

For Immediate Release

Contact: xxxxxxxxxx

+1-xxx-xxx-xxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxx@ebrc.org

Industry and Academic Leaders Form “Go-To” Organization for Biological Engineering

Emeryville, CA—Academic and industry leaders in synthetic biology have come together with support from the National Science Foundation to form a consortium to accelerate progress in biological engineering to address critical global needs.

The Engineering Biology Research Consortium, EBRC, aims to be the leading organization bringing together an inclusive community committed to responding to the needs of the world by purposefully guiding the advancement of engineering biology.

“The planet faces many challenges, including the need to feed, care for, and provide energy to a growing population, all while reducing our environmental impact,” said Jay D. Keasling, a recognized leader in synthetic biology and EBRC Board Chair. “Biology will be a critical part of the solution to these and other challenges in the 21st century.”

Recent advances in biology, computing, engineering, and many other fields are converging to make biology easier to engineer. Biofuels, green chemicals, better foods, and more personalized medicines are examples of biological solutions that are being made possible by synthetic biology.

“A key role of EBRC will be to create a US roadmap for engineering biology to help inform federal agencies how to maximize investments and push beyond technological roadblocks to accelerate progress in energy, food, fuel, and the environment,” said Theresa Good, Deputy Division Director of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences at the National Science Foundation. “Without a clear and community-oriented vision for synthetic biology, the US risks losing its early leadership in this cutting-edge discipline.”

The bio-based economy is growing much faster than the rest of the economy, rivaling large sectors like mining and computer manufacturing. Advances in gene editing technology continue to make progress faster, cheaper, and more precise, further expanding biologically engineered products for the public.

“Despite the growing importance of biology to our economy and in our daily lives, many countries—including the US—lack a strategic plan to advance biotechnology efficiently and responsibly,” said Douglas Friedman, Executive Director of EBRC. “EBRC will showcase cutting-edge research in engineering biology, identify pressing challenges and opportunities, and articulate compelling research roadmaps and programs to address them.”

EBRC will be launched with a diverse group of academic and industrial participants to ensure that it reflects and speaks for the engineering biology community broadly. EBRC will be established as the “go to” organization for any person, agency or institution seeking input or focused attention from the synthetic biology community.

"EBRC represents a unique opportunity for industry to exercise leadership and positively impact the trajectory of the field," Steve Evans, EBRC Vice Chair and Dow Agrosociences researcher, said. "By connecting academic and industrial researchers with policymakers and public stakeholders, we can create unified, shared visions to realize the very best potential of this fast-evolving field."

EBRC was born from Synberc, the Synthetic Biology Engineering Research Center, a ten-year NSF-supported program that helped to lay the research foundations for synthetic biology. EBRC will build on Synberc's successes by broadening participation and furthering conversations about broader impacts, as the products of biological engineering increasingly touch our daily lives.

"EBRC will foster leadership in advancing responsible practices and promoting the development of the next generation of leaders in the synthetic biology community," EBRC investigator Ken Oye of MIT explained. "That means better solutions, greater safety and security, and—ultimately—more flourishing communities."

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