



Committee Call Notes

Scientist Mentoring & Diversity Program for Biotechnology (SMDP Biotech)

Outreach & Planning Committee

Conference Call

Tuesday, February 3, 2026

12:00PM Eastern / 9:00 AM Pacific

The following Committee members were in attendance:

ICPD Staff: Dayveon Cooper, Bill Heath, Scott May, Elisabeth Valerio, Lauren Celano (Propel Careers), Cynthia Cheatham (BIO), Ashton Delauney (Bristol Myers Squibb), Kevin Kenworthy (Incyte), Tizita Mammo (AstraZeneca), Charlene Rincón (Moderna), Crystal Taylor (Kenvue), 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 first Scholar Mentoring and Development Program for Biotechnology (SMDP Biotech) Outreach & Planning Committee meeting of 2026. Cynthia Cheatham from BIO was welcomed as a new committee member and thanked for BIO's continued partnership.

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.

Scott then invited everyone on the call to introduce themselves before reviewing the meeting agenda.

SMDP enhancements

The committee reviewed the 2025 enhancements, including the updated meaning of SMDP (Scholar Mentoring & Development Program), revised eligibility criteria referencing NIH disadvantaged background guidelines, and transcript requirements. Committee members discussed the rationale for changing 'Scientist' to 'Scholar' and 'Diversity' to 'Development'. It was agreed to revisit naming and criteria after the 2026 application cycle during the April meeting.

Scholar Recruitment

ICPD is implementing a broad recruitment strategy that includes participation in professional conferences, university outreach, and virtual information sessions designed to introduce students to career opportunities in biotechnology and the benefits of participating in SMDP.

- Participation at the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) Annual Convention, March 18–20, where ICPD staff will recruit prospective scholars.
- Continuation of virtual information sessions for students considering careers in biotechnology and medtech.



- Recent virtual information session held on January 23 attracted more than 100 attendees, demonstrating strong interest in the 2026 program.
- Campus outreach sessions are planned with the University of Southern California (USC), Dartmouth College, Cornell University, the University of Cincinnati, and Rutgers University.
- Ongoing engagement with alumni who continue promoting the program through LinkedIn and other professional networks.

Mentor Recruitment & Best Practices

Scott May continued the committee's ongoing discussion on mentor recruitment and support, noting that ICPD is developing a collection of best practices from partner organizations. The discussion focused on practical approaches that have proven successful in preparing mentors for participation in the program and ensuring a positive experience for both mentors and scholars.

Establishing an Internal Program Liaison

Charlene Rincón shared that one of the most effective practices at Moderna has been designating an internal company liaison to coordinate the mentoring program. This individual serves as the primary point of contact between ICPD and the company and is responsible for:

- Recruiting mentors across the organization.
- Explaining the goals and expectations of the SMDP program before ICPD's formal orientation.
- Preparing mentors for their role and answering initial questions.
- Working with sponsoring business units to identify appropriate mentors.
- Maintaining ongoing communication with company leadership throughout the program.

Charlene explained that she has also developed internal guidance describing the qualities sought in mentors, recognizing that not every employee is equally suited or equally interested in mentoring. She emphasized that careful mentor selection contributes significantly to the quality of the scholar experience.

Conducting Mentor Orientation Sessions

Crystal Taylor described Johnson & Johnson's practice of holding mentor orientation sessions approximately two months before the training session. These sessions review program expectations, travel and lodging arrangements, mentoring responsibilities, expected meeting frequency, and provide an opportunity for mentors to ask questions before the program begins.

Executive Sponsorship and Organizational Support

Crystal also highlighted the importance of visible executive sponsorship. Prior to the training session, the executive sponsor communicates with participating mentors and their direct supervisors to reinforce the organization's commitment to SMDP, ensure managers understand the mentor's travel schedule, reduce delays in travel approvals, and demonstrate that mentoring is valued by company leadership.

Broadening Mentor Participation Across Organizations

Tizita Mamo shared that AstraZeneca is exploring recruiting mentors from different business units rather than concentrating participation within one department. This approach distributes travel budgets, broadens organizational engagement, and supports sustainability objectives.



Re-engaging Returning Mentors

Elisabeth noted that several experienced mentors had expressed interest in participating again after previous cohorts but had not been contacted internally by their companies. She encouraged partner organizations to establish processes that balance recruiting new mentors while actively re-engaging returning mentors so willing participants are not overlooked.

Next Steps

Scott thanked committee members for sharing their experiences and confirmed that ICPD will compile the recommendations into a Mentor Best Practices resource for partner organizations. The discussion will continue during the April committee meeting, and members were encouraged to submit additional ideas following the call.

Planning for the 2026 Training Session

Scott May and Elisabeth provided a detailed update on planning for the 2026 SMDP Biotech Training Session, which will be held June 20–25, 2026, in San Diego. Planning is well underway, with preparations focused on securing venues, confirming speakers, arranging company site visits, and creating opportunities for meaningful interaction between scholars, mentors, alumni, and partner organizations.

Training Venues and Site Visits

Scott noted that ICPD continues to explore venue options for the main training program while working closely with BIO and its San Diego partners. In addition to the primary meeting venue, ICPD is seeking host companies willing to welcome scholars for site visits on Monday afternoon, June 22. Companies were invited to consider hosting either the full scholar cohort or smaller groups. Scott referenced the previous year's Boston program, where scholars visited AstraZeneca, Amgen, and Pfizer in smaller groups, providing participants with firsthand exposure to research environments and company culture.

Agenda Development

Elisabeth reported that the training agenda is in its final stages of development and that a draft would be shared with committee members shortly. While the overall program structure is largely in place, several speaker opportunities remain available.

Committee members were encouraged to recommend:

- Senior industry leaders for the biotechnology and consumer healthcare industry panel.
- Talent acquisition and recruiting professionals to participate in the 'Getting Hired' session.
- Professionals to contribute to career development and career choices discussions.
- SMDP alumni working within partner organizations who could serve on alumni panels and share their career journeys.

Elisabeth emphasized that broad representation across partner organizations helps scholars gain exposure to a wide variety of career paths and perspectives within the life sciences industry.

Annual Celebration

The committee also reviewed plans for the Annual Celebration Reception on Sunday evening, June 21st. The reception will bring together scholars, mentors, alumni, speakers, partner representatives,



and committee members in a more informal setting to encourage networking and relationship building. Committee members were encouraged to attend and to RSVP by May 22.

Discussion

Committee members were invited to identify potential speakers, recommend company representatives, and consider opportunities to host site visits in San Diego. Scott emphasized that these contributions are an important part of ensuring scholars experience both the educational and practical dimensions of careers in biotechnology.

Next Steps

- Finalize the 2026 training agenda and distribute a draft to committee members.
- Continue recruiting speakers and panelists.
- Confirm company hosts for San Diego site visits.
- Collect RSVPs for the Annual Celebration Reception by May 22.

Sponsorship Update

Partners were thanked for confirming sponsorships. Remaining sponsorship confirmations are requested by February 27. ICPD aims to secure 95 sponsored scholar-mentor pairs and recruit two emerging company sponsors.

Alumni Program

Dayveon Cooper provided an update on the continued development of the SMDP Alumni Program, highlighting significant progress made since the formation of the SMDP Alumni Steering Committee (ASC). He noted that the Steering Committee has already held two meetings and formally adopted its 2026 operating budget, providing the foundation for a more structured alumni engagement strategy.

Alumni Steering Committee

Dayveon explained that the Alumni Steering Committee consists of seven leadership roles. Each lead has been tasked with developing a 90-day action plan outlining priorities, activities, and anticipated budget requirements for their respective area of responsibility. These plans will guide implementation throughout 2026 and help establish a sustainable framework for long-term alumni engagement.

2026 Alumni Networking Event

Planning is underway for the 2026 SMDP Alumni Networking Event, which will take place on Saturday, June 20, in San Diego as a hybrid in-person and virtual event. The event will culminate in a networking reception welcoming the incoming 2026 SMDP Biotech scholars and mentors. Partner organizations and members of the Outreach & Planning Committee were invited to participate. Attendees were asked to RSVP to Dayveon Cooper by May 22 and indicate whether they planned to attend in person or virtually. Members of the Alumni Steering Committee are also expected to participate.

Alumni Outcomes Research

Dayveon announced that ICPD is preparing an updated SMDP alumni research report. Building on previous reports, the new edition will include scholar employment history and career progression data. This will enable ICPD and partner organizations to better understand alumni career trajectories,



identify hiring outcomes across partner companies, and more effectively demonstrate the long-term impact of the program.

Committee Discussion

Committee members welcomed the progress being made to formalize the alumni program and recognized its importance in strengthening the SMDP community beyond the annual training session. The expanded alumni research and networking initiatives were viewed as valuable tools for maintaining engagement, measuring program impact, and supporting future scholars.

Virtual Programming

Scott May provided an update on ICPD's ongoing virtual programming initiatives, emphasizing that these activities continue to strengthen engagement with scholars, mentors, alumni, and partner organizations throughout the year, rather than limiting interaction to the annual training session.

Virtual Career Networking Events

Scott reminded committee members that ICPD continues to host virtual career networking events that function as online career fairs for current scholars and alumni. These sessions typically feature two or three partner organizations and provide participants with an opportunity to learn about career paths, internships, and employment opportunities directly from company representatives.

Partner organizations interested in participating in a virtual networking event during the spring were encouraged to contact ICPD. Scott noted that these events give companies an opportunity to showcase their organization, introduce participants to their culture and career opportunities, and connect with highly qualified SMDP scholars and alumni before formal recruitment cycles begin.

Supporting Year-Round Engagement

Scott also highlighted the broader suite of virtual resources available through the SMDP community, including the online Jobs Board, regular communications, and other digital engagement activities that help maintain connections between scholars, mentors, alumni, recruiters, and partner organizations throughout the year.

Committee Discussion

Committee members were encouraged to consider participating in future virtual career events and to work with ICPD to identify suitable dates and company representatives. These programs were recognized as an effective way to increase employer visibility, strengthen relationships with alumni, and connect scholars with career opportunities beyond the annual training session.

Action Items

Action	Owner	Due
Submit Selection Committee names and email addresses	Partner organizations	April 8
Submit mentor names and contact information	Partner organizations	May 8
Recommend speakers and panelists	Committee members	May 8
RSVP for Annual Celebration Reception	Committee members	May 22
Confirm 2026 sponsorship commitments	Partner organizations	February 27
Introduce emerging company sponsors	Committee members	Ongoing
Advise ICPD of interest in hosting site visits	Partner organizations	As soon as possible
Compile mentor best practices	ICPD	April meeting

Scholar Mentoring & Development Program [SMDP Biotech] | Outreach & Planning Committee



Upcoming SMDP Biotech O&P Committee calls:

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

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

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

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