

## **State Awards Regional Partnership \$9 Million To Develop Genome Research Infrastructure**

**By Robin Suits**

The Ohio Biomedical Research and Technology Transfer (BRTT) Commission recently awarded \$9 million to the Genome Research Infrastructure Partnership (GRIP), a regional collaboration involving Wright State University School of Medicine. The award will fund the development of core facilities at the partners' research centers, including functional genomics and bioinformatics programs at Wright State.

“As a regional partnership linking academic institutions, industry, and government laboratories, the GRIP can pursue significant new research directions that no single partner could manage by itself,” says Robert E.W. Fyffe, Ph.D., director of the Center for Brain Research and associate dean for research affairs for the School of Medicine, who is a co-principal investigator on the grant. “This unique partnership provides an opportunity for Ohio to establish a national program in genomic research.”

The GRIP was one of three programs to receive a total of \$21.5 million in funding through the BRTT Commission's Partnership Awards program. Each of the 16 proposals submitted went through a comprehensive peer review and evaluation process and the three believed to offer the greatest benefit to the people of Ohio were chosen to receive funding. Funding for the Partnership Awards comes from revenues Ohio receives from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement established in 1998.

A distinctive feature of the funded projects is the extensive collaboration between scientists in universities and the private sector. The GRIP was created in 2001 to enable the partners to share technologies needed for genome research, help Ohio become a preeminent genome research center, and enhance the state's biotechnology industry. In addition to Wright State University, the GRIP includes the University of Cincinnati, the Children's Hospital Research Foundation (Cincinnati), Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals, Acero Inc., and the Air Force Research Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The GRIP will have a highly visible hub in the University of Cincinnati's newly created Genome Research Institute, which occupies a 360,000-square-foot facility acquired from Aventis Pharmaceuticals. David Millhorn, Ph.D., director of the Institute, will lead the partnership. The BRTT award will fund the development of core facilities at this hub and at the partners' other

research centers. Funds will be used for equipment, personnel, and operating supplies for the study of cancer biology, neuroscience, endocrinology, and cardiovascular/pulmonary biology.

“The recent completion of the Human Genome Project has fueled a worldwide revolution in the biological sciences. However, the availability of gene sequences alone is not sufficient for understanding cell function, or for developing important new diagnostic and therapeutic products,” Dr. Millhorn explains. “To become a leader in the field of biomedical research, it is crucial that we develop the capabilities to translate our research advances into practical applications”

The GRIP’s goals are to:

- Establish a comprehensive research infrastructure that will allow the GRIP partners to successfully compete and achieve leadership roles in the post-genome era.
- Use the infrastructure to conduct basic, clinical, and pharmaceutical research that will lead to the creation of proprietary gene and protein databases, the development of new therapeutic strategies, new research initiatives, and novel drug targets, all of which will eventually lead to improved health care for the citizens of Ohio and the nation.
- Create a “forward-looking” educational program in the genome sciences that will provide the expertise for fueling the development of biotechnology in the commercial, academic, and healthcare sectors in Ohio.
- Generate commercial products from GRIP research by new and existing biotechnology companies in Ohio, including members of the partnership.

“The BRTT award will have an immediate impact on Wright State researchers,” Dr. Fyffe says. “It will enable us to continue to invest in core facilities at Wright State that can contribute significantly to the growth of the partnership. Those core facilities also will help our faculty to be more competitive with their individual research projects.”

Development of biomedical research and technology in Ohio is a key component of Governor Bob Taft’s Third Frontier Project, a \$1.6 billion, 10-year plan to establish Ohio as a national leader in biotechnology research.

“These awards clearly signal a major step into the Third Frontier,” Governor Taft said in announcing the Partnership Awards. “These scientific projects will be instrumental in furthering the goal of making Ohio a premier state in biomedical research. We are encouraged by the scientific merit of these projects and the commercialization potential they carry to bring additional funding into the state and to create new opportunities for Ohioans.”

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