



OPINION

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Guest Opinion

San Francisco needs bold pitch to land stem-cell HQ

Bikash Chatterjee

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom and his economic development team are hard at work on their upcoming bid for the hotly contested California Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

Our major competition for what will be headquarters for administration of the \$3 billion in Proposition 71 stem-cell research funds approved by voters last fall is that "other" city by the bay: San Diego. We're talking about a formidable contender.

San Diego's highly organized pro-business consortium includes more than 450 Southern California life sciences firms, active support from UC-San Diego and world-renowned research facilities such as the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, Scripps Research Institute and Burnham Institute. They "get" what stem-cell research means in terms of economic and scientific payback.

In San Francisco, we don't even have a single biotech company doing business inside city limits. We need to get our act together -- and fast.

That means demonstrating our city's aggressive financial commitment to an industry growing about 10 percent annually and projected to employ a million people by 2015.

With hundreds of drugs now in late-stage clinical trials, more biotech firms will soon be making the transition from small boutique R&D outfits to profitable commercial enterprises with products -- and large, well-paid staffs.

Let's make a deal

Here are ways to secure a slice of that pie:

- Dispel the preconception that San Francisco is a real estate nightmare -- built out and short on space. Trumpet Mission Bay and the square footage available. Match that with a guarantee of free rent not only for the institute, but also for associated businesses and grant recipients. Promise affordable housing units in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Help UCSF to provide incubator space for start-ups and translational labs for proof of concept and early-stage clinical development that would be mutually beneficial with our premier scientific research institution.
- Reach out to biotech leaders throughout the Bay Area -- the men and women who are worth millions to our community, both in resources and talent -- should they choose to plant a stake within city limits.
- Mention our deeply established, world-class past that includes arts, food, a clean environment, intellectual and academic resources, progressive values, creative spirit and overall quality of life.

San Francisco's proposal for this lucrative center will be due in a few short weeks. Attention, Mayor Newsom: It's time to come out swinging.

Bikash Chatterjee is chief operating officer of Pharmatech Associates, a San Carlo-based business facilitation firm.

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