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GET ENTERPRISING



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It has been just over two years since the publication of an article in *Science* magazine calling for a new Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise to foster coordination in the search for an AIDS vaccine.¹ Since that time, many meetings have been held and working groups formed. With the publication of a strategic

scientific plan in early 2005 in *PLoS Medicine*, the Enterprise moved a step closer to becoming reality.² We hope to see two year's of organization lead to real action when its first executive director is appointed later this year. We offer here an open letter to the director with our thoughts on the eight issues that should be addressed.



MEMO

To: The new Executive Director of the Global HIV/AIDS Vaccine Enterprise
From: The AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition (AVAC)
Subject: Get enterprising—quickly
Date: September 2005

Welcome to the first day of your new job!

The Scientific Strategic Plan of the Enterprise, published in February of this year, identifies scientific priorities in AIDS vaccine development and begins to look at ways of addressing those priorities. A number of committees—from the International Coordinating Committee, to working groups, to technical expert groups—have been meeting and discussing ways to move this initiative forward.

There are many issues that need to be quickly addressed as the Enterprise shifts from planning to action. AVAC believes that the following eight concrete tasks should be the focus of your work from the first day.

01 COMMUNICATE FREQUENTLY AND TRANSPARENTLY

There are many people anxiously waiting to see how the Enterprise will work. There are many others who know little or nothing about it, but whose help you will need if the Enterprise is to succeed. To lead the field, you must commit to transparency and clear communication. This will not be easy, but it is critical to the success of the Enterprise. Communicate frequently to as large an audience as possible about the

work of the Enterprise and its partners. Your communications plan must be international in scope and should reach beyond the parochial borders of AIDS vaccine researchers and advocates.

02 SET POLICIES FOR SHARING AND COORDINATING OF DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Arguably the most important component of the Enterprise's scientific plan is the goal of creating a common pool of data, reagents, assays and technologies that cooperating researchers can draw upon. This will address one of the major roadblocks in AIDS vaccine development to date. AVAC believes that publicly available incentives, policies and procedures need to be put into place by the Enterprise Secretariat to ensure full and fair sharing of data and technology. Researchers from academia to government to big industry have that obstacle as a high priority to solve. It is up to you to build a technical and legal framework that will make this possible.

03 ENSURE THE ABILITY TO TAKE RISKS

As the Enterprise works to coordinate vaccine development efforts, bringing together the best minds (many of whom have been searching for a vaccine for decades), it is important that valuable ideas are not left behind. Seek out and foster innovation in basic research, vaccine development, community advocacy, and regulatory and intellectual property issues—and all areas that have the potential to contribute to the faster development and ultimate distribution of a safe and effective AIDS vaccine.

04 BRING NEW INVESTIGATORS INTO THE SEARCH

To ensure that the momentum continues apace, it is critical to bring young investigators into the search now. Scientific research fields are growing and changing rapidly, making the competition for the best and the brightest scientific minds fierce. But AIDS vaccine research still offers exciting opportunities to young researchers, and the chance to contribute to solving the greatest public health threat of our lifetime. Ensure that there are adequate incentives for young researchers (from developed and developing countries) to enter the field and work with current researchers.



05 MAKE THE ENTERPRISE TRULY GLOBAL

The Enterprise has been seen by many—fairly or not—as a US organization. In part, this is because the majority of funders and scientists working on basic research and AIDS vaccine development are based in the US (or Europe), and that will likely continue to be the case. But there are scientists outside of Europe and the US who have valuable contributions to make, and vaccine development does not stop at the doors of a laboratory. Clinical trials need to be carried out in countries around the world, and we need to always prepare communities where the vaccine is most needed. Brazil, China,

India, South Africa, Thailand and an increasing number of other countries have growing pharmaceutical R&D and manufacturing capacities. There are many people and organizations around the world with significant contributions to make to the enterprise of developing an AIDS vaccine. Seize the opportunity to be a truly global leader by reaching out to all of them.

06 INVOLVE CIVIL SOCIETY IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

Civil society in both developed and developing countries has a critical role to play in helping the Enterprise achieve its goals. AVAC has been involved from the beginning—Chris Collins, then executive director, was a co-author of the 2003 *Science* article, and AVAC staff and board members have attended meetings and served on working groups and committees as the Enterprise has developed. A wider group of civil society leaders came together in London in May 2005 to hear about the Enterprise and to offer suggestions. For many who attended, it was their first opportunity to hear plans for the Enterprise and offer input. This dialogue should be expanded, and you should specifically ask members of civil society how best to establish the mechanisms for their input, then work to incorporate their valuable insights into the framework of the Enterprise. It is not enough to listen to suggestions; we must find meaningful ways to engage civil society in this effort.

07 TAKE ON THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF CLINICAL TRIALS

The tenofovir prevention trials in Asia and Africa have shown us that there are still many unresolved issues surrounding the politics and ethics of clinical trials of new prevention technologies. The Enterprise cannot focus only on scientific bottlenecks and leave the political and ethical bottlenecks to resolve themselves. The HVTN, IAVI, NIH and UNAIDS have all made strides in responding to community concerns and addressing issues around provision of treatment and care to trial participants. You should build

strong relations with the Global Fund, WHO and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program that encourage them to work in close collaboration with vaccine research efforts so that expanded access to prevention and treatment today are linked to the development of new technologies for tomorrow.

08 ESTABLISH REALISTIC MILESTONES AND A PROCESS FOR MONITORING PROGRESS

Dozens of individuals—researchers, funders, policy makers and community advocates—have worked together on a voluntary basis to get the Enterprise to this point. The strategic plan lays out the major issues and begins to articulate the way forward. Now, a much more concrete plan is needed as the true work begins. AVAC believes that within the first six months on the job, you should articulate a set of milestones for the Enterprise to achieve over the

next two years. Moreover, this plan should identify a process to monitor progress, achieve accountability, and modify plans accordingly.

The world will be watching as you and the Enterprise Secretariat begin to turn a plan into a structure. We know that what we have suggested will not be easily achieved, but we believe that it can and must be done—and done quickly—if the Enterprise is to succeed.

CHAPTER FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Klausner, R. et al. "The Need for a Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise," *Science* 2003 300: 2036-2039
- ² Coordinating Committee of the Global HIV/AIDS Vaccine Enterprise (2005) "The Global HIV/AIDS Vaccine Enterprise: Scientific Strategic Plan," *PLoS Med* 2(2): e25

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- + "The Global HIV/AIDS Vaccine Enterprise: Scientific Strategic Plan" is online at http://medicine.plosjournals.org/archive/1549-1676/2/2/pdf/10.1371_journal.pmed.0020025-L.pdf
- + "The Need for a Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise" is online at <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/reprint/300/5628/2036.pdf>