



Committee Call Notes

Scientist Mentoring & Diversity Program for Biotechnology (SMDP Biotech)

Outreach & Planning Committee

Conference Call

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

9:00 AM Pacific / 11am Central / 12:00PM Eastern

The following Committee members were in attendance:

ICPD Staff: Dayveon Cooper, Bill Heath, Scott May, Dustie Savage, Elisabeth Valerio, Dozie Amuzie (Johnson & Johnson), Emilia Asante (Kenvue), Erica Bozeman (Johnson & Johnson), Lauren Celano (Propel Careers), Cynthia Cheatham (BIO), Beth Damm (AstraZeneca), Ashton Delauney (Bristol Myers Squibb), Justin Gergarich (Johnson & Johnson), Jenny Huang (Johnson & Johnson), Kevin Kenworthy (Incyte), Yvette Lucero (Arrowhead Pharmaceuticals), Luis Perez-Almodovar (Kenvue), Charlene Rincón (Moderna), Crystal Taylor (Kenvue), Tamisha Vaughn (Arrowhead Pharmaceuticals), Brittany Witherspoon (Johnson & Johnson)

Welcome & introductions: BOLD ITEMS WILL BE COVERED DURING THE CALL

For a more in-depth briefing contact Scott May at smay@icpdprograms.org or +1 (202) 441-7370

Scott May welcomed committee members to the second Scholar Mentoring and Development Program for Biotechnology (SMDP Biotech) Outreach & Planning Committee meeting for 2026.

The agenda was sent via email and reminded the committee members they can locate the agenda, past meeting notes and supporting documents for the meeting on the website www.icpdprograms.org, select "Committees" from the "Select an ICPD site" drop-down menu at the top right side of the page.

Committee members introduced themselves, their organizations, and locations. Scott highlighted the strong representation of SMDP alumni serving on the committee, demonstrating the program's long-term engagement. Elisabeth Valerio joined the meeting from Zimbabwe and shared that she had recently reconnected with 2006 SMDP alumnus Darius Walker during his visit to Africa, illustrating the lasting global relationships built through SMDP.

Alumni Program

Dayveon Cooper reported that the SMDP Alumni Steering Committee (ASC) is now fully established and meets monthly. The committee has adopted its 2026 operating budget and consists of seven leadership positions responsible for Regional Chapters, Communications, Alumni Data & Technology, Programs, Professional Development, and overall leadership.

The ASC's priorities for 2026 include establishing six regional alumni chapters while expanding both in-person and virtual programming to strengthen year-round alumni engagement.



Planning is well underway for the 2026 SMDP Alumni Networking Event on Saturday, June 20 in San Diego. Alumni attending in person will participate in welcoming the incoming SMDP Biotech scholars and mentors during the Opening Event, creating early opportunities for networking and helping new scholars immediately become part of the broader SMDP community.

Partner organizations and Outreach & Planning Committee members were invited to attend the event and asked to RSVP by May 22. The Alumni Steering Committee is also planning a dedicated alumni event during the 2026 SMDP MedTech Training Session in Boston.

Dayveon also reported that the SMDP Alumni Research Reports are being expanded to include alumni employment history in addition to current positions. The MedTech report has been completed, while the Biotech report is being updated. These enhancements will provide stronger data on career progression and hiring outcomes across partner organizations.

Elisabeth Valerio thanked Dayveon Cooper, Brittany Witherspoon and Bill Heath for their leadership in establishing the Alumni Steering Committee, noting that the initiative lays an important foundation for future alumni leadership and regional chapter development.

Virtual Programming

Scott May provided an overview of ICPD's year-round virtual engagement strategy, emphasizing that virtual programming continues to strengthen connections between scholars, mentors, alumni, recruiters and partner organizations well beyond the annual training session.

Scott demonstrated the SMDP Jobs Board, showing committee members how quickly partner organizations can post employment opportunities. Members simply log into the portal, create a new posting using the title, description and application link from their company's careers page, and choose whether the position should be visible publicly or only to the SMDP community.

Scott noted that newly posted positions are automatically highlighted in the weekly SMDP email summary, giving scholars and alumni regular visibility into opportunities across partner companies. He encouraged organizations to curate positions that are particularly relevant to SMDP participants.

Upcoming virtual events were reviewed, including AstraZeneca's 'Belonging in Industry' session, the SMDP MedTech Career Networking event, the Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine R&D Roundtable with Senior Leaders, and the SMDP Biotech Career Networking event. Scott advised that one company participation slot remained available for the Biotech Career Networking event.

Participating companies would receive dedicated breakout rooms to engage directly with scholars and alumni.



Scott also reminded members that the weekly SMDP newsletter is available to promote partner company news and encouraged organizations to send announcements to Elisabeth Valerio for inclusion.

During discussion, Justin Gergarich suggested exploring whether artificial intelligence could automate the posting of relevant vacancies from partner company career sites directly into the SMDP Jobs Board. Elisabeth Valerio agreed the idea warranted further exploration and proposed engaging the IT team to evaluate whether AI could selectively identify appropriate opportunities without overwhelming users. Scott noted that curated postings remain valuable but agreed the concept merited further investigation.

Partner Updates

Scott invited committee members to share updates from their organizations that would be of interest to the broader SMDP community. No formal partner updates were presented, and the committee proceeded to planning for the 2026 training session.

Planning for the 2026 SMDP Biotech Training Session

Scott reported that preparations for the June 20-25 training session in San Diego continue to progress well. Given the proximity of the program, discussion focused on finalizing scholar selection, mentor recruitment, conference programming and logistical arrangements.

BIO International Convention

Cynthia Cheatham (BIO) provided an update on preparations for the BIO International Convention. She highlighted keynote programming featuring Gary Sinise, NVIDIA's Head of Healthcare, Genentech's CEO during the company's 50th anniversary celebration, and moderator Katie Couric. Scholars will again be invited to BIO's Community & Culture Brunch, continuing a valued partnership that provides participants with exceptional exposure to biotechnology leaders and industry networking.

Scholar Selection

Scott announced that ICPD received a record 330 scholar applications for the 2026 Biotech program. He thanked committee members who volunteered on the Selection Committee and noted that every applicant received three independent reviews. With application scoring complete, staff will finalize the incoming cohort over the following week.

Mentor Recruitment

Partner organizations were reminded to submit mentor names and contact information by May 8 so ICPD could begin onboarding mentors and communicating expectations before the training session.

Executive Sponsors

Scott introduced a discussion on the evolving role of Executive Sponsors within partner organizations. He explained that these senior leaders champion SMDP internally, assist with mentor recruitment,



support executive engagement, advocate for the program, and occasionally interact with scholars during the training session. Scott encouraged organizations without an established Executive Sponsor to consider creating the role and invited further discussion during a future committee meeting.

Agenda & Speakers

Elisabeth Valerio reported that development of the 2026 training agenda was progressing well. Committee members were encouraged to recommend speakers from their organizations, particularly mentors and company leaders attending BIO. She also announced that the conference agenda would be presented through a new interactive conference webpage that will showcase speakers and provide a richer participant experience.

Opening Event & Venues

Scott May reminded committee members that the SMDP Biotech Opening Event will be held on Saturday, June 20, and encouraged Outreach & Planning Committee members to attend. Alumni, scholars, mentors, partners and committee members will gather to welcome the incoming 2026 cohort. Members were asked to RSVP to Dustie Savage or Dayveon Cooper. Scott also reported that arrangements for the host hotel, training venue and opening event location were nearing completion and that final details would be shared with participants shortly.

Partner Support

Scott thanked partner organizations for their continued commitment to SMDP, reporting that 76 scholar-mentor sponsorships had already been confirmed for the 2026 Biotech program. Based on ongoing conversations with partner companies, ICPD anticipated increasing this number to between 85 and 90 supported scholar-mentor pairs before the program begins.

Scott encouraged organizations that still had capacity to support additional scholars to contact ICPD. He also highlighted the Emerging Company Sponsorship initiative, through which ICPD invites selected early-stage biotechnology companies to participate in SMDP at no cost. These organizations receive the same mentoring and engagement opportunities as sponsoring partners while providing scholars with valuable exposure to entrepreneurial biotechnology environments.

Committee members were asked to introduce suitable emerging biotechnology companies, particularly those located in the San Diego area. In response to a committee question, Scott confirmed that companies from any therapeutic area are welcome to participate and that there are no restrictions regarding scientific focus.

Other ICPD Program Updates

SMDP MedTech

Scott reminded members that planning for the 2026 SMDP MedTech Training Session in Boston is also underway. Organizations that have not previously participated were encouraged to consider sponsoring scholars and mentors. Because scholar selection will occur later in the summer, partners still have time to make sponsorship decisions.



To illustrate the diversity of training in the MedTech applicant pool, Scott shared preliminary applicant statistics showing strong representation across biomedical, mechanical, chemical and computational engineering, data science and related quantitative disciplines. Applicants also represented a broad range of public and private universities, with approximately equal numbers pursuing bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees.

ELISA Business Network

Scott briefly highlighted the successful completion of the 2026 ELISA Business Scholars Training Session and ELISA Business Summit in Hwange, Zimbabwe. Committee members interested in collaborating with ELISA or learning more about the initiative were invited to contact Scott.

Sage Clubs

Members were reminded of the recent launch of Sage Clubs, ICPD's new school-based initiative operating in eight pilot schools. The program equips young people with practical skills, confidence and leadership opportunities while encouraging positive contributions within their schools and communities.

Action Items

- Finalize the 2026 SMDP Biotech scholar cohort following completion of application scoring.
- Partner organizations to submit remaining mentor names and contact information by May 8.
- Recommend additional speakers for the 2026 training agenda.
- RSVP for the June 20 Opening Event by May 22.
- Identify emerging biotechnology companies for participation in the Emerging Company Sponsorship initiative.
- Explore the feasibility of AI-assisted integration between partner career sites and the SMDP Jobs Board.
- Continue finalizing venues and logistics for the San Diego training session.

Next Meeting

The next Outreach & Planning Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 28, 2026. Scott thanked committee members for their continued partnership and expressed appreciation for their support in preparing for another successful SMDP Biotech Training Session.

Upcoming SMDP Biotech O&P Committee calls:

Tuesday, July 28, 9-9:30 am PT

Tuesday, September 22, 9-9:30 am PT

Tuesday, November 3, 9-9:30 am PT