







have permitted Systems Biology to have “a seat at the table”, its voice is still not large. Moving forward, and as noted above, the panel advises that NIGMS specifically encourage the centers to develop into inter-institutional (virtual) consortia, possibly including public/private partnerships, breaking out of the restrictive expertise extant in any one institution and harvesting talents from a broader landscape. Such a development will also enhance the capability of the training and outreach activities of the centers to permeate more broadly biomedical science.

- *NCSBs are not as cost-efficient as P01s and R01s in the production or publication of some kinds of data, and therefore are not the best mechanism to support every kind of Systems Biology research. The data collected by the panel shows that R01s and to some extent P01s are more cost effective as ranked by cost per publication or per citation and are comparable in terms of citations per publication (Figure 1). Some reservation was, however, expressed as to the interpretation of such data and how they might relate to important scientific discoveries. Moreover, this speaks to the salient nature of Systems Biology in general, but not to the distinction between NCSBs and “smaller science” mechanisms. NCSBs are not solely meant research engines like R01s and P01s; rather they are mechanisms whereby, through training and outreach as well as by promulgation of novel tools and ways of thinking drawing from a broader and more diverse community of scientists, the prosecution of all science will be changed. Given these diverse and to some extent divergent goals it is not surprising that pure research engines are more cost efficient in doing research. However, the data for 2004-2012 also show that nearly 30% of NCSB publications fall within the top 10% for citations within their ESI category (Figure 2); NCSB published highly cited software, tools, and*

	Activity	Cost per Publication	Cost per Citation	Citations per Publication
National Centers for Systems Biology (NCSB) (NIGMS)	P50	\$160,000	\$5,500	32
Physical Science - Oncology Centers (PS-OC) (NCI)	U54	\$132,500	\$6,000	25
National Centers for Biomedical Computing (NCBC) (Roadmap)	U54	\$131,000	\$5,500	32
Integrative Cancer Biology Program (ICBP) (NCI)	U54/U56	\$187,000	\$5,500	37
Quantitative Approaches to the Analysis of Complex Biological Systems (PA98-077) (NIGMS)	R01/P01	\$111,000	\$2,500	48

Figure 1. Comparator publication analysis for NIH-supported Systems Biology research. P50 data from 2002 to 2014; numbers rounded to nearest \$500.

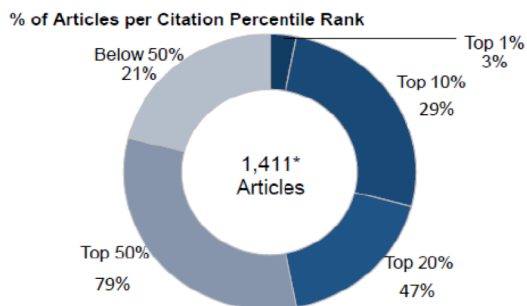


Figure 2. Citation Impact of publications arising from NCSB-supported research between 2004 and 2012.

Type of Product	NCSB Publications	PA98-077 Publications
Software	72	16
Dataset/database	53	8
Web Tool	4	1

Figure 3. Comparator analysis of software, tools and databases arising from NIGMS-funded Systems Biology-related grants, 2002-2014.

*and databases at a rate 5 times that of R01s/P01s (Figure 3): This is highly visible work impacting the way in which science is done, not just providing data. Transformations in the way in which science is approached, however, are rarely fast.*

- *A corollary of this is that the panel perceived substantial variation in the apparent productivity and the quality of the research and outreach being done by different NCSBs, and therefore would encourage greater scrutiny of programs prior to funding, including reductions in funding for new grants within individual grant cycles if the requisite standards are not met. The panel acknowledges the problems with peer review of proposals where the actual goal is to develop a cadre of peers capable of such review, and sees how proposals might score well in such peer review, even if they represent great science rather than great Systems Biology. However, NCSBs should represent the very best of Systems Biology in consortia that will move the field forward, not just pursue normal science, and this means that new proposals should be clearly in the superior range of the previously funded ones, not simply*

<i>Funding Agency</i>	<i>Closed Announcement</i>	<i>Open Announcement</i>
Air Force -- Research Lab	1	
Air Force Office of Scientific Research	9	
Chicago Service Center	4	
CSREES	1	
DARPA - Biological Technologies Office		1
DARPA - Defense Sciences Office	3	
Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency	1	
Defense Threat Reduction Agency	1	
Department of Commerce	1	
Dept. of the Army -- Materiel Command	3	2
Dept. of the Army -- USAMRAA	14	6
Environmental Protection Agency	1	
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	2	1
National Institute of Standards and Technology	6	
National Institutes of Health	34	5
National Science Foundation	5	
NAVAL MEDICAL LOGISTICS COMMAND	1	
Office of Naval Research	3	
Office of Science	7	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>15</b>

Figure 5. System Biology FOAs across the federal government, 2008-2015.

<i>Activity Code</i>	<i>Closed Announcement</i>	<i>Open Announcement</i>	<i>Total</i>
F30	2		2
P01	1		1
P50	4	1	5
P60	1		1
R01	13	2	15
R21	4		4
Supp	1		1
T32	2	1	3
U01	1	1	2
U19	3		3
U24	1		1
U54	1		1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>39</b>

Figure 4. NIH System Biology FOAs 2008 – 2015. Institutes supporting these included NCI, NHLBI, NIA, NIAA, NIAID, NIAMS, NICHD, NIDA, NIDCD, NIMH as well as NIGMS.

*the best of what is there at one time.*

*With an eye to broadening involvement of researchers in Systems Biology, the panel favors additional scrutiny of NCSB proposals at institutions that have previously been home to an NCSB.*

- *The data revealed a picture of eroding support for Systems Biology at a time when sustained engagement is paramount: data from 2008 to 2015 show that at both the federal and NIH level only 15% of grant mechanisms "relevant to Systems Biology" remain active (Figures 4 and 5). The panel encourages sustained support of NCSBs, judiciously focused so as to maximize impact and distinction from typical investigator-initiated science, accepting that this may entail a reduction in the number of centers. If the number of outstanding centers falls below a critical threshold, the mechanism could be merged into a broader mechanism that funds, "center-sized", interdisciplinary, collaborative research and training in quantitative biology.*

- *The prospect for broadening opportunities for applications of Systems Biology emphasizes the catalytic role NCSBs will have in influencing the rate at which the discipline penetrates the practice of science.*
  - *Because “Systems Biology” is broadly defined and relatively new, meaningfully sourcing federal funding is challenging. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, drawing on computation, high- throughput screens, statistical analysis, computational modeling, bioinformatics etc., it usually employs interdisciplinary teams. Consequently, the scope of R01, and even P01 projects is limited because of budgetary constraints, even with non-modular budgets. Therefore, the classic R01 and P01 mechanisms, while powerful, provide only a limited source of Systems Biology funding. Another main asset of a “center” mechanism is that it provides sufficient levels of support for a large team of scientists, as well as the support for highly integrative discovery-based and tool-oriented projects that are not supported by R01 and P01 mechanisms.*
  - *NIGMS is in a special position within all Federal Institutions, either within the NIH or NSF, because its PIs are of the greatest scientific diversity, facilitating bridges between translational medicine, basic science, engineering, and mathematics. Because the NIGMS covers all biomedical research in a general way, it is particularly powerful as a catalyst and, we believe, responsible for further enabling the field of Systems Biology to develop and expand its reach in the most efficient, effective, and far-reaching manner.*
- *NCSBs represent a 15 year sustained effort in training of junior investigators skilled in Systems Biology, and the panel recommends that this training mission be enhanced by encouraging additional innovative combinations of training and outreach in the context of workforce development. While training in Systems Biology within the existing NIGMS T32 framework is essential and consistent with expanding Big Data needs, the integrated training within the NCSBs has considerable additional value. Historically, the NCSB training mission has included extensive outreach to a wide range of scientific communities, enhancing the reach, the reputation and the development of systems approaches. Junior investigators specifically funded within the Centers (including graduate students and post-doctoral fellows) have experienced a unique training environment that includes training in interdisciplinary Big Data team science, a quantitative focus and exposure to various modeling strategies. In addition, the Centers have had an impact on developing relevant curricula and educational resources, typically in the context of websites, for Systems Biology. These are examples of opportunities not consistently available with T32-supported programs.*
  - *The Center contributions to the development of the science of Systems Biology have now positioned the field well for extension into the development of predictive paradigms of disease evolution and drug response that are central to the concept of Precision Medicine. This will involve the development of novel informatics tools to integrate diverse data sets reflective of genomic, epigenomic, lipidomic, metabolomic, microbiomic and imaging based networks from the single cell to population levels and also to integrate data derived from model systems and from deep phenotyping in humans. Thus, the Centers now have an opportunity further to advance the “basic science” of the field while providing training, outreach and impact to foster and accelerate translational science.*

- *Continued investment in training, particularly in the context of a comprehensive Center framework, will also expand the critical mass and the diversity of scientific background of individuals capable of leading NCSBs and other important Systems Biology initiatives in the future.*