

Interview with Claudio Wernli, Executive Director of the Chilean MSI

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Who administers the MSI?

The MSI in Chile is administered by an Executive Secretariat under the direction of a Board of Directors (BD) comprised of 8 distinguished Chilean members (3 scientists, 1 economist, 1 entrepreneur, 1 senator, the Chair of the National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT)), all headed by the Chilean Ministry of Planning.

The MSI also counts on the support of a permanent body of 8 prestigious foreign scientists, the Program Committee (PC), representing different specialties and coming from different countries, whose main responsibility is the selection of projects at each bidding process and to give general oversight regarding the science of the program.

Who selects the competing institutes/nuclei?

The Centers of Excellence are of two types: large (Science Institutes) and small (Science Nuclei). The PC carries out the selection of project, finally recommending to the BD those to be awarded within a short final list. The BD makes the final decision.

For the selection group (the program committee), what are the criteria for selecting members?

The PC is selected based on their experience as scientists and science innovators/managers, as well as their international stature recognized by organizations such as NSF, TWAS, the US National Academy, and others, who propose PC candidates to the MSI.

How much money is allocated to the Chilean MSI, from what sources?

The total annual budget for the Chilean MSI has fluctuated for the last 3 years around \$6 million per year. These are all government funds. During the first 3 years of the program, a World Bank Learning and Innovation Loan financed the initial set up of the MSI.

Who determines the funding amounts allocated to each MSI project?

The Board, as proposed by the Executive Director. This is directly dependent upon the availability of resources as approved by the nation's yearly budget law.

How much discretion do the scientists have in how they spend those funds?

Scientists have total discretion, but there are ceiling limits to invest funds in the following areas: honoraria, civil works, administration and overhead.

What are attitudes toward the MSI among the Chilean scientific community?

As the program became known, attitudes were rapidly, increasingly positive. It could be said that the MSI is highly appreciated by the Chilean scientific community and also recognized overseas, particularly for its flexibility, transparency and operation, as described in the 4 evaluations carried out by independent panels of foreign experts during

the first 6 years of the program. A high number of projects are proposed to each concourse opened.

What kinds of changes would you suggest for the MSI, if any?

Not many. Definitely the implementation of advice and support to stimulate a weak action on recording intellectual property rights and patents by the Centers and perhaps developing some mechanisms to enhance connections and joint work among scientists and among young investigators.

What advice do you have for other nations interested in an MSI?

In view of the excellent evaluation reports so far, stating, for instance, that the program is exemplary, successful and by far the nation's most productive source of formation of young scientists, in addition to a significant number of collaborations with the industrial, educational and public sectors, I would certainly advise other nations to implement the MSI model. After Chile, the MSI has also been established in Brazil, Mexico and Uganda, and Vietnam and Kazakhstan are in the process of following in the same direction.