MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

ON

High Throughput Screening, Toxicity Pathway Profiling, and Biological Interpretation of Findings

BETWEEN THE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)/
National Toxicology Program (NTP)

AND THE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)
National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI)
NIH Chemical Genomics Center (NCGC)

AND THE

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA)
Office of Research and Development

I. PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES/GOALS

This Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets in place mechanisms to strengthen the existing collaborations that utilize the complementary expertise and capabilities of the NIEHS/NTP, the NCGC of the NHGRI, and the Office of Research and Development (ORD) of the EPA in the research, development, validation, and translation of new and innovative test methods that characterize key steps in toxicity pathways. A central component of this MOU is the exploration of high throughput screening (HTS) assays and tests using phylogenetically lower animal species (e.g., fish, worms), as well as high throughput whole genome analytical methods, to evaluate mechanisms of toxicity. Ultimately, the data generated by these new tools is to be provided to risk assessors to use in the protection of human health and the environment. The goals of this MOU are to investigate the use of these new tools to (1) identify mechanisms of chemically induced biological activity, (2) prioritize chemicals for more extensive toxicological evaluation, and (3) develop more predictive models of *in vivo* biological response. Success in achieving these goals is expected to result in test methods for toxicity testing that are more scientifically and economically efficient and models for risk assessment that are more biologically based. As a consequence, a reduction or replacement of animals in regulatory

testing is anticipated to occur in parallel with an increased ability to evaluate the large numbers of chemicals that currently lack adequate toxicological evaluation.

II. BACKGROUND

For several years, EPA and NIEHS have recognized the need to modify the scientific basis for hazard identification and risk assessment by working toward partially or fully replacing current test methods with higher throughput, mechanism-based test methods. This recognition led both organizations to initiate programs to evaluate using *in vitro* biochemical- and cell-based assays and non-rodent animal models for toxicological testing. In 2004, the NTP released its Vision and Roadmap for the 21st Century (http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/go/vision), which established an HTS initiative to focus on integrating HTS and non-rodent screening assays into its testing program. In 2005, the EPA established the National Center for Computational Toxicology (NCCT) within ORD to bring innovative molecular biological and computational tools to the evaluation of hazards and risks of environmental chemicals. To accomplish its mission, the NCCT works closely with ORD's National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (NHEERL), which conducts related laboratory, clinical, and epidemiological research. The NTP Vision for the 21st Century and the goal of the ORD are to support the evolution of toxicology from a predominantly observational science at the level of disease-specific models to a predominantly predictive science focused upon a broad inclusion of target-specific, mechanism-based, biological observations. The NCGC, one of the centers of the Molecular Libraries Screening Centers Network (MLSCN) within the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research Molecular Libraries Initiative, has been a key collaborator with both the NTP and EPA in this process. The NIH established the NCGC in 2004 as a national resource for chemical probe development and compound profiling using industrial-scale HTS assays, informatics, and chemistry.

In 2005, the EPA with support from the NTP funded a project at the National Research Council (NRC) to develop a long-range vision for toxicity testing and a strategic plan for implementing the vision. The impetus for this project was a strong commitment by both agencies that future toxicity testing and assessment paradigms meet evolving regulatory needs (e.g., that the paradigms readily accommodate the increasingly large numbers of substances that need to be tested); incorporate the recent advances in molecular toxicology, computational sciences, and information technology; and offer increased efficiency in design, costs, and animal usage. In response, the NRC Committee on Toxicity Testing and Assessment of Environmental Agents recently released a vision and implementation strategy titled A Vision for Toxicity Testing in the Twenty-first Century (NRC 2007). This report is a powerful catalyst for a focused and collaborative effort across the research community to: (1) develop a more robust scientific basis for assessing potential adverse health effects of environmental agents; (2) provide broad coverage of chemicals, chemical mixtures, outcomes, and life stages; (3) use population-based and human exposure data to inform decisions regarding chemical selection and environmentally relevant testing conditions; (4) reduce the cost and time of toxicity testing; and (5) use laboratory animals in targeted testing where essential data are needed and cannot be appropriately obtained *in vitro* or using phylogenetically lower animal species.

The convergence of science, technology, regulatory need, and public opinion has produced an historic opportunity to transform toxicology and risk assessment into more accurate, rapid, and

cost-effective sciences. In recognition of the need for a long-term, multiple Federal agency commitment, this MOU is being established to guide the construction and governance of a detailed research strategy to make the NRC Committee's vision a reality. This MOU builds on a number of separate and joint efforts among our three organizations that are very much aligned with the NRC Committee's vision. Building on the strengths of the individual organizations is intended to facilitate the advancements necessary to move toxicology to a more predictive science based on the most relevant and meaningful tools of modern molecular biology and chemistry.

III. AUTHORITIES

EPA enters into this MOU pursuant to Section 103 of the Clean Air Act [42 U.S.C. §7403 (a) and (b)]; Section 104 of the Clean Water Act [33 U.S.C. § 1254 (a) and (b)]; Section 300 j-l of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. §1442); Section 10 of the Toxic Substances Control Act [15 U.S.C. § 2609 (a)]; and Section 20 of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act [7 U.S.C. § 136r (a)].

NIEHS enters into this MOU pursuant to Sections 301, 401, and 463 of the Public Health Service Act [42 U.S.C., §§ 241, 281, and 285l].

NHGRI enters into this MOU pursuant to Section 301 of the Public Health Service Act [42 U.S.C. § 241].

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each participant intends to implement the following provisions of this MOU, under the responsibility of the Assistant Administrator for ORD and the Directors of the NTP and the NCGC.

A. Toxicity Pathways: A shared focus of all participants is to identify and/or develop HTS assays that investigate "toxicity" pathways. To this end, the three organizations agree to collaborate to identify toxicity pathways that contribute to a variety of adverse health outcomes (e.g., from acute oral toxicity to long-term effects like cancer) and assays that provide information on key steps in those pathways. All participants agree that this aim will best be accomplished through joint meetings, by seeking advice from acknowledged experts in different disciplines in the international scientific community, and through specialized workshops. The three organizations agree to identify data gaps where research and development are needed to modify existing assays (e.g., incorporation of metabolic competency) or to develop new assays designed to allow a more comprehensive evaluation of how compounds interact with key steps in critical toxicity pathways. Once the pathways and assays are identified, the NCGC agrees to develop suitable HTS assays, or utilize the MLSCN assay development program and/or various government supported research and development programs (e.g., the Small Business Technology Transfer/Small Business Innovation Research program) to do so.

***B. Chemical Selection*:** The participants agree that large numbers of compounds with existing toxicological data need to be identified and tested in the identified HTS assays and alternative animal models. The NTP and the EPA have databases of toxicological information on a large number of compounds. The EPA also has models and databases for determining whether

exposures are likely to occur, at what level, and by what route. The EPA and NTP agree to share toxicity and exposure information on compounds selected for testing and to collaborate, where deemed useful, on identifying compounds for testing. The EPA and NTP also plan to make appropriate efforts to ensure, as a means for evaluating endpoint reproducibility, some degree of overlap between the chemical libraries under study. The EPA, NCGC, and NTP agree to jointly determine appropriate quality assurance/quality control procedures for the compounds chosen for testing.

C. Analysis and Bioinformatics: Analysis of individual HTS assay results (i.e., identifying active and inactive compounds for a particular assay) and bioinformatics (i.e., evaluating sets of data from multiple *in vitro* and *in vivo* assays while taking into account chemico-physical properties for significant relationships) are critical to the success of the joint initiative. As a result, the three organizations agree to: collaborate on the development of the most appropriate tools for the analysis of HTS data, share data (both HTS as well as that generated using traditional test methods), and work to make all the data publicly accessible. The EPA, NTP, and NCGC agree to employ computational approaches to evaluate the information from HTS studies. The NTP or NHEERL agree to undertake targeted *in vivo* follow-up studies when appropriate. The organizations also agree to consider the use of extramural mechanisms to support these activities. Proof-of-concept studies will be important to demonstrate the feasibility of the new approach and their undertaking will require a critical level of effort across the institutions. It is envisioned that these efforts will evolve towards a systems-biology approach as a foundation for constructing and using biologically based dose-response models in risk assessment. Regulatory acceptance of these new approaches will take considerable thought and effort. Therefore, an important consideration will be the translation of the results of this joint research program into testing strategies that provide data useful to risk assessors.

D. Outreach: Effective and open communication about this research program, its findings and their use will be important to its acceptance and ultimate success. The three organizations agree to conduct joint outreach activities related to the development and use of HTS and other innovative approaches for assessing toxicity. Such activities might include activities:

- Sponsoring relevant workshops (e.g., to identify the key toxicity pathways for various organ systems or to develop best practices for analysis of the new data streams).
- Organizing symposia that focus on advances in the area of HTS for toxicity testing and systems-biology models for integration and interpretation of the data.
- Co-sponsoring a seminar series that addresses key advancements in HTS or translation of HTS data into phenotypic outcomes that would form the basis for more mechanistically based risk assessment practices.
- Contributing via presentations and posters to national and international meetings.
- Co-authoring articles to keep the scientific community informed of progress and advances in this research program.
- Continuing to interact via joint meetings of the EPA Chemical Prioritization Community of Practice (CPCP), the NCGC, and the NTP HTS Faculty.
- Promoting the regulatory acceptance of alternative approaches when deemed scientifically defensible.

E. Governance: The activities identified in this MOU are to be managed by a Governance Board (GB) composed of the Director of the NCGC, the Director of the EPA/ORD National

Center for Computational Toxicology, and the Branch Chief of the NTP Biomolecular Screening Branch. The members of the GB, with advice from their management, are to be responsible for developing and implementing a cross-organizational research strategy, promoting cross-organization interactions, identifying and recommending actions to overcome barriers to success, ensuring minimal redundancy of activities, serving as spokespersons for the tripartite effort within and outside their respective organizations, and reporting on the overall progress of the program to their respective organizations at periodic intervals. The GB is expected to meet by teleconference or in person at least once every two months.

F. Scientific Review: The activities carried out by the EPA, NTP, and the NCGC in support of this MOU will be reviewed at regular intervals (initially, approximately every six months) by their respective review panels. For the NCGC, this is the NCGC Working Group, which reports to the NHGRI Board of Scientific Counselors. For the NTP and the EPA, this is their respective Boards of Scientific Counselors.

V. LIMITATIONS

All commitments made in this MOU are subject to the availability of appropriated funds and each party's research priorities. Nothing in this MOU, in and of itself, obligates any participant to expend appropriations or to enter into any contract, assistance agreement, interagency agreement, or other financial obligation.

This MOU is neither a fiscal nor a funds obligation document. Any endeavor involving reimbursement or contribution of funds between the participants to this MOU will be handled in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and procedures and will be subject to separate subsidiary agreements that will be effected in writing by representatives of the participants.

Except as provided in this Section (Section V, LIMITATION) and Section VII, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, this MOU is not legally binding and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by law or equity against the NIH/NIEHS/NTP, the NIH/NHGRI/NCGC, or the EPA.

VI. PROPRIETY INFORMATION

Not applicable as all participants are Federal agencies.

VII. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The parties agree that inventorship of any patentable matter, created by any of the participants pursuant to the terms of this MOU, will be determined in accordance with U.S. patent laws. Ownership will follow inventorship and vest in the inventors or their employers as determined by contract or law.

The participants agree to notify each other when joint-authoring a journal article that includes a non-government employee as a co-author. In such cases, the participants should ensure that all necessary rights under copyright are acquired to the satisfaction of all parties.

VIII. POINTS OF CONTACT

The following individuals are designated points of contact for the MOU:

NIEHS/NTP:

Raymond Tice, Ph.D.
Acting Branch Chief
Biomolecular Screening Branch
National Toxicology Program
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
Mail Drop EC-17
P.O. Box 12233
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
Tel. 919-541-4482
Fax. 919-541-0947
email: tice@niehs.nih.gov

NCGC:

Christopher P. Austin, M.D.
Director, NIH Chemical Genomics Center
National Human Genome Research Institute
National Institutes of Health
9800 Medical Center Drive, MSC 3370
Bethesda, MD 20892-3370
Tel: 301-217-5733
Fax: 301-217-5736
email: austinc@mail.nih.gov

EPA/ORD:

Robert J. Kavlock, Ph.D.
Director, National Center for Computational Toxicology
Office of Research and Development
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Research Triangle Park, NC 27711
Tel: 919-541-2326
Fax: 919-541-1194
email: kavlock.robert@epa.gov

IX. MODIFICATION/DURATION/TERMINATION

This MOU is to take effect upon signature of all participants and remain in effect for a period of five years, unless the participants decide otherwise in writing. This MOU may be amended at any time by the mutual written consent of the participants. Additionally, the participants agree to review this MOU annually to determine whether it should be revised, renewed, or cancelled. A participant may terminate its participation in this MOU by providing written notice to the other participants at least thirty (30) days in advance of the desired termination date.

X. APPROVALS

National Toxicology Program

/Samuel H. Wilson/
Samuel H. Wilson, M.D.
Acting Director
National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
National Institutes of Health
National Toxicology Program

___December 17, 2007_____
Date

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

/George M. Gray/
George M. Gray, Ph.D.
Assistant Administrator
Office of Research and Development

_____Janaury 8, 2008_____
Date

NIH Chemical Genomics Center

/Francis S. Collins/
Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Human Genome Research Institute
National Institutes of Health

_____January 30, 2008_____
Date

/Eric D. Green/
Eric D. Green, M.D., Ph.D.
Scientific Director
Division of Intramural Research
National Human Genome Research Institute
National Institutes of Health

____Janaury 24, 2008_____
Date

Proper Signatures
Treat as signed, § 1.4(d)(2)