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Kansas Bioscience Authority approves \$2.13M in financing

Kansas City Business Journal - by [Aly Van Dyke](#) Staff Writer

The **Kansas Bioscience Authority** has approved three financing proposals worth a combined \$2.13 million.

The KBA — an independent state entity designed to propel Kansas in bioscience — made the move at its board meeting Tuesday, providing the final OK for proposals its investment committee had recommended earlier this month. Two of the recommendations — amounting to \$1.63 million — are aimed at attracting two cancer researchers to the **University of Kansas Cancer Center** as a way of helping the center earn **National Cancer Institute** designation.

The first is a \$780,000 investment during the next three years to bring Liang Xu, an NCI-financed professor at the **University of Michigan Health System**, to the KU Cancer Center and the Department of Molecular Biosciences. The KBA will provide the money by making Xu a Rising Star scholar for his accomplishments in molecular biology and nanotechnology. Xu is expected to bring an additional \$3.5 million in federal money within 10 years. The KBA created its Rising Stars Program to draw emerging bioscience scholars to the state.

The second is an investment of \$850,000 during the next five years to bring Daotai Nie to the KU Cancer Center and the Department of Molecular and Integrative Physiology with the KU School of Medicine. Nie is a professor at the **University of Southern Illinois School of Medicine** and would bring existing NCI financing to the KU Cancer Center. He also will be a Rising Star scholar and is expected to bring in an additional \$3.6 million in federal financing during the next 10 years.

Although the hirings of Xu and Nie remain pending, the KU Medical Center on Monday announced two new hires toward the same purpose.

Kapil Bhalla, a leading drug development scientist from the Medical College of Georgia, will become deputy director for KU Cancer Center on Aug. 1.



Bernadette Gray-Little

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And Shrikant Anant, a biologist and gastrointestinal cancer expert who joined the staff July 6, serves as the associate dean for research at KU Med.

KU Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little said hiring researchers is an important step along the pathway to NCI designation.

“As I think about the work of the NCI designation, it’s very clear that a major part of what has been accomplished and a major part of what has to be accomplished has to do with hiring, hiring, hiring,” she said during the KBA board meeting.

Moving forward, Gray-Little said the university would begin seeking groups of researchers to hire, rather than individual hires.

“In order to initiate major new initiatives, faculty must be recruited in clusters,” she said.

The third financing commitment the KBA board passed Tuesday was a \$500,000 equity investment to help OsteoGeneX select drug candidates and finance international intellectual property protection. OsteoGeneX is a Kansas City, Kan., firm that develops a bone-building treatment. It has **received KBA financing** in the past.

The KBA also has been branching out beyond the state. On Monday, it announced that it would be one of nine partners with the **U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service** — a role it hopes will help propel Kansas as a national force in biotechnology.

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