



Committee Call Notes

Scientist Mentoring & Diversity Program for Biotechnology (SMDP Biotech)

Outreach & Planning Committee

Conference Call

Tuesday, July 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, Elisabeth Valerio

Maria Alvim Gastón (Lilly), Cynthia Cheatham (BIO), Ashton Delauney (Bristol Myers Squibb), Sarina Kajani PhD (AstraZeneca), Cornel Phillip PhD (AstraZeneca), Charlene Rincón (Moderna), Benjamin Schreiner (Pfizer), Anna Zinger (Pfizer)

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 members to the July meeting of the SMDP Biotech Outreach & Planning Committee and thanked them for continuing to help guide the Scholar Mentoring & Development Program for Biotechnology. He reminded members that committee calls are recorded to support preparation of the official meeting minutes and showed participants where the meeting agenda and committee materials can be accessed through the ICPD website, icpdprograms.org, select "Committees" from the "Select an ICPD site" drop-down menu at the top right side of the page.

Participants introduced themselves and their organizations. Several members reflected on their longstanding connection to SMDP as former scholars, including Cornell Phillips, Charlene Rincón and Elisabeth Valerio. Their continued involvement illustrated the enduring relationship SMDP seeks to build with scholars beyond the formal mentoring year.

Planning for the 2027 SMDP Biotech Training Session

Scott advised the committee that ICPD had already begun preparations for the 2027 SMDP Biotech Training Session, scheduled for June 5-10 in Philadelphia. Scholar recruitment is expected to begin in November 2026, making the summer and early fall an important period for reviewing selection criteria, initiating mentor recruitment, identifying training and site-visit venues, and beginning broader program planning.

Scholar Selection Criteria

Scott led a detailed review of the existing SMDP scholar selection framework and invited committee members to provide recommendations before recruitment begins. He explained that the process is divided into objective eligibility criteria and a subsequent qualitative review. ICPD staff first determine whether applicants meet all objective requirements. Eligible applications are then distributed to volunteer reviewers from partner organizations or their designees for scoring against the qualitative criteria.



Scott reviewed the materials provided to reviewers, including the application, résumé or curriculum vitae, two letters of recommendation and the applicant narrative. Reviewers typically receive approximately twenty application packets and score candidates through the online system using the established qualitative measures, including factors such as the relevance of their research and demonstrated leadership potential.

Maria noted that Lilly employees had previously participated in applicant review but that the company had changed its internal approach and no longer permits employees to score SMDP applicants. She confirmed, however, that Lilly could continue participating in other aspects of the program, including mentoring, and offered to review the criteria and provide feedback. Scott and Elisabeth emphasized that input on the criteria remains valuable even when a partner company does not participate directly in selection.

Geographic Eligibility and U.S. Territories

Cornell Phillips raised an important question about the geographic wording of the eligibility criteria, which currently refers specifically to accredited institutions in the United States or Puerto Rico. Drawing on his background in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Cornell asked whether the language unintentionally excludes institutions in other U.S. territories, including the Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa. He suggested that the committee consider broader wording referring to the United States and its territories.

Scott explained that Puerto Rico had historically been named explicitly because early SMDP recruitment efforts placed particular emphasis on increasing awareness and participation among students at Puerto Rican institutions. Elisabeth agreed that Cornell's observation illustrated the value of periodically reviewing the criteria and acknowledged that other U.S. territories may not have been sufficiently considered in the existing language. No change was adopted during the meeting; the issue was identified for further review as part of the broader selection-criteria discussion.

Clarifying Student and Postdoctoral Eligibility

Charlene Rincón identified a second area requiring clarification. She noted that the criterion allowing an applicant to have received a degree within the previous three years could appear inconsistent with a later criterion describing eligible applicants as undergraduate, graduate, doctoral or postdoctoral participants. From a company talent-management perspective, she explained, the distinction matters because university relations and talent acquisition functions may treat current students and postdoctoral researchers differently.

Scott explained that the wording was intended in part to accommodate postdoctoral researchers who may no longer be formally enrolled as students but remain in academic research positions while preparing to transition into industry. Charlene emphasized that the language should nevertheless be sufficiently clear for partner companies to understand whether their participation is supporting student development, postdoctoral career transition or formal recruitment.



The committee agreed that the nuance warranted further consideration rather than attempting to resolve the wording during the call. Scott invited members to continue reviewing the criteria and submit written comments or schedule individual conversations with ICPD. Feedback will be considered before the committee finalizes the framework used to promote the 2027 program to universities and prospective applicants.

2027 Mentor Recruitment & Best Practices

The committee then turned to early mentor planning. Partner companies were encouraged to begin recruiting both new and returning mentors in August, well ahead of the June 2027 training session. ICPD will prepare customized mentor-recruitment flyers for participating companies, incorporating each organization's logo and summarizing the roles and responsibilities of SMDP mentors.

Scott noted that one practice emerging from previous committee discussions is for companies to conduct an internal call or competition for mentors rather than relying solely on direct appointments. Interested employees can apply after reviewing the expectations of the role, giving the company a pool from which to select mentors. Returning mentors can also be encouraged to apply. ICPD will continue compiling and sharing best practices for recruiting, preparing and supporting mentors throughout the mentoring year.

Philadelphia Training Venue

ICPD is seeking a partner company in the greater Philadelphia area to host the core 2027 training program. The anticipated group size is approximately 160 participants, requiring a facility capable of accommodating the full group throughout Sunday, June 6, and the morning of Monday, June 7. Scott invited companies with appropriate facilities to contact him so that potential host arrangements can be explored well in advance.

If a partner-company facility is not available, ICPD will also consider university or conference-hotel options. The preference, however, is to create opportunities for scholars to experience an industry environment whenever logistically feasible.

Partner Company Site Visits

In addition to the central training venue, ICPD hopes to arrange site visits with two or three partner companies in the Philadelphia area from 1:30-3:30pm. on Monday, June 7. The full cohort would be divided into smaller groups for these visits. Scott encouraged companies with suitable facilities to consider hosting scholars and to begin internal conversations early.

The committee noted that company site visits are an important complement to the formal training program because they allow scholars to experience working environments directly, meet additional professionals and gain a more tangible understanding of careers within the biotechnology industry.



Items for Continued 2027 Planning

The official agenda also identified agenda and speaker development, the Annual Celebration of SMDP Biotech reception, and coordination with the BIO International Convention as areas for continued 2027 planning. These items were not substantively discussed during this portion of the July meeting and will be developed during subsequent committee discussions.

2025 SMDP Biotech Cohort - End-of-Year Reflections

The committee reviewed the conclusion of the 2025 SMDP Biotech mentoring year. An end-of-year reunion call was held on July 23, providing scholars with an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the program and the progress they had made during the year. The reflections were especially encouraging. Scholars spoke about the value of the exposure, support and professional network they gained through SMDP and reported feeling substantially better prepared to navigate the transition from academic training into industry.

The discussion reinforced that the value of SMDP extends beyond the initial in-person training. The combination of sustained mentoring, access to industry professionals, professional-development programming and an enduring peer network gives scholars a framework for making more informed career decisions and entering industry with greater familiarity with professional expectations.

ICPD reminded the committee that scholars must satisfy the program's monthly reporting requirements in order to graduate from SMDP Biotech, receive a certificate of completion and be formally welcomed into the SMDP Alumni Network. Staff continue to follow up with scholars as the cohort completes these requirements.

Debrief: 2026 SMDP Biotech Training Session - San Diego

The committee then conducted a detailed debrief of the June 20–25 SMDP Biotech Training Session in San Diego. Overall, the program was viewed as highly successful, while the experience also identified several practical lessons that can strengthen planning for Philadelphia in 2027.

Opening Event & Alumni Participation

The opening-night reception was considered a strong start to the program. Members of the SMDP Alumni Steering Committee were fully represented, together with a number of additional SMDP alumni. Their participation gave incoming scholars an immediate connection to the broader SMDP community and demonstrated that the program is intended to create relationships that continue beyond the formal mentoring year.

Training Format & Drug Discovery Game

The 2026 training returned to a format without concurrent scholar sessions, and this change was well received. Keeping the principal training content together reduced the need for participants to choose between competing sessions and helped create a more cohesive shared experience across the cohort.



The committee thanked Pfizer for once again facilitating the Drug Discovery Game. The interactive exercise was very well received and generated considerable energy and participation among the scholars. While scholars participated in the game, mentors met separately to discuss expectations for the virtual mentoring year and share ideas about how ICPD can better support and engage mentors throughout SMDP.

One logistical lesson emerged from holding the two activities simultaneously in adjacent space: scholars were so enthusiastically engaged in the Drug Discovery Game that the noise made it difficult at times for mentors to hear their separate discussion. This will be considered when selecting rooms and configuring future scholar and mentor sessions.

Scholar-Mentor Participation & Matching

A total of 73 scholars were sponsored for the 2026 cohort. ICPD reported that all scholar-mentor pairs had been connected and that staff were continuing to confirm that pairs were moving into their monthly mentoring meetings. A separate virtual session for remote mentors and scholars was scheduled for July 29 to reinforce expectations and support pairs that had not been able to participate together in person.

Forty-six mentors attended the San Diego training in person. Fewer than ten stand-in mentors were available to support scholars whose assigned mentors could not attend, placing considerable demands on those volunteers. The experience reinforced the importance of securing in-person mentor participation whenever possible and planning more deliberately for scholars whose mentors will participate remotely.

The virtual one-on-one mentoring sessions also presented scheduling challenges. In some instances, assigned mentors had not been confirmed early enough to allow scholar-mentor pairs to be allocated to virtual breakout rooms in advance. Although the sessions ultimately worked, ICPD identified advance breakout-room assignments as an important operational improvement for future training programs. Mentors who cannot attend in person should, whenever possible, be confirmed early and available for the scheduled virtual one-on-one session.

Following the training, ICPD continued individualized follow-up to ensure that every scholar was introduced to the appropriate mentor and that mentoring relationships were positioned to begin successfully. The committee recognized this post-session support as especially important when mentor substitutions or remote participation complicate the initial introduction.

Training Venue & Hospitality

The Lane was viewed as a very good meeting venue overall, and the service provided by the venue team was strong. Food and beverage service for the opening-night reception was particularly well received. The deli lunch served on Sunday was more limited and was identified as an area that could be improved in future planning.



The experience also highlighted the importance of physical separation when scholars and mentors are engaged in different activities. The sound generated by the highly interactive Drug Discovery Game carried into the mentor discussion area, making conversation difficult. Future venue planning should therefore consider not only room capacity but also acoustics and the ability to isolate simultaneous activities when necessary.

Annual Celebration of SMDP Biotech

The Annual Celebration of SMDP Biotech was reported to have gone very well, with attendance reaching maximum capacity. The event provided an opportunity for scholars, mentors, partners, alumni and other members of the SMDP community to interact outside the formal training environment and celebrate the new cohort.

Partner Company Site Visits

ICPD expressed appreciation to Johnson & Johnson, Lilly and Arrowhead Pharmaceuticals for hosting company site visits. Scholars whose assigned mentors were based at one of the participating companies visited that company wherever possible, allowing them to deepen relationships with their mentors and gain direct exposure to the mentor's organizational environment. Remaining scholars were distributed among the three companies.

The site visits continued to demonstrate the value of providing scholars with first-hand exposure to different company environments. The experience informed the committee's earlier discussion about building two or three partner-company site visits into the 2027 Philadelphia program.

Event Check-In & Conference Technology

ICPD continued using QR codes for event and session check-in, enabling participants to sign in using their mobile phones. This substantially reduced waiting time and simplified attendance tracking. ICPD also implemented an enhanced conference page for the San Diego program, providing participants with a more centralized source for event information.

BIO International Convention

The committee acknowledged BIO's support during the BIO International Convention. Many SMDP scholars participated in the BIO Community & Culture Brunch, adding another opportunity for them to engage with the broader biotechnology community during their week in San Diego.

Key Lessons for Future Training Programs

- Continue the non-concurrent format for core scholar training where practical.
- Preserve the Drug Discovery Game while ensuring adequate acoustic separation from simultaneous mentor activities.
- Strengthen expectations and advance planning for assigned mentors to attend the training in person whenever possible.
- Expand contingency planning for stand-in mentors so that a small number of volunteers are not supporting too many scholars.



- Confirm remote mentors early and pre-assign virtual scholar-mentor pairs to breakout rooms before the session.
- Continue post-training follow-up until every scholar has been successfully introduced to the assigned mentor.
- Retain QR-code check-in and enhanced digital conference resources.
- Continue partner-company site visits as an important component of the SMDP industry-exposure experience.

Remaining Agenda Items

Following the detailed discussion of the 2027 program planning and the debrief of the 2026 San Diego Training Session, the committee had reached the end of the available meeting time. Scott May noted that the remaining agenda items would be carried forward for discussion at the next Outreach & Planning Committee meeting. Accordingly, the items below are recorded as planned or informational agenda items rather than as matters substantively discussed or decided during the July 28 call.

Partner Support - Deferred to the Next Meeting

The agenda identified several partner-support priorities for the coming planning cycle. Scott May was scheduled to contact current partners in August to begin determining the number of scholar-mentor pairs each organization wished to reserve for the 2027 SMDP Biotech and SMDP MedTech programs. The agenda also noted continuing opportunities for companies to support scholar-mentor pairs in the 2026 SMDP MedTech program, scheduled for October 16-21 in Boston.

Additional partner-support priorities included identifying or reconfirming Executive Sponsors within participating companies and continuing ICPD's Emerging Company Sponsorship initiative. Under that initiative, ICPD planned to support two emerging companies at no cost for one scholar-mentor pair each, while also exploring whether established partners might wish to help support emerging-company engagement.

The 2027 sponsorship rate was listed as \$12,000 per scholar-mentor pair. Because the committee did not reach this section during the call, no new sponsorship commitments or decisions were recorded.

SMDP Alumni Program - Deferred to the Next Meeting

The agenda reflected continued growth of the SMDP Alumni Program and the work of the Alumni Steering Committee (ASC). The ASC was meeting monthly, had an approved 2026 budget, and was prioritizing the establishment of six regional chapters together with expanded in-person and virtual alumni programming.

The agenda also recorded that the 2026 SMDP Alumni Networking Event had been held in person and virtually on June 20 in San Diego. Alumni attending in person were invited to participate in the Opening Event for the incoming 2026 SMDP Biotech scholars and mentors. A further alumni event was planned to coincide with the SMDP MedTech program in Boston.



Work was also underway to update the SMDP Biotech and SMDP MedTech alumni research reports to include alumni employment history, strengthening ICPD's ability to document longer-term career outcomes. These items were not discussed in depth during the July meeting and were therefore left for subsequent follow-up.

Virtual Programming - Deferred to the Next Meeting

The agenda included a number of year-round virtual engagement resources, including the SMDP Jobs Board, recruiter orientations for partner companies, the weekly email summary, the SMDP app and interactive map, Mentor Moments, Career Spotlights, project pages and the SMDP Gateway membership program. The agenda noted that more than 95 Mentor Moments and 48 Career Spotlights featuring SMDP alumni had been published.

Because the committee did not reach this section of the agenda, no new discussion, demonstrations or decisions concerning virtual programming were recorded during the July 28 meeting.

Partner Updates - Deferred to the Next Meeting

The agenda identified a Kenvue Virtual Open House scheduled for July 30 and proposed a broader discussion of feedback ICPD had received from partner companies about SMDP scholars. That feedback suggested that SMDP scholars often demonstrate strengths in mentoring and being mentored, networking effectively, and presenting with confidence to senior management. The agenda posed an important future question: how might partner companies help ICPD quantify these observed differences and outcomes?

This discussion was not reached during the July meeting and was therefore carried forward rather than recorded as a committee conclusion.

Other ICPD Program Updates – Informational

The agenda noted that the 2026 SMDP MedTech Training Session would be held October 16–21 in Boston and that the 2027 SMDP MedTech Training Session was scheduled for October 1–6 in San Francisco.

The agenda also referenced the Enterprise, Leaders & Innovators Society for Africa (ELISA), noting that the 2026 ELISA Business Scholars Training Session and ELISA Business Summit had been held March 19–22 in Hwange, Zimbabwe, near Victoria Falls. Partner organizations interested in ELISA were invited to contact Scott May. These updates were not substantively discussed during the call.

Action Items

- ICPD to incorporate committee feedback as it continues reviewing the 2027 SMDP Biotech scholar selection criteria.
- Partner companies to begin identifying and recruiting new and returning mentors for the 2027 program.



- ICPD to prepare customized mentor-recruitment materials for partner companies and continue compiling mentor-support best practices.
- Partner companies with suitable Philadelphia-area facilities to consider hosting the June 6-7, 2027 SMDP Biotech Training Session.
- Partner companies in the Philadelphia area to consider hosting scholar site visits on June 7, 2027.
- ICPD to apply lessons from the San Diego debrief to future mentor attendance, stand-in mentor coverage, virtual breakout-room preparation, venue configuration and post-training follow-up.
- Scott May to contact current partners regarding anticipated 2027 SMDP Biotech and SMDP MedTech sponsorship levels.
- Carry Partner Support, Alumni Program, Virtual Programming and Partner Updates

Upcoming SMDP Biotech O&P Committee calls:

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

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