



Institute of International Education

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PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON THE SOCIAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS
OF GENETIC ENGINEERING

Summary: The Institute of International Education (IIE) seeks funding in the amount of \$56,245 to cover the costs of planning and developing an international conference of leading scientists and humanists to explore the social and ethical implications of genetic engineering.

I. The Issue

Genetic engineering has long been considered a distant possibility. Now very recent discoveries concerning the manipulation of the DNA molecule, which is the repository of hereditary traits, have made it an imminent reality. The results may have a more profound effect upon the lives of present and future generations than any other discovery of modern times.

There is still time to shape the implications of these discoveries. In the words of a group of concerned scientists with whom IIE consulted: "Because the technology is not yet perfected, and there has been as yet relatively little economic investment in it, the case of genetic engineering presents to the world at this moment a unique opportunity to consider, in advance, the interests of humanity before it is too late to control the use of this powerful technique."

The scientists engaged in this research believe that it will add importantly to our understanding of the molecular basis of certain diseases and will eventually permit directed alteration of the genetics of micro-organisms, plants and animals. Many useful applications of genetic engineering have been predicted. It has also been pointed out, however, that many apparently desirable genetic alterations could disturb in some way the intricately balanced inter-relationships that have evolved in nature so that the net effect of these genetic alterations, although unforeseeable at present, might be harmful to society. Furthermore, there are dangers which are inherent in the nature of the research which is now in progress: the unintentional creation of new disease forms, for example, or the spread of cancer by altered bacteria. The changes brought about by genetic engineering are self-duplicating, and as a result many of them would be irreversible.

Biological scientists around the world are aware of the hazards of genetic engineering research, and they have joined together to discuss the dangers and to formulate safety guidelines in order to minimize the risk of laboratory accidents. The more profound social questions, however, have not been seriously considered.

Indeed, it is not in the province of scientists alone to weigh the possible risks and rewards of genetic engineering; nor should they be left to make decisions which may have a profound effect upon the future of humanity. For this we need the participation of every member of society and particularly of those who are specially qualified to evaluate the ethical and social implications of the issue. The possibility of applying genetic engineering to the evolution of the human species, for example, raises fundamental ethical questions which need to be brought out into the open.

There is little precedent for an organized consideration of the ends of scientific research of any type with respect to social and ethical values. An international meeting would be an innovative approach to one of the major emerging problems of modern society.

II. Proposed Action

The Institute of International Education proposes to undertake a three- to four-month program of planning for an international conference to be held in late 1977 or early 1978, probably in Western Europe, to effect the following:

- A. To bring together leading biologists, other natural scientists, social scientists, and humanists (especially philosophers and theologians) as well as public affairs leaders from throughout the world to examine and discuss the issues involved.
- B. To collect, edit, and publish the most significant contributions.
- C. To raise public consciousness of the issues inherent in genetic-engineering research and to educate public policy leaders.
- D. To consider and promote ways of ensuring continuing expression of the public interest in this area.

III. Purpose of this Request

The Institute is seeking funding in the amount of \$56,245 (budget attached) to carry out all the preliminary work of planning and organizing the conference.

This funding will make possible, first of all, formation of an advisory council of between 50 and 60 persons, including scholars from all areas of the world who enjoy international reputations in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, as well as public affairs leaders and representatives of appropriate scientific and nonscientific professional associations in the United States and abroad. In the case of biologists, membership will be offered to both opponents and supporters of the new research techniques, insofar, of course, as the latter also support the appropriateness of public debate on the issue. This council will be asked:

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- A. To recommend a site and other logistical arrangements.
- B. To prepare the agenda.
- C. To identify participants and mode of invitation.
- D. To select speakers and to commission papers.
- E. To design preparatory and follow-up activities.
- F. To prepare and submit requests for conference funding, preferably from both United States and non-United States sources.

In addition, a 15-man executive committee, drawn from the council's membership, will be appointed. Not more than one-half of this committee's members will be from the United States. This committee will undertake:

- A. To hold two meetings of one or two days' duration during the three- to four-month planning period. The first of these meetings will be held in New York at the outset of the planning. The second will be held in Europe, toward the conclusion of the period, at the proposed site of the conference.
- B. To prepare recommendations to the full council on agenda, speakers, and other matters.
- C. To meet individually, between the two formal meetings, with three or four advisory council members from their own geographic area, to review recommendations and to encourage discussion of the issue at hand, at both ad hoc and regularly scheduled meetings of local professional associations.

IV. Role of the Institute of International Education

The Institute's role will be to take the leadership in enlisting the participation of top-level scientists, social scientists, and humanists from all over the world and of appropriate professional associations, and to provide all the facilitative services necessary to plan the conference as outlined in Section III above.

The Institute of International Education is a not-for-profit New York corporation with its headquarters in New York City; regional offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco; and overseas offices in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Lima, Mexico City, and Nairobi. IIE was founded in 1919 and is the largest and most experienced organization in international educational exchange. The Institute's central purposes are to further mutual understanding between the United States and other nations and to advance a more peaceful and productive international order.

IIE has planned and carried out a number of international conferences in its 57-year history. Since 1958, the Institute has been conducting annual international conferences of university leaders in Latin America under the aegis of the Council on Higher Education in the American Republics (CHEAR). In 1968, the Institute conducted a conference of French university rectors and U.S. college presidents, based on the CHEAR model. More recently, International Councils of Higher Education have been formed in Asia and the Middle East, also patterned after CHEAR, and the Institute has conducted conferences of regional university leaders in Manila, Hong Kong, and Kuwait, as well as in Latin America.

Conferences are only one part of the many ways in which IIE fulfills its aims. Basically, IIE's services consist of the international interchange of persons, information, and skills. The Institute contracts with sponsors, such as foreign governments, international organizations, foundations, corporations, educational institutions, and research centers to provide a range of specified services to individual or institutional grantees. In the fiscal year 1975, IIE administered 208 programs funded by 84 sponsors benefiting 9,140 individuals. In addition, the Institute uses funds donated by contributors to support a range of public service activities such as counseling and information services, workshops, seminars, publications, and libraries. These services reached an estimated total of 200,000 individuals in fiscal 1975.

V. Funding for the Conference Itself

At the conclusion of the three- to four-month planning process described above, IIE will be prepared to lead the operational phase of the conference. Funds will be sought at this point, from foundations and governments, to cover preparation of papers and the costs of organizing and administering the conference itself. The amount needed will depend on the design dictated by the advisory council, especially the number of participants and the policy on reimbursement for travel.

November 16, 1976