

OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Request for Information: Building A 21st Century Bioeconomy

Questions No 1, 8, 9 and 10:

1) One grand challenge to creating a thriving bioeconomy is to make community college systems the foundation of biotechnology workforce training. Four-year colleges and universities graduate potential management personnel, but a greater and unmet need is for people to do the actual hands-on laboratory work needed for research and development as well as production. These laboratory skills can and are being taught by community colleges. The first challenge is to put the full force of White House public relations and policy-making behind biotechnology education in community colleges.

Such a program is well established at City College of San Francisco where the BioLink National Center was founded 13 years ago and thrives today. (Please see submission to this RFI by Ms. Elaine A. Johnson PhD, Executive Director) These graduates work in all areas of life sciences research. Many California taxpayers and observers of higher education's ongoing pleas for increased funding have come to question whether the four-year colleges are meeting the needs of today's economy. They see a mismatch between higher education and the economy's workforce needs. The "biotech age" needs people with high end skills that increasingly do not come with a bachelors degree. A technically-skilled 21st century American bioeconomy workforce requires commitment to and investment in education and training. The bulk of the training can and should be in the community colleges.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important subject.

Barbara W. Wanvig
San Francisco, CA