

Sustainability of Research Centers

Definition of the Problem

The IUPUI campus, comprised of ~20 distinct Schools, enjoys a breadth of disciplinary excellence that is unique in the state of Indiana. IUPUI is thus well positioned to excel in inter-disciplinary endeavors to tackle complex societal problems that characterize our urban environment. This has led in recent years to the development of inter-disciplinary “Centers” that span traditional school boundaries and draw strength from units across the IUPUI campus. An ongoing challenge, however, is how to sustain such Centers after the exhaustion of start-up dollars. Funding to support or develop infrastructure is typically not available from traditional external funding agencies. Such funds are necessary for administrative functions, equipment, pilot and feasibility grants to young investigators, and continued coordination of interdisciplinary grant activity. The responsibility centered management (RCM) budget model utilized at IUPUI further limits the ability to effectively marshal resources at the campus level to respond to research opportunities. Some IUPUI Schools return a portion of “Center grant” indirect cost recovery (ICR) to the relevant Center, but these practices are unevenly applied across the campus.

The problem of how to sustain Centers once initial seed funding has been expended has been identified by the IUPUI Strategic Plan (Innovation and Discovery subgroup), the School of Medicine’s Transforming Research Initiative, and the Research Affairs Committee of the IUPUI Faculty Council.

Goal

Define ongoing support for campus and university-designated research centers that span more than one School (eg, Signature Centers, Biomechanics and Biomaterials Research Center). Ongoing support would create a structure in which larger programs and greater funding could be developed.

Proposal

A faculty member who is also a member of an inter-School Center should be allowed to designate a grant proposal submission as a Center proposal. Not all proposals a faculty member submits may be designated as such, but if the Center has provided pilot funds, research facilities and equipment, or other tangible support to a project that is submitted extramurally, that proposal should qualify for a return of 10% of the ICR that comes to the campus directly to the Center if the proposal is funded.

The source of these funds is as follows:

For every \$100 of ICR generated by a qualifying “Center Grant”, \$97.50 comes to IUPUI. Ten percent of this number (\$9.75) will be provided to the relevant Center. The campus, which retains 20% of the \$97.50 ICR, will contribute \$4.88 to the Center. This contribution will be contingent on the relevant School(s) making a matching ICR contribution (\$4.87) to the Center.

In addition, the School contribution must not affect the distribution of ICR funds that would normally be provided to the PI and relevant department.

All proposals that are considered a part of a Center should be identified as such at the time of submission, with the agreement of the Deans of the Schools. A Credit Split Agreement between the investigators and the Schools should be completed and signed by a representative of each School and by the investigators at the time of submission. This approach would distribute funds fairly as a component of a School's participation in inter-School research centers, and not place the burden on any single School.

What is an Inter-School Center?

The policy governing Centers can be found at: http://www.indiana.edu/~vpr/centers_policy.shtml

There are several criteria that must be met for a Center to be considered an inter-school Center:

- (1) The Center must have formal designation as a Center at the campus or university levels
- (2) An inter-school Center will involve faculty members from at least two different Schools
- (3) The Center provides shared resources or Core Facilities that provide for joint use by faculty of at least two different Schools

Who is a member of a Center?

There could be several criteria by which a faculty member could be a designated member of a Center:

- (1) The faculty member is listed on a website and materials produced by the Center as a designated member of the Center
- (2) The faculty member has received tangible support from the Center that was important to developing the idea that resulted in a successful grant proposal

How much could ICR generate in support of a Center?

It is not clear, although an estimate could perhaps be developed by reviewing the ORA database or proposals. Accepting the figures of the Task Force on Sustainability of Research Centers, and assuming that only 10% of all proposals would be submitted as Center proposals, the plan could generate ~ \$500,000 per year. However, this relies on the School of Medicine having numerous inter-school connections and proposals and is probably unrealistic. Removing the School of Medicine entirely from this equation could still generate about \$75,000/yr.