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Dear Dr. Alving:

On behalf of the EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation, I am writing to provide comments to the draft Strategic Plan of the National Center for Research Resources (NCCR). The EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation represents the institutions and researchers that participate in the Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Program, as well as those institutions and researchers that participate in IDeA-like programs located in 6 other federal agencies. As we have indicated in conversations with Dr. Zerhouni, you, and other senior NIH administrators, our community has been and continues to be a strong supporter for both IDeA and other NCCR programs, as well as for sustained growth in the overall NIH budget. We believe that the role of NCCR in building cross-cutting infrastructure for basic and translational research initiatives of the categorical NIH Institutes is one that needs to be more widely appreciated in the health community. We believe that the Nation will benefit from the development and dissemination of an effective NCCR Strategic Plan, and appreciate the opportunity to contribute to that Plan.

We would like first to thank NCCR for including IDeA within the strategic planning effort, and stating that it will continue to address basic, translational, clinical, and community-based participatory research. From our perspective, the IDeA program has been exceptionally well managed since its inception, and has already begun to produce many benefits for our states, institutions, and investigators, as well as helping NIH address its overall biomedical research mission. We are committed to sustaining the momentum created by IDeA investments in our states and to expanding the impact of recent NCCR initiatives. The following comments and suggestions are offered in the hope of strengthening the Plan so that both the NIH and IDeA researchers can continue to accrue the benefits of this valuable program.

1. The Plan does not define a distinguishable role for IDeA commensurate with its accomplishments, capabilities, capacities, and potential. The Plan focuses largely on the CTSA initiative, with certain elements of IDeA, such as mentoring, integrated into that focus. While these integrated elements are important aspects of IDeA, other major IDeA components, such as COBRE are not explicitly included in the Plan. Since the Plan does not capture the full breadth and depth of IDeA, it falls short in its intent to articulate a significant role for IDeA states in the future of NCCR.
2. While the Strategic Plan should retain descriptions of the potential for IDeA and CTSA to collaborate, we believe there should be separate components of the Plan that focus on these important programs independently. Both the high visibility of IDeA and the relative size of IDeA within NCCR's budget justify an enhanced description of the

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primary goals and benefits of IDeA. We also believe that the typical reader of the Strategic Plan will need more information in order to understand the two key components within IDeA (COBRE and INBRE), as well as some of the innovative funding actions (IDeANet and co-funding) which have helped the program to successfully increase the amount of NIH funds (excluding IDeA support) awarded to biomedical researchers in IDeA states.

3. The Plan should state that IDeA is (a) enhancing the biomedical research infrastructure, including people, facilities, and research resources, of our states, (b) supporting innovative research collaborations in our states leading to research awards made through the NIH merit review process, and (c) stimulating the pipe line of health professionals at all levels. Clearly, these are NIH priorities for which the IDeA program is well suited.
4. The Plan appears to closely align the IDeA and RCMI efforts. While there is indeed some programmatic overlap (in areas such as mentoring), the goals of IDeA and RCMI, and those of the institutions, researchers, and communities that are served by these programs, do not overlap to the degree implied in the current Plan's language.
5. The Plan understates the contributions of IDeA programs in the strengthening of informatics and cyberinfrastructure in IDeA states. Not only has NCRB supported a pioneering western regional collaboration, IDeANet/Lariat, but also the IDeA leaders within our states are helping to coordinate multi-agency investments in cyberinfrastructure. In this context, we believe that the Plan should also cite potential partnerships with the National Science Foundation since NSF is one of the key federal "players" in infrastructure development. We also suggest the expansion of IDeANet to include other regions of the country.

The EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation hopes that these suggestions prove useful as NCRB finalizes its Strategic Planning effort. After our December, 2007 meeting with you, the EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation created a Task Force drawn from our community to help us interact with NIH on IDeA-related matters. We are committed to assisting NCRB as it carries out its efforts to ensure that all regions of the Nation benefit from NIH research funding, and that all of these regions contribute to the success of the NIH mission. Please do not hesitate to call on me and the EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation if we can be of further assistance to you.

Sincerely,



Paul Hill, Ph.D.