's principal investigator (*e.g.* name and contact information);
- the title of the research project or program;
- information regarding the applicant organization (*e.g.* organization name, type of organization, organizational contacts, address, county and legislative district);
- research start and end dates;
- amount of funding requested from LSDF; and
- general information that is not likely to result in private loss to its providers (*e.g.* whether human subjects or vertebrate animals will be used in the proposed research).

The following information will generally be deemed exempt from disclosure and withheld in response to requests for public records related to unfunded applications:

- the abstract describing the research and key words associated with the research;
- the names of research collaborators and collaborating organizations;
- a roster of personnel, including their biographical sketches, working under the grant; and
- the narrative, budget, supporting letter and attachment sections.

### For funded applications:

The following information will generally be disclosed in response to requests for public records related to funded applications:

- information regarding the grant's principal investigator (*e.g.* name and contact information);

- the title of the research project or program;
- information regarding the applicant organization (*e.g.* organization name, type of organization, organizational contacts, address, county and legislative district);
- research start and end dates;
- amount of funding requested from LSDF;
- general information (*e.g.* whether human subjects or vertebrate animals will be used in the research);
- the names, addresses and contact information for collaborating organizations and individuals;
- a roster of personnel, including their biographical sketches, working under the grant, to the extent that release of this information is not reasonably expected to result in private loss to its provider(s); and
- portions of the application's abstract describing the research and the narrative, budget, supporting letter and attachment sections and key words associated with the project or program, to the extent that their release is not reasonably expected to result in private loss to the provider(s) of this information.

### **Submitting a Public Disclosure Request**

All requests for LSDF grant applications must be made in writing. The request must include the first and last name of the requestor, contact information (including address, telephone number, and/or e-mail address), and a specific description of the document(s) being requested. The request may be submitted by postal mail, private courier, fax or electronically ([recordsrequest@lsdfa.org](mailto:recordsrequest@lsdfa.org)). LSDF will respond to the request within five (5) business days of its receipt.

If LSDF receives a public records request for a grant application (letter of intent and/or proposal), it will notify the grant application organization of the request in a timely manner in order to allow that organization the opportunity to assert objections to disclosure in any applicable proceeding.