NIH Biosafety Modernization Initiative Engagement Summary
American Society for Microbiology Biosafety Experts
February 11, 2026

Background

NIH announced its Biosafety Modernization Initiative in Fall 2025 and began an expansive plan for engaging stakeholders. In addition to holding six regional listening sessions, NIH also participated in smaller engagements to gather individual input to help inform a new NIH biosafety policy.

The American Society for Microbiology (ASM), a professional life science organization aimed at promoting and advancing microbial sciences around the world, requested a meeting between NIH and a group of ASM members with biosafety expertise.

Event Summary

NIH previously participated in a webinar held by ASM on December 15, 2025. ASM members with expertise in biosafety provided additional individual feedback on the Biosafety Modernization Initiative.

ASM members provided individual feedback on several topics related to the new biosafety policy, including some of the following comments and input:

- The potential to allow institutions, in specific circumstances, to be empowered to lower the containment of experiments based on risk assessment.
- Consideration for giving greater power and autonomy to institutional biosafety officers, as opposed to requiring NIH approval for certain experiments.
- Some specific experiments involving toxins are more in line with chemical safety as opposed to biosafety. However, it was noted that certain experiments involving the cloning of toxins may be appropriate to have under the IBCs' purview.

Additionally, some individuals indicated it was outside the scope of an Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) to review non-biomedical research involving plants, while others indicated it was necessary to have that review to ensure a gap does not exist for the review of non-U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) permitted research.

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NIH thanked individuals for their comments and encouraged ASM members to continue providing feedback through the mechanisms listed on the NIH Office of Science Policy website.

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