

# Scientists call for greater access to biodiversity resources, data

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The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) has released a report from a workshop of experts that was convened last fall to outline the steps needed to build a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance (NIBA) in the next ten years. NIBA is a national scientific, engineering, and data management initiative first called for in 2010. When built, NIBA will provide online access to digitized data for biological specimens held in natural history museums, universities science departments, and government laboratories, among other repositories.

The experts' workshop was convened by AIBS with support from the National Science Foundation.

NIBA is a coordinated, large-scale and sustained effort to digitize the nation's biological collections in order to make their data and images available through the Internet. The Implementation Plan for a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance (<http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html>) "provides a detailed roadmap to achieve a vital national goal, which will be extremely important in coping with consequences of climate change, invasive species, pollution and other major environmental problems," said Dr. James Hanken, director of Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology and an author of the report.

In 2010, the scientific community developed a [Strategic Plan](#) for NIBA. The Strategic Plan has been well received, but the scientific community also recognized a need to augment the Strategic Plan by identifying the

key steps, milestones, and stakeholders required to fully achieve its goals. Thus, AIBS convened a workshop to develop an Implementation Plan for NIBA. Both documents have emerged from the biocollections community and have been widely informed through workshops of experts. The broader [scientific community](#) and the public have also provided input that informed the final Implementation Plan.

"Scientists are eager to see the NIBA implemented," said Dr. Lucinda McDade, Interim Executive Director of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and an author of the report. Hanken concurs and notes that NIBA is required to help move research forward and to ensure that policymakers and the public have access to the information they need to make informed decisions.

"This report strongly emphasizes research applications while also highlighting important educational components and focusing on workforce training that will be necessary to achieve and sustain NIBA," said McDade.

The National Science Foundation already is showing earnest commitment to achieving many of the goals identified in the report through several current funding initiatives, notes Hanken. "Full implementation of NIBA will require additional investments by other federal and state agencies that hold major biocollections."

The report identifies many specific activities that can and should be led by individual scientific societies, biocollections institutions, federal and state agencies, colleges and universities, and other consumers of digitized data.

The Implementation Plan includes detailed recommendations to:

- 1) Establish an organizational and governance structure that will provide

the national leadership and decision-making mechanism required to implement NIBA and to fully realize its Strategic Plan.

- 2) Advance engineering of the US biocollections cyberinfrastructure.
- 3) Enhance the training of existing collections staff and to create the next generation of biodiversity information managers.
- 4) Increase support for and participation in NIBA by the research community and a broad spectrum of stakeholders.
- 5) Establish an enduring and sustainable knowledge base.
- 6) Infuse specimen-based learning and exploration into formal and informal education.

"We urge all stakeholders to join the NIBA effort," said McDade.

**More information:** The Strategic Plan for NIBA is at [digbiocol.wordpress.com/brochure/](http://digbiocol.wordpress.com/brochure/).

The Implementation Plan for NIBA will be available at [www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html](http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html) on March 4, 2013.

Provided by American Institute of Biological Sciences

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