

# Synthetic Biology Scorecard finds federal agencies responding to bioethics report

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Federal agencies have started taking steps to address the recommendations in a 2010 report from the presidential bioethics commission to improve the governance of synthetic biology research and development, though the government has not fully addressed any of the report recommendations, according to a scorecard tracking the efforts.

The [Synthetic Biology](#) Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars launched the web-based [Synthetic Biology Scorecard](#) in February to track federal and non-federal efforts to implement the [recommendations](#) in *New Directions: The Ethics of Synthetic Biology and [Emerging Technologies](#)*, a December 2010 [report](#) from the Presidential Commission for the Study of [Bioethical Issues](#). The recommendations seek to minimize risks from the technology while ensuring that social and [economic benefits](#) are realized.

Eighteen months after the release of the report, information collected by the Project and submitted by users finds that steps have been taken by the U.S. government over the past four months to continue addressing the report recommendations. These measures include a new White House-led interagency working group looking at government work on the issue; a recent six-party meeting at the [National Academy of Sciences](#) (the last in a series of three meetings between the United States, United Kingdom and China); and the development and release of the National Bioeconomy Blueprint.

Still, the Scorecard finds that none of the recommendations have been

fully addressed, including six recommendations that called for federal action within 18 months, or by mid-June 2012. Of the six recommendations calling for action within 18 months, five of the recommendations saw some level of government activity.

Of the 17 recommendations tracked by the Scorecard, 13 had some level of federal activity and four had no activity, including a recommendation calling for [risk assessments](#) before research organisms or commercial products involving the technology are released into the environment and a recommendation calling for the identification of reliable containment and control mechanisms.

President Obama requested the Commission's report more than two years ago in response to important advancements in the field of synthetic biology. On May 20, 2010, scientists at the J.C. Venter Institute unveiled a bacterial cell controlled by a synthetic genome. The same day, the president asked the Commission to study "the implications of this scientific milestone . . . [and] consider the potential medical, environmental, security, and other benefits of this field of research, as well as any potential health, security, or other risks."

The Scorecard has new features to improve usability. People are encouraged to submit work by agencies, organizations, states and others that fulfill the Commission recommendations. The Project plans to continue to highlight the progress towards implementing the recommendations.

**More information:** The Scorecard can be found here:  
[www.synbioproject.org/scorecards/recommendations/](http://www.synbioproject.org/scorecards/recommendations/)

Provided by Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

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