

Second Time's The Charm For GP-Write

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This morning marked the opening of the second meeting for self-professed 'sequel to the Human Genome Project', Genome Project-write (GP-write), at the New York Genome Centre. It comes almost exactly a year after their [controversial first meeting](#) in Boston on 10th May 2016.

GP-write was [founded in 2016](#) by geneticists Jef



Boeke from New York University Langone Medical Centre and [George M. Church](#) from

Harvard University, lawyer Nancy J. Kelley, and

GP-Write logo

biotechnology researcher Andrew Hassel. The central goal of the project is to synthesise a complete human genome from scratch for both medical and research purposes, a colossal undertaking with current technology.

Since it was first announced, the project has been subject to scrutiny from ethicists concerned about how this research could be used. In a similar vein of thought to anti-gene editing arguments, many people have voiced worries that being able to synthesise genomes could lead to the design of 'super humans' or could significantly harm society. It was even more controversial then when the first meeting for the project was invitation only and was conducted behind closed doors, with all information being embargoed.

Beyond ethical complications, the largest problem faced by GP-write so far has been raising the funding necessary for such an ambitious task. The organisation hoped to raise \$100M in 2016 but fell well short of their target when investors were hesitant.

"We hope the National Institutes of Health will be involved in GP-write but thus far they haven't been as enthusiastic as we are," Boeke said.

Some companies have been willing to support the project however, starting with Hassel's own company Autodesk. There are also reports that California-based, acoustic liquid company Labcyte will be GP-

write's first commercial partner, although this has not been officially confirmed by the project.

Despite the problems of the past, this year's meeting appears to be heading in the right direction. In response to the concerns about secrecy, this meeting has been more publically announced and tickets were on sale to everyone on their website. There have also been public efforts to include both lawyers and ethicists in the discussions.

For the meeting itself, the organisers have arranged for a multitude of speakers to attend from Harvard University, the Jackson Laboratory, Johns Hopkins, the National Human Genome Research Institute, King's College London, and many more. The meeting was opened this morning by a welcome by co-founder Kelley, then moved onto an overview of the project by Church and Boeke.

More than 200 biologists should be in attendance across the next two days.

"At the end of the day, it is really about putting the foundation in place to write much larger genomes than we are presently able to, and to recognize that these technologies are coming very quickly whether we are ready for them or not," Hessel said. "I think this is just going to be a kickass meeting. The room is going to be full of interesting folks. And I am sure there will be dissenters too."

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