

GBC Letter of Understanding

The Global Biodata Coalition (GBC) is a forum supported by organisations that fund biological, life sciences and biomedical research. The GBC's aims are:

- To be a forum for funders of biodata resources to better coordinate and share approaches for efficient management and growth of this infrastructure and share strategies.
- To stabilise and ensure sustainable financial support for the global biodata infrastructure, with a focus on an identified and prioritised set of Global Core Biodata Resources that are crucial for sustaining the broader infrastructure.

This letter sets out the shared understanding of how the GBC is structured and operates. It is an informal document and is not legally binding.

This revised version of the Letter of Understanding was approved by the GBC Board of Funders' in June 2026.

GBC Background and Rationale

The research that we—as organisations that fund biological, life sciences, and biomedical research—support generates high volumes and many types of data that are deposited in publicly accessible biodata resources. These biodata resources are essential for academic and private-sector research by scientists worldwide and collectively form a distributed global infrastructure that is now central to almost all forms of biomedical and life sciences research.

Though used universally, funding for this infrastructure comes from national and charitable research funders, with little coordination. This leads to duplication, inefficiencies, and difficulties in access, including being able to meet open-access goals and requirements. Equally important is also the real risk that important resources might disappear if funding for biodata resources is abruptly cut.

Greater coordination among funders will benefit scientists, the funders, and use of the data for public and private purposes.

The challenges for biological, life sciences, and biomedical research funders are many. They include:

- the near universal use of biodata resources in funded research,
- the duplication that comes from an absence of strong coordination,
- the exponential growth in the production of data, and
- the requirement of almost all funders to ensure that data from the funded research are openly accessible to all scientists everywhere.

Though exact values are not available, we estimate that the world's funders spend at least USD 600 million annually to support biodata resources, part of a total expenditure on biological, life science and biomedical research that globally is likely to be greater than USD 600 billion.

We support the GBC so that together we can help ensure sustainable and efficient support of biological, life sciences, and biomedical data.

Scope

The GBC defines biodata resources as biological, life sciences, and biomedical databases that archive research data generated by scientists, serving as the repositories of record for particular data types, as well as knowledgebases that add value by aggregation, processing, and expert curation.

The GBC will monitor the entire infrastructure of biological, life sciences, and biomedical resources, but with most effort focused on open-access resources. GBC will develop relationships with other organisations concerned with funding and sustainability of data resources in key fields that intersect with life sciences, such as environmental and climate sciences.

Support

The GBC is supported by organisations that fund biological, life sciences and biomedical research, who join the GBC by agreeing to contribute funds. On approval of the GBC Board, organisations may provide in-kind contributions alongside, or instead of, a direct financial contribution where there is demonstrable assistance in the delivery of the GBC programme.

General

As funders of biomedical and life sciences research:

- *We recognize the essential role and growing importance of biomedical and life sciences biodata resources in current and future scientific research.*
 - Biomedical and life sciences biodata resources are essential infrastructure for public and private research by scientists worldwide.
- *We recognize that the biodata resource infrastructure is both fragmented and fragile.*
 - Biodata resources are growing exponentially as new technologies enable greater data production.
 - These resources are crucial to current and future biomedical and life sciences research and are required for managing the open-access policies being adopted by most funders.
 - This infrastructure has developed piecemeal over recent decades and to a large extent without significant coordination among funders or biodata resource managers. As a result, the infrastructure is fragile and fragmented, and in parts duplicative and non-strategic.
- *We recognize that biomedical and life sciences funders would benefit from working together to manage funding for biodata resources.*
 - The GBC exists to assist organisations that fund life science research with their future strategies to address the challenges associated with biodata resources, to ensure that essential biodata resources remain freely available to all researchers everywhere around the globe (and not restricted to higher financial resources regions), to address the fragility and potential loss of biodata resources that would damage both public and

private research, and to share strategies for the further expansion of biodata resources (e.g., for imaging data).

Accordingly, we agree that the GBC will have the following two key aims:

- To be a forum for funders of biodata resources to better coordinate and share approaches for efficient management and growth of this infrastructure and share strategies.
- To stabilise and ensure sustainable financial support for the global biodata infrastructure, with a focus on an identified and prioritised set of Global Core Biodata Resources that are crucial for sustaining the broader infrastructure.

Benefits

The GBC will **benefit funders** by managing coordination of spending on data resources globally. This will reduce duplicate spending on similar resources and encourage greater participation of all funders in overseeing the broader biodata ecosystem. Research funders will also benefit from coordinated approaches in support of the open-access data policies that most funders have now implemented.

The work of the GBC will **benefit scientists** and **national infrastructures** through safeguarding open-access scientific data and aiding funders in coordinating long-term support for the data infrastructure that is crucial for all biomedical and life sciences research.

The work of the GBC will be of benefit to industry and the commercial sector because biodata resources are used extensively in patents, drug development, diagnostics development, and other biotechnology areas.

Basis

We agree that the GBC is a voluntary collaborative endeavour. Financial and in-kind contributions to the GBC are voluntary. A just and fair system for the contributions to support the operation of the GBC and its activities is agreed as below.

We agree that the GBC should take as a fundamental principle that life sciences and biomedical biodata resources should be open and freely available to all.

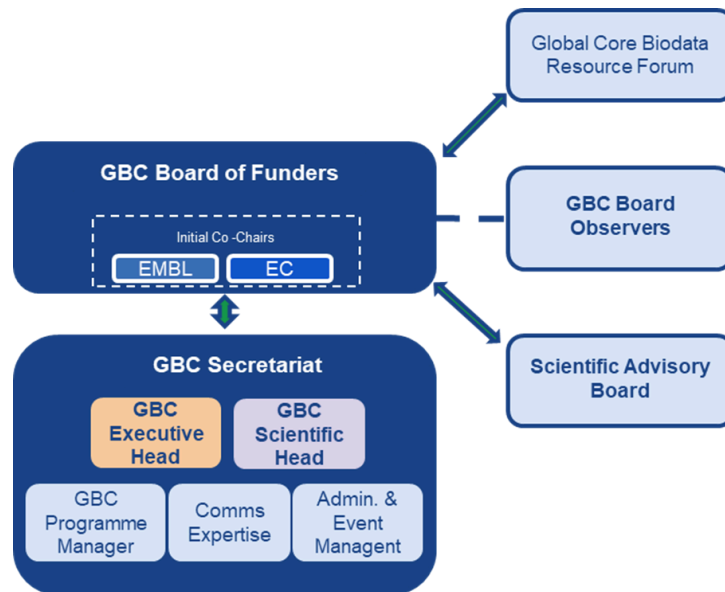
The GBC will support the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) principles associated with data, as well as the CARE (collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, ethics) principles for indigenous data governance.

The GBC welcomes all research funders worldwide to participate in the organisation. Admission of new members requires the approval of the GBC Board; the Secretariat will develop and document the process for this for Board approval.

Governance

We support the following GBC governance.

Current GBC governance structure:



- GBC Members are organisations. They may be national government funding bodies, international bodies that support the GBC, charitable funding bodies, or other entities designated by such organisations (the requirements for which are provided in specific documentation detailing GBC membership).
- GBC Members support the GBC financially and/or via in-kind means, in accord with principles agreed by the Board of Funders (the Board).
- For the purposes of this document, the Members authorise the Coalition to use, under Board supervision, their name and logo on the GBC website.
- The Board of Funders comprises a Chair(s) and individuals who are appointed by GBC Members.
- The Board of Funders is the governing and decision-making body whose powers and responsibilities are to:
 - agree procedures for Board operation and decision-making, including quorum, voting and the election of the Board Chair and other office-bearers;
 - provide financial and/or in-kind contributions;
 - adopt rules (bylaws) to achieve the GBC aims;
 - adopt a (multi-year) strategic plan;
 - review the work plan and budget for the GBC;
 - participate in recruitment panels and otherwise advise on the appointment and dismissal of the GBC’s Executive Head and Scientific Head; and
 - establish relationships with other organisations (e.g., the Global Alliance for Genomics and Health).
- The Board of Funders may, in order to address biodata resource issues that affect scientists throughout the world, invite additional bodies to join to better ensure comprehensive coverage of all continents and regions of the world, and to include transnational and international critical infrastructure bodies that can assist the GBC in its mission.

The Board will strive to make decisions by consensus.

The GBC Board of Funders shall elect a Chair or co-Chairs and up to three Deputy Chairs. The Chair and Deputy Chairs should as far as possible be from different world regions, to denote the global nature of the GBC (e.g., the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia and Pacific). Appointments are for three years and are renewable.

The Board acts on behalf of the Members to ensure that GBC operations fulfil the aims of the GBC as stated in this Letter of Understanding.

The **GBC Secretariat** is hosted by EMBL-EBI and funded through a five-year (2026-2030) grant awarded to EMBL by the European Commission, and through the contributions from GBC members. The Secretariat is mandated by the Board of Funders to carry out operational activities according to decisions of the Board and the agreed-upon work plan, including spending of, and accounting for, the annual Member financial contributions. Secretariat staff, including the Executive Head and Scientific Head are EMBL employees and thus abide by EMBL's Rules and Regulations, but answer to the GBC Board for direction and activity. Thus, the Executive Head and Scientific Head will develop and implement the work program with Board approval, be responsible for the hiring of GBC Secretariat staff, and supervise their work, as well as any consultants and seconded personnel.

The **Scientific Advisory Committee** (SAC) will provide expert scientific advice to the Board. The SAC members are appointed by the Board.

Board Observers

Board Observers are nominees of funding organisations that agree with the aims of the GBC but cannot (or cannot yet) support GBC financially. Observers are invited to attend GBC Board meetings and participate in discussions but do not vote on issues before the Board. GBC Members agree that, as global biodata resources are a shared responsibility, research funders are expected to tangibly support the GBC in order to participate in its governance activities. Observer status shall be granted for two years, after which observing funders must normally become full GBC members or cease participation. The Board may extend this term in cases where the Observer has a clear commitment and pathway to become a GBC member.

Funding GBC Operations

As signatories of this Letter of Understanding, GBC members agree to share future financial support for the GBC Secretariat to advance the aims of GBC under the direction of the Board, building on the support provided by the five-year European Commission grant. This is based on the following Principles:

- Members agree to a GBC budget on a rolling three-year basis and together commit to provide cash and in-kind support to meet this obligation.
- All GBC members are expected to provide cash contributions. The amount is based on members' reported annual life sciences and/or biomedical sciences research budget.
- We will discuss and agree on the formula for contributions. We began with the following formula:
 - Band 1 - Research Funders with a total annual research funding in biology/life science/biomedical science of USD 5 billion or more.
 - Expected minimum annual contribution: USD 300 thousand.

- Band 2 - funders with total annual research funding in biology/life science/biomedical science of USD 0.5–5 billion.
 - Expected minimum annual contribution: USD 100 thousand.
- Band 3 supporters: funders with total annual budgets in biology/life science/biomedical science of less than USD 0.5 billion.
 - Expected minimum annual contribution: USD 30 thousand.
- The amount of the annual contribution is reviewed by the Board regularly and may be adjusted upwards or downwards after review of GBC’s activities, the number of contributing members, and other costs.
- Essential regional and invited Members will not be expected to provide a cash contribution, though in-kind contributions may be sought.
- With Board approval in advance, some funders may provide a portion of their contribution via in-kind support.
- The in-kind contributions may include actions such as paying for consultation services, conducting the Global Core Biodata Resource review process, provision of office space and utilities, funding GBC plenary meetings, and website development/maintenance.
- We will review the formula for contributions on a regular basis.

Governance transition

EMBL-EBI became the host of the GBC Secretariat on 1 January 2026. The generous support of the International Human Frontier Science Program Organization, under a letter of agreement between the President of HFSPPO and the GBC Executive Director, representing the GBC Board, ceased on December 31st 2025.

Rigorous review

The Board will commission independent formal reviews of the GBC every three-years.

Scientific activities

GBC scientific activities are described on the GBC website and in associated documents, and are subject to Board oversight and approval.

Consultation and inclusion

There are many stakeholders involved with the international biodata resource infrastructure whose input is essential if the GBC is to achieve its goals. These include data resource managers, data infrastructure managers, scientists, technical experts, funders and users of biodata resources. The GBC will actively consult with these stakeholders at meetings, through the GBC website (www.globalbiodata.org) and other channels.

Duration of applicability of this document

This Letter of Understanding is a time-limited document, agreed upon with the initial purpose of establishing the GBC, and will be updated periodically as the GBC matures, by agreement of the Board of Funders.

Members of the Global Biodata Coalition

A list of current Member and Observer organisations is maintained on the GBC’s website.