

Washington Research Foundation pledges \$100,000 to support early-career researchers at the Institute for Systems Biology

Goal is the advancement of high-risk, high-reward healthcare innovations

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA, January 8, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ --

[Washington Research Foundation](#)

(WRF) has pledged \$100,000 to the [Institute for Systems Biology](#) (ISB) to

support early-career scientists working

on high-risk, high-reward healthcare innovations with a path to commercialization and public benefit. In keeping with ISB's vision, the goal is the advancement of research that addresses pressing issues in human health.

“

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Nitin Baliga, Ph.D.

ISB created the [Innovator Award Program](#) in 2017 to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among its non-faculty researchers. Early-career scientists often struggle to secure outside funding for their work due to a lack of a demonstrable track record and the perceived risks of funding unproven researchers. This can slow career advancement and lead to the abandonment of projects with significant potential. The Innovator Award Program

provides up to \$50,000 per project to enable researchers to progress their work to a stage where it is increasingly likely to receive federal funding.

ISB has funded 13 projects since the program began, with previous awardees working in areas including the development of new antibiotics, improved therapeutics for patients with tuberculosis, and a novel method of detecting and studying DNA that could inform future cancer treatments. In addition to the funding, awardees gain experience in leadership, grant writing and project management.

Underrepresented minority (URM) scientists are disproportionately underfunded and untenured nationally. ISB developed the Innovator Award Program with these disparities in mind. While the



program is not exclusive to these communities, women and URM researchers are strongly urged to apply.

“WRF's generous support for ISB's Innovator Award Program is a testimonial of their shared vision and commitment to propel the careers of early-stage scientists – especially scientists from URM groups,” said Nitin Baliga, Ph.D., professor, senior vice president and director at ISB. “We are proud to continue the ISB-WRF partnership to diversify the scientific workforce in Washington.”

WRF's pledge was the result of discussions between Baliga and David Shoultz, Ph.D., MBA, WRF's director of grants programs, on recognizing the important role of young researchers and potential areas of additional funding during ISB's 20th anniversary in 2020. WRF has provided over \$2.3 million in prior grants and pledges to the Institute, including ongoing support that brought microbiome specialist Sean Gibbons, Ph.D., to ISB in 2018 following postdoctoral training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

“We're excited to provide funding for the Innovator Award Program at ISB, especially given the opportunity to focus on scientists who come from a URM background,” Shoultz said. “Supporting translational research with commercial potential remains at the center of our strategy at WRF.”

ISB has committed to securing an additional \$50,000 for this year's awards from other sources. The application period runs from January 25 to March 3, 2021, with winners to be announced on March 19.

About Washington Research Foundation:

Washington Research Foundation (WRF) supports research and scholarship in Washington state, with a focus on life sciences and enabling technologies.

WRF was founded in 1981 to assist universities and other nonprofit research institutions in Washington with the commercialization and licensing of their technologies. WRF is one of the foremost technology transfer and grant-making organizations in the nation, having earned more than \$445 million in licensing revenue for the University of Washington and providing over \$111 million in grants to the state's research institutions to date.

WRF Capital, the Foundation's venture investment arm, has funded 108 local startups since 1994. Returns from these investments support grant-making activities at WRF.

For additional information, please visit www.wrfseattle.org.

About Institute for Systems Biology:

Institute for Systems Biology (ISB) is a collaborative and cross-disciplinary nonprofit biomedical

research organization based in Seattle. We focus on some of the most pressing issues in human health, including brain health, cancer, sepsis and aging, and other chronic and infectious diseases. Our science is translational, and we champion sound scientific research that results in real-world clinical impacts. ISB is an affiliate of Providence, one of the largest not-for-profit health care systems in the United States. Follow us online at www.isbscience.org, and on Facebook and Twitter.

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