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NIH, DOE Guidelines Encourage Sharing of Data, Resources

At its December 7, 1992, meeting, the DOE-NIH Joint Subcommittee on the Human Genome approved the following sharing guidelines, developed from the DOE draft of September 1991.

The information and resources generated by the Human Genome Project have become substantial, and the interest in having access to them is widespread. It is therefore desirable to have a statement of philosophy concerning the sharing of these resources that can guide investigators who generate the resources as well as those who wish to use them.

A key issue for the Human Genome Project is how to promote and encourage the rapid sharing of materials and data that are produced, especially information that has not yet been published or may never be published in its entirety. Such sharing is essential for progress toward the goals of the program and to avoid unnecessary duplication. It is also desirable to make the fruits of genome research available to the scientific community as a whole as soon as possible to expedite research in other areas.

Although it is the policy of the Human Genome Project to maximize outreach to the scientific community, it is also necessary to give investigators time to verify the accuracy of their data and to gain some scientific advantage from the effort they have invested. Furthermore, in order to assure that novel ideas and inventions are rapidly developed to the benefit of the public, intellectual property protection may be needed for some of the data and materials.

After extensive discussion with the community of genome researchers, the advisors of the NIH and DOE genome programs have determined that consensus is developing around the concept that a 6-month period from the time the data or materials are generated to the time they are made available publicly is a reasonable maximum in almost all cases. More rapid sharing is encouraged.

Whenever possible, data should be deposited in public databases and materials in public repositories. Where appropriate repositories do not exist or are unable to accept the data or materials, investigators should accommodate requests to the extent possible.

The NIH and DOE genome programs have decided to require all applicants expecting to generate significant amounts of genome data or materials to describe in their application how and when they plan to make such data and materials available to the community. Grant solicitations will specify this requirement. These plans in each application will be reviewed in the course of peer review and by staff to assure they are reasonable and in conformity with program philosophy. If a grant is made, the applicant's sharing plans will become a condition of the award and compliance will be reviewed before continuation funding is provided. Progress reports will be asked to address the issue.

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