

Establishment of Centers at UC Merced

Revised and approved by CoR on November 8, 2023 - Approved by DivCo on December 14, 2023

Definition

A “Center” at the University of California is typically a unit that furthers research in a designated field or is engaged in providing research facilities for other units and departments, though a Center may also be established to advance other aspects of the University’s mission, such as teaching or service or equity, diversity, and inclusion. Centers must contribute to the intellectual capital of the campus and will often contribute to the education of graduate and undergraduate students. A Center is typically smaller than an Institute or an ORU (organized research unit). Sometimes several Centers will form an Institute, or they may form a cluster of Centers within an ORU. The mission and activities of a Center should not duplicate those of an existing Unit or Center on the campus or within the School(s).

The Center has evolved as a structure to facilitate collaborations by multiple investigators on a topic of common interest. A Center may be established as a pilot in a strategic area, where institutional support may be provided for a defined time; it may be the result of a Federal or other external award; it may originate as a line item from the Legislature; it may be funded by philanthropy; or it may be created by a group of scholars focused on a research theme of mutual interest which does not require extramural resources. Centers should generate value and research infrastructure beyond that resulting from the simple aggregation of research and scholarship of the participating faculty members in their respective Units (e.g., through the promotion of research collaboration and the development of facilities, resources, and services that benefit a large number of researchers, for instance, including equipment purchases, speaker series, etc.). Centers may appropriately be housed in Schools when the faculty involved are members of the same School and the Center’s research, teaching or outreach focus is consistent with that of the School; in ORUs when the Center focuses on research consistent with the strengths of that ORU; or in the Office of Research & Economic Development or EVC/Provost’s office when participating faculty are members of multiple Schools and the research, teaching, or service theme is campus-wide.

Establishment

A. Process

Centers at UC Merced are created as follows:

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1. Center proposals should be reviewed and approved by (1) the appropriate Dean or ORU Director, (2) Vice Chancellor for Research (VCR), (3) EVC/Provost, and (4) Chancellor's office before submitting any proposal for either extramural or intramural funds that includes the term "Center" in the project title. Where a short extramural submission timeline does not allow for all approvals to be secured prior to proposal submission, there must at minimum be written approval from the Dean or ORU Director, and the remaining approvals must be secured before the Center may be established. Written approval to submit a proposal does not circumvent a full review process. For the establishment of a Center that draws a majority of the budget from the central campus funds, the Center proposal will be jointly reviewed by CoR and CAPRA. The recommendation from the Senate review will be forwarded to VCR, EVC/Provost, and/or the Chancellor for final determination.
2. Funding could come from a variety of sources, including extramural (e.g., grants, philanthropy, the legislature) and intramural (e.g., a School, ORED, the Office of the Chancellor, or UCOP). The proposal should include clear justification by appropriate campus unit(s) for any anticipated university-provided core support or cost-sharing. If new internal funds, beyond that in any entity's existing budget allocation, are needed to support a Center, these funds must be requested by the unit, and allocated through the campus budget call process. No central funding will be provided outside of that process.
3. Space requirements must be coordinated with the supporting dean, vice chancellor, or ORU director and submitted to the Capital, Space Strategies, and Real Estate Office in advance of proposal submission. In the case of extramural submissions without sufficient time for full review by the Capital, Space Strategies, and Real Estate Office, the Dean, Vice Chancellor, or the EVC/Provost must provide a written statement detailing the commitment of space already assigned to the school or division at the time the proposal is funded. If additional space is required after the Center is established, a request must be made following campus space procedures, with outcomes dependent upon availability.
4. Either concurrent with or following approval of the Center proposal, the Dean, VCR, or EVC/Provost will consult with the initiator of the Center proposal (and the PI if different from the proposal originator) to discuss the appointment of the Director. The Dean, VCR, or EVC/Provost prepares a recommendation memo for the appointment of the Director of the new Center. In cases of cross-school centers, consultation with appropriate Deans and the VCR and/or EVC/Provost is required. In the case of grant funded centers for which the PI/Director and administrative structure have already been identified and the funding agency has, after review, specifically approved these individuals to serve in these positions, it is anticipated that they will be recommended by the Dean or VCR.
5. This memo is forwarded to the EVC/Provost, who may consult with the appropriate Deans, Units Chairs, VCR, or others and decides whether to approve the Directorship.

B. Proposal Elements

The case for the establishment of a Center should include the following elements (note: for grant funded centers which already include each of these elements, the approved proposal elements may be highlighted and submitted in lieu of new plans):

1. A strategic plan describing the mission and goals of the new Center and how it contributes to the research, teaching, and/or service mission of the campus, School and/or Units.
2. An operational plan for the first 5 years of the proposed center, which should include an organizational chart, an outline of proposed center activities, potential extramural funding sources, and existing funding. If an advisory committee is deemed necessary by the proposer(s), the operational plan should also include a description of the role of the advisory committee, the process for selection of committee membership, and the proposed initial advisory committee members.
3. A clear model for financial sustainability including a summary of existing or secured funding for the Center, budget estimates for the first five years of operation to meet the strategic objectives of the proposed Center, and anticipated funding sources if applicable.
4. Articulation of resource and staffing needs where not stated in the budget (e.g., space, capital equipment, information technology (IT), library resources, administrative assistance, etc.) of the proposed Center, related commitments to meet those resource needs identified by source, and realistic projections of future resource needs.
5. A Center's viability must not depend solely on the work of one faculty member, and should be formed only under those circumstances in which several faculty members plan to be seriously involved in the Center. In this vein, the proposal should include a list of participating faculty.

C. Review of Centers

1. All Centers are subject to annual financial review. These reviews are conducted by the Dean, ORU Director, VCR or EVC/Provost responsible for the Center.
2. All Centers are subject to regular five-year sunset reviews. For Centers that rely on mostly extramural funds or intramural funds from Schools and ORUs, the Dean, ORU Director, VCR, or EVC/Provost responsible for the Center conducts this review and is responsible for the cost of the review. The review will follow guidance and templates for the five-year sunset reviews established by the campus (i.e., through the Periodic Review Oversight Committee) to reduce administrative burden, ensure reviews are designed to provide the information necessary to make appropriate sunset decisions, and promote consistency across reviews. The review will include a recommendation as to whether the Center should be sunsetted, with final determination made by the EVC/Provost in consultation with the VCR and the Office of the Chancellor. In the case of a Center housed in a school, the EVC/Provost's determination of whether to sunset the Center would be informed by a recommendation from the cognizant dean (in addition to consultation with the VCR and Office of the Chancellor). For a Center that requires intramural support during the last two years of the five year review cycle, the officer overseeing the Center will first forward the review materials to the Academic Senate Chair. By examining relevant metrics such as the amount of central funds used, and its percentages relative to the total operating budget of the Center and the total amount of internal funding for Centers and Institutes, the Academic Senate Chair will determine whether the Center has substantial implications on the campus central funds such that a Senate review is warranted. If a Senate review is needed, the Senate Chair will convene a joint review committee composed of members from CoR and CAPRA. The recommendation from the Senate review will be forwarded to VCR, EVC/Provost, and/or the Chancellor's Office for final determination. Unless sunsetted, Centers will

continue to operate for the interval determined at its renewal or until the next five year review, whichever time period is shorter. The conditions for continuation, including funding considerations, will be determined at the time of renewal. Exceptions will be considered for grant funded centers for which extensive reviews are mandated by the funding agencies. In those cases, the reports should be reviewed by the Dean/VCR to ensure they include all relevant information and Deans/VCR should participate in the reviews conducted by the funding agency.

3. Center Directors serve in an “At Will” capacity and are subject to removal for cause. Director appointment lengths will be specified in the Center proposal, with review and notification of continuing service one year before reappointment. Annual performance reviews should be conducted by the appropriate supervisor, *i.e.*, Dean, ORU Director, VCR, or EVC/Provost. Renewal reviews of the Center Director would be concurrent with review of the Center. Such review will be conducted by the appropriate Dean/ORU Director in consultation with the VCR and relevant stakeholders. The EVC/Provost, in consultation with the Office of the Chancellor, will make the final decision regarding reappointment.