

In last year's AVAC Report, we anticipated that the Enterprise would advance into operational reality when its first executive director was to be appointed. We identified eight concrete tasks that should be the focus of the new director from the first day:

- 01 Communicate frequently and transparently.
- 02 Set policies for sharing and coordination of data and technology.
- 03 Ensure the ability to take risks.
- 04 Bring new investigators into the search.
- 05 Make the Enterprise truly global.
- 06 Involve civil society in a meaningful way.
- 07 Take on the politics and ethics of clinical trials.
- 08 Establish realistic milestones and a process for monitoring progress.

We were excited in March of this year when it was finally announced that Adel Mahmoud would be the chief executive of the Enterprise. Shortly after the announcement, Mahmoud met with the AVAC board and staff, and we were impressed. He displayed a command of the challenges, a bold willingness to address them and a commitment to ignite and fuel new scientific innovation. Mahmoud said he wanted to look at ideas that had not been explored and challenge scientists to work together more collaboratively.

At the time of his appointment, he said: "My job will be to help Enterprise partners realize the vision of the scientific plan—to identify timelines and milestones, track progress, and keep us on course to reach our ultimate goal."

The recent announcement that Mahmoud would not take up his position in September is, therefore, a disappointment.

While the Enterprise partners continue to do important work individually, and are showing signs of willingness and ability to work together in new ways, leadership matters.

In fact, it may matter more than ever. In the absence of an executive director, the Enterprise has achieved some advances, including:

- Publication of a scientific plan that lays out major issues and begins to articulate a way forward (and that now needs to be updated)
- Commitments from new funding initiatives from the Gates Foundation and the NIH that support collaborative work in the highest priority areas of vaccine discovery and laboratory standardization
- Additional Enterprise-related funding announcements from Germany, Russia and Switzerland which show promise of making the efforts more global

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Leadership is needed to take these initiatives to the next level. The Enterprise still needs an updated, more concrete plan, with specific timelines and milestones and a process to monitor progress, achieve accountability, and modify directions accordingly.

In the absence of a director, the Enterprise may find itself in danger of losing momentum, as it seeks to establish itself as an entity deserving of funding; and the individual players—who are collaborating now—may not agree on how best to measure progress and ensure that the new money is being spent in the best way possible.

An executive director does not have to monitor progress directly, but having someone in this role—part constructive critic, part cheerleader, part champion—will strengthen the overall endeavor and send a clear signal to multiple audiences about the importance of this undertaking.

New ventures frequently have start-up challenges —especially one like the Enterprise which has, as its core mission, a new way of doing business. And the fact that new events have taken place during the year that we were waiting for Dr. Mahmoud may help refine the job description for the next search, which we are told is already underway.

This is a critical juncture, then, for the Enterprise and its members. The ongoing search for a leader should continue with all due speed; and critical Enterprise-related activities like re-constituting working groups should happen even before the position is filled.

If this happens, then the delay—while disappointing—will have been a learning opportunity, and not a major setback for the field.