

The logo features a dark blue background with a grid pattern. On the left, there is a stylized image of a microscope lens or a similar scientific instrument. The text "NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD FOR BIOSECURITY" is written in a white, serif font across the top right.

NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD FOR BIOSECURITY

Codes of Conduct Working Group

Progress Report
March 30, 2006



Working Group Charge

- **Goal:** To foster a culture of responsibility among life scientists who are potentially conducting dual use research.
- **Premise:** Codes of conduct are an important tool in promoting professionalism and responsible behavior and thus a key element of the NSABB charge.

Working Group Charge

“To provide recommendations on the development of a code of conduct for scientists and laboratory workers that can be adopted by professional organizations and institutions engaged in the performance of life science research.”

- **To identify issues pertinent to the conduct of DUR that a code should address.**
- **To develop standards and principles that can be included in a formal educational and training program to promote appreciation for codes of conduct in the life sciences.**

Working Group Participants

Voting Members

- Murray Cohen
- Claire Fraser
- John Lumpkin
- Mark Nance
- Diane Wara

Ex Officios

- Jason Boehm (OSTP)
- Jamie Fly (DoD)
- Robert Mikulak (DoS)
- Jan Nicholson (CDC)
- Stuart Nightingale (DHHS)
- Gerald Parker (DHHS Alt.)
- Kerry Patterson (DoD)
- Caird Rexroad (USDA)
- Scott Steele (DoJ)
- Helen Quill (NIH)

Working Group Findings

- **Codes are not procedural guidelines.**
- **Codes provide general guideposts for responsible and ethical behavior.**
- **Codes are useful in promoting a “culture of responsibility,” one of the NSABB aims.**
- **Codes can be international in scope.**

Working Group Findings

- **Codes are typically adopted by societies and associations to instill and promote a sense of professionalism.**
- **Adherence to a code may be voluntary, but is often a mandatory condition of membership in a society or association.**
- **Broad input from the research community, especially intended adherents and thought-leaders, promotes acceptance and support for a code.**

Working Group Analysis

- **Existing codes were surveyed to identify core values and standards relevant for a code that emphasizes biosecurity concerns.**
- **These elements were prioritized and organized.**

Working Group Analysis

The Working Group then considered:

- **Target audience**
- **The value of contextual information, such as:**
 - **What are the concerns associated with DUR?**
 - **How valuable is education in preventing misuse of DUR information?**
 - **How will a Code be used?**
- **Structure and format:**
 - **Other codes, such as the GE “Spirit and Letter,” were used as models for a logical and accessible presentation of concepts.**

Proposed Approach

The draft code will consist of three major sections:

- **Preamble**
 - Provides an introductory overview of “dual use” research
 - Describes the utility of codes.
 - Suggests how this code may be used.
- **Core Guiding Principles**
 - States the fundamental tenets of responsible behavior
- **Body of the Code**
 - Articulates additional principles consistent with the core tenets
 - Maps to various phases of the research process.

Proposed Approach

Major principles identified to date include:

- **Awareness about dual use research;**
- **Forethought in research planning and conduct;**
- **Consideration for the safety and security of others;**
- **Training and educating students and technicians;**
- **Compliance with applicable guidelines and rules;**
- **Responsible communication practices.**

Public Input on the Proposed Approach

The proposed approach must be tested and then benefit from more robust input from the research community

- **Focus Groups;**
- **Publication and dissemination (NSABB Web site, Listserv, other means);**
- **Regional townhall-style forums;**
- **Participation at annual conferences of key scientific groups.**

Initial Evaluation of Proposed Approach: Focus Groups

- **Focus groups were organized to provide feedback to the Codes Working Group that could be used to further refine the development of a draft code.**
- **Participants included practicing scientists, administrators, leaders in scientific and professional organizations, local oversight personnel, and ethicists.**

Focus Groups Cont'd

- **Each session was structured to last approximately 3 hours with questions and discussions targeted toward the types of participants involved.**
- **General attitudes towards codes and dual use research concerns were sampled.**
- **The group was also asked to comment on the draft set of core principles.**

Focus Group Responses

Codes in General

- **Most participants had experience with codes and found that they had a positive impact personally.**
- **Participants discussed the distinctions they perceived between a code of conduct, a code of ethics, guidelines, and regulations.**
 - **In particular, discussion contrasted prescriptive guidelines with the more general behavioral standards articulated by codes.**
 - **Mixed views about the level of detail helpful in a code of conduct.**

Focus Group Responses

Codes in General

- **Opinions varied regarding the ability of codes to influence behavior.**
 - **Those who intend to do wrong will not be deterred by a code.**
 - **Codes often express behavioral standards that ought to be self-evident.**
 - **A code can be helpful in clarifying or reinforcing behavioral principles, particularly**
 - **For those inexperienced in research,**
 - **Where standards may not be obvious,**
 - **Where ethical choices benefit from clearly articulated standards.**
 - ***“A code can make good people better”***

Focus Group Responses

Dual Use Research

- **A clear understanding of the term “dual use research” is pivotal to assessing the value and impact of a code of conduct.**
- **Many individuals agreed that a code would be an effective tool to raise awareness about “dual use” research concerns in the life sciences; a code will**
 - **Catalyze discussion in the community about dual use**
 - **Serve as an educational tool for individuals**
 - **Enhance sensitivity to the possible misuse of research results**

Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach

- **In general, the NSABB code of conduct should:**
 - **Include principles unified by a clear underlying philosophy regarding the dual use research concern**
 - **Add value and not redundancy to the body of existing codes in the life sciences**
 - **Have a clear scope**
 - **Have a clear audience**

Focus Group Responses Working Group's Approach

- **In general, the NSABB code of conduct should also:**
 - **Be concise and compelling**
 - **Articulate realistic expectations**
 - **Have a peer-oriented voice, speaking to scientists as professionals**
 - **Be positive in tone and convey the value of the scientific endeavor**

Focus Group Responses

Working Group's Approach

- **Participants agreed with the Working Group's aim to:**
 - **Emphasize the importance of public trust to the research enterprise**
 - **Codes can demonstrate scientists' concern for the quality, ethics, and safety of their activities**
 - **Codes can show that organizations are attending to the oversight of their activities**

Focus Group Responses

Working Group's Approach

- **Additional concerns**
 - **The scientific community must be a part of the process in developing a code; essential for:**
 - **Appropriate content**
 - **Broad acceptance**
 - **Implementation of an NSABB code may necessitate a commitment to increased educational efforts and the resources necessary to support them.**

Next Steps – Finish Drafting Code

- **Evaluate all focus group suggestions; develop draft code accordingly.**
- **Take into account the work products of the other NSABB working groups (e.g., Criteria and Communications).**

Next Steps – Ensure Broad Public Input

- **Publication and dissemination inviting input**
 - **NSABB Web Site**
 - **Federal Register**
 - **Listserv**
- **Hold Regional Townhall Style Meetings**
 - **Targeting Summer 2006**
 - **Will explore themes developed through the Focus Groups**
 - **Widely publicized to encourage broad participation by the life sciences community**

Next Steps – Ensure Broad Public Input

The Working Group invites suggestions on:

- **Ensuring ample vetting of the code; and**
- **Promoting acceptance within the scientific community.**