

NIH Biosafety Modernization Initiative Engagement Summary
New England Society for Biomedical Research Focus Group
Feb. 26, 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 New England Society for Biomedical Research (NESBR) convened a focus group composed of Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) members, biosafety officers, investigators, and research administrators from Boston University, Broad Institute, Dana Faber Institute, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, Tufts University, and University of Massachusetts Medical School. NESBR moderated three focus groups to solicit feedback from individuals on specific discussion topics.

Event Summary

As part of the event, NIH provided suggested discussion topics specific to the membership of each focus group.

Focus Group 1: IBC members, Biosafety Officers

Attendees provided individual feedback, including some of the following comments and input:

- Ensure that IBCs' capabilities are proportional to increased responsibilities.
- Designated or expedited review where a biosafety officer or subset of the IBC can approve research without it going to the full committee is appropriate for some research.
- There is a large continuum of Risk Group (RG) 2 pathogens and IBC review for all might cause additional burden to the IBC.
- It is important that research involving RG 3 and RG 4 pathogens be reviewed and approved by the full IBC.

Focus Group 2: Investigators

Attendees provided individual feedback, including some of the following comments and input:

- Some indicated that transmissibility should be a factor in assigning RGs, while others indicated it should not.

- It would be helpful to provide a clear triggering threshold level for what incidents are reportable.
- Anonymous incident reporting would encourage incident reporting in a non-punitive way.

Focus Group 3: Research Administrators

Attendees provided individual feedback, including some of the following comments and input:

- Institutional cooperation between IBCs, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) is crucial.
- Coordination with NIH's Federal partners is important to close perceived gaps and ensure the new biosafety policy does not create gaps.
- An expanded scope could prove burdensome unless designated or expedited review is added, where a biosafety officer or subset of the IBC can approve research without going to the full committee.

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