



NIH BACKGROUNDER

National Institutes of Health

Public-Private Partnerships

NIH often calls on the private sector for help with particularly complex problems related to its mission to improve human health. Each partner brings its unique resources and strengths to the table and the results are better than any could accomplish alone. The Human Genome Project is a prime example.

The kind of far-reaching progress anticipated for biomedical research in the 21st century will require research collaboration among several sectors. NIH has mechanisms in place to encourage partnerships among researchers in academia, government and the private sector. Yet few NIH-supported researchers and potential partners who could benefit from these opportunities are aware of them.

The Public-Private Partnerships component of the NIH Roadmap will begin with a focus on agency processes and mechanisms to facilitate collaborative efforts between the NIH and the private sector. The NIH public-private partnership liaison will serve as a resource to NIH staff on such partnerships, share best practices across the NIH and chair an internal Public-Private Partnerships Coordinating Committee. With an eye toward keeping pace with changes in the business sector and dealing with concerns about intellectual property, patents and licensing rights, the liaison working with the Coordinating Committee, will regularly review existing partnership mechanisms and recommend any necessary changes in policies, regulations or legal authorities to achieve NIH's objectives. This effort will compliment, not replace, the role of the Institutes and Centers as they work with the private sector to serve their missions. For information about specific partnership opportunities, please contact the relevant NIH Institute or Center.

Partnerships between government agencies and private industry already have extended and accelerated NIH research, research training and the dissemination of information in diverse and creative ways. For example, the Osteoarthritis Initiative partnership is poised to do something that neither government nor private industry could accomplish alone—establish a database of radiological images, biomarkers and physical exams as objective and measurable standards for the progression of this painful and disabling disease. Currently, there is no effective treatment for osteoarthritis, so new therapies are acutely needed by the millions of Americans affected by this disorder. The seven-year project to recruit 5,000 men and women age 50 and older at high risk for developing osteoarthritis of the knee is funded by several NIH institutes, along with the pharmaceutical companies Merck, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corp. and Pfizer. The data collected through the initiative will be available to researchers to quicken the pace of scientific studies and to speed progress toward better treatments.

Clearly, public-private partnerships have become a model for advancing science and communicating results of medical advances to improve the quality of life for all people. As researchers tackle ever more complex biomedical problems, strategic partnerships between NIH, private industry and nonprofit organizations will become more important.

The URL for the NIH Roadmap web site is nihroadmap.nih.gov. This initiative is under development. Further information about the NIH can be found at its Web site: www.nih.gov.

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