



VCU

Research-Related Institutes and Centers

Policy Type: Board of Visitors

Responsible Office: Office of the Vice President for Research

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Policy Statement and Purpose

The framework under which research-related institutes and centers (ICs) are established and operate at Virginia Commonwealth University is grounded in institutional strategic planning. *VCU2020-A Vision for Excellence* mandated a university-wide policy for institutes and centers. *Quest for Distinction*, VCU's plan for 2011-2017, calls for building institute and center strength, emphasizing multidisciplinary research. Equally important, it also holds accountability as one of our core values. The efficient, responsible, and transparent operation of VCU's institutes and centers ties together our two most recent strategic plans: VCU2020 prescribes regular evaluation of ICs and *Quest for Distinction* mandates accountability to ensure the performance of ICs in contributing to the mission of the institution.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance in the development and establishment of ICs and to outline a process for systematic, periodic review of all VCU research-related institutes and centers. This Policy aims to promote visibility, transparency, and accountability across all institutes and centers.

Exception: Institutes and Centers (ICs) with non-research missions are not officially created or operated under the *Research-Related Institutes and Centers* Policy. However, this policy may be used for guidance on forming and operating non-research ICs. Non-research centers and institutes may not compete for IC budget funds that have been allocated for research-related centers.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

Table of Contents

Who Should Know This Policy	2
To Whom Does This Apply	2
Definitions	2
Contacts	3

Procedures.....	3
❖ Developing an Institute or Center	4
❖ Evaluating Institutes and Centers	5
❖ Modification of an Institute/Center (IC)	7
❖ Discontinuation of an Institute and Center (IC)	7
Forms.....	8
Revision History.....	9
FAQs.....	9

Who Should Know This Policy

All faculty, deans and research deans are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions. Institutes and Centers (ICs) with non-research missions are not officially created or operated under the *Research-Related Institutes and Centers Policy*. However, this policy may be used for guidance only on forming and operating non-research ICs.

To Whom Does this Policy Apply

All research-related ICs must adhere to this policy, however, it also provides guidance for those ICs whose mission does not include research.

Definitions

INSTITUTE OR CENTER:

An organizational unit, approved and recognized by the Institution, with a broad, interdisciplinary mission which is typically manifold, focusing on elements that may include teaching, service, patient care and/or research. ICs involve faculty from several disciplinary units.

RESEARCH-RELATED INSTITUTE OR CENTER (IC):

An IC which has research as a core component of its mission and activities. Also see FAQ #1 for additional details.

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OR CENTER:

Approved by the VCU Board of Visitors, or when appropriate, by the VCU Health System Board of Directors. Institutes or Centers seeking chartered status must be interdisciplinary endeavors that cross school/college boundaries and demonstrate compelling novel ideas that will serve the university. They must have detailed plans for resourcing and sustaining the IC. Typically, ICs seeking chartered status will have been functioning as a general (or informal) center for multiple prior years and have a demonstrable record of success. The official designation of a chartered IC would allow for the use of the “VCU” prefix in the name of the IC.

GENERAL INSTITUTE OR CENTER:

Non-Board approved ICs may not use the “VCU” prefix in the name.*

INSTITUTE OR CENTER DIRECTOR:

The institute or center Director (IC Director) is the individual who provides administrative leadership. The IC Director holds responsibility for assuring the IC is effectively and efficiently managed, and able to meet its goals and objectives.

INSTITUTE OR CENTER OVERSIGHT OFFICIAL:

The institute or center oversight official (IC Oversight Official) is the individual to whom the director of the institute or center reports. This will typically be a Dean or a Vice President.

PRESIDENT'S CABINET:

The VCU President, Senior Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents and other direct presidential reports as deemed necessary by the President.

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH-RELATED INSTITUTES AND CENTERS:

Committee appointed by the Vice President for Research, in consultation with the Provost, and the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences to engage in the following activities for research-related ICs:

- Review and provide recommendations on proposals to establish new ICs
- Provide guiding principles to be used in the evaluation of ICs
- Receive certification of annual reporting from the IC Oversight Official (i.e., the individual to whom institute director reports)
- Review evaluation protocols for 7 year evaluation of all chartered ICs
- Review and comment on the 7 year written evaluation report for all chartered ICs
- Review and provide recommendations on modification or discontinuation of an IC
- Periodically review the policy or policies for the creation of ICs, and propose changes to the President's Cabinet.
- Review and make recommendations for funding allocations available to the Vice President for Research for the support of ICs.

Contacts

The Office of the Vice President for Research, in consultation with the VCU Committee on Institutes and Centers, officially interprets this policy. The Office of the Vice President for Research is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by the policy *Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures* through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to the Office of the Vice President for Research.

Procedures

The following procedures outline the steps for developing and evaluating research-related ICs at Virginia Commonwealth University.

DEVELOPING AN INSTITUTE OR CENTER:

Research-related ICs must be guided by a mission statement and organizational plan that clearly demonstrates the potential to add value to the university in terms of intellectual power, collaborative interdisciplinary relationships, and growth in extramural funding and resource development.

1. The request to establish a research-related IC requires submission of a written proposal that minimally includes:
 - Mission and goals of the IC and a discussion of how the IC would add value to the university and help advance its strategic goals. In particular, the proposal should address how the IC will do some or all of the following:
 - Enhance interdepartmental and interschool interactions and collaborations leading to significant multi-investigator awards
 - Lead in promoting strategic initiatives that position the institution to develop and expand its research enterprise
 - Play a significant role in transferring science into practice
 - Play a significant role in ensuring the recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty
 - Create a mentoring environment for faculty that augments and extends beyond that provided by individual departments
 - Provide unique educational opportunities for faculty and trainees
 - Develop and maintain core facilities or services that promote and support research
 - Build linkages between the university and the community
 - Explanation as to why existing university structures (departments, school, and other ICs) are unable to meet the mission and goals of the proposed IC.
 - If seeking chartered status, an explanation as to the rationale for seeking this status.
 - Organizational structure, operations, and governance including to whom the IC director reports (i.e., the IC Oversight Official), the rationale for selection of an IC director and a definition of membership for IC faculty
 - General ICs: Depending on scope of mission, general ICs typically report to a dean, vice provost, or senior administrator, as appropriate for VCU or VCU Health System
 - Chartered ICs: Must report to a dean, vice provost, vice president, or senior administrator, as appropriate for VCU or VCU Health System.
 - It should be clear in the proposal that responsibility for space, budget appropriation, and management of both general and chartered ICs resides with the IC Oversight Official .
 - Specific activities to be undertaken by the IC with measureable outcomes and a timeline for the stages of development over the first 5 years.

- A guidance template for potential outcomes to be included in the proposal may be found on the Office of Research IC webpage:
http://www.research.vcu.edu/centers_cores/institutes.htm
 - Projections of numbers of faculty members and trainees who are expected to participate in the IC over the initial five-year period. Core membership must include a minimum of five faculty members from each of two or more Schools or departments. The nature of the participation of the faculty members should be described.
 - Statement of how the research of each of the individual researchers would be integrated with the proposed IC such that the potential outcomes would be greater than that realized from their individual efforts.
 - Resources needed to sustain the IC, including funding, personnel, and space. The resource needs should be outlined for the initial 5-year period.
2. ICs created in response to RFPs and as the result of the receipt of funding are required to follow the procedures for creation, operation and evaluation set out in the official documents in addition to the requirements of this Policy.
 3. Approval of an IC will be based on a compelling proposal that specifies the contributions the IC will make above and beyond those expected from existing institutional units (e.g., departments, other ICs).
 4. Proposals must be reviewed and approved as appropriate for general or chartered IC:
 - General ICs: Approval must be obtained from the relevant dean(s), VCU Committee on ICs and the appropriate academic vice president.
 - Chartered ICs: Approvals must be obtained from the relevant dean(s), VCU Committee on ICs, President's Cabinet, University Council, and VCU Board of Visitors or VCU Health System Board of Directors, as appropriate.
 5. In addition to all other approvals, all ICs that propose to develop educational programs must have such programs reviewed and approved through the relevant university approval process. For policies related to approval and changes to educational programs:
<http://www.provost.vcu.edu/academic-affairs/academic-integrity-and-quality/assessment/curriculum-approval/>

EVALUATING INSTITUTES AND CENTERS

To comply with VCU's mandate for accountability and to ensure the performance of ICs are contributing to the mission of the institution, all research-related ICs are subject to an annual internal evaluation, as well as an external evaluation on a 7 year cycle.

1. Internal Annual Evaluation: Annually, the IC must prepare a written report which provides an assessment of the outcomes articulated in the planning proposal. A guidance document for use in the evaluation process may be found at:
http://www.research.vcu.edu/centers_cores/vcu_ic_annual_review.pdf
 - The annual report must contain quantitative and qualitative information on the performance of the IC. Example templates for reporting quantitative information can be found at:
http://www.research.vcu.edu/centers_cores/ic_performance_data_template.xlsx
 - Tangible evidence of goal achievement must be evident in annual reporting.
 - Annual reporting requirements become effective upon approval of the IC; annual reports are due January 15th of each applicable year.
 - General ICs: Annual report must be provided to the IC Oversight Official.
 - Chartered ICs: Annual report must be provided to the dean, vice president or the IC Oversight Official. Annual reports of chartered ICs will be made available to the Vice President for Research and the VCU Committee on Institutes and Centers if requested.
 - Grant-funded ICs: If either a general or chartered IC is supported from a grant dedicated to the operation of the IC, the report to the funding agency may suffice. This option will be exercised at the discretion of the IC Oversight Official.
 - “Grandfathered” ICs: In 2007, each Dean or Vice Provost provided a list of extant ICs to be “grandfathered” as official institutes and centers at VCU. Such “grandfathered” ICs are subject to the evaluation and reporting provisions of this policy.

2. External Evaluation: An external evaluation will typically occur at 7 year intervals. The date of final approval for any IC will serve as a guide to determine the appropriate evaluation cycle. For “grandfathered” ICs, the IC policy approval date (2007) will be used as the guide to determine their reporting and evaluation cycle. The external evaluation process may be coordinated or linked with another review process, such as academic degree program review, as appropriate. The VCU community will be notified when an IC is undergoing review and offered the opportunity to provide evaluative input. This input will be considered in the review team’s evaluation report.
 - The nature of the evaluation is dependent upon the type of IC:
 - General IC: The external evaluation involves constituting a panel of experts which, at the discretion of the IC Oversight Official, may include reviewers external to VCU. The format for review will be agreed upon between the IC director and the IC Oversight Official. The evaluation must involve the preparation and review of a comprehensive document detailing the operation, accomplishments, and future plan of the IC. The review team must prepare a written review/report. The IC director will be given an opportunity to provide a written response to the review team’s report.
 - Chartered IC: The external evaluation must include the use of outside experts to review the program. The format for this review process is agreed upon between the IC director and the

IC Oversight Official. In addition, the format must be approved by the VCU IC Standing Committee. The evaluation must involve the preparation and review of a comprehensive document detailing the operation, accomplishments, and future plan of the IC. The process will involve on-site interactions with investigators, staff and trainees. The review team must prepare a written review/report. The IC director will be given an opportunity to provide a written response to the review team's report.

- The evaluation report will be used to make decisions about the disposition of the IC. It may also be used to make recommendations for funding allocations available to the Vice President for Research for the support of ICs.
 - General IC: The report of the reviewers and the IC director response is transmitted to the IC Oversight Official for a final decision regarding continuance. Notification of this decision is made to the VCU IC Committee. If the recommendation is for modification or discontinuation of the IC, the procedures outlined below must be followed.
 - Chartered IC: The review team's report and the IC director's response will be transmitted to the IC Oversight Official and the Office of the Vice President for Research (if different). The OVPR will forward the review team's report and the IC director's response to the IC Committee which will review these materials and provide its analysis, including the identification of IC strengths and suggestions for improvement, to the OVPR who will forward it to the IC Oversight Official for a final recommendation regarding disposition of the IC (i.e., continuance, modification, discontinuation). The report of the review team, the analysis of the IC Committee, and the recommendation of the IC Oversight Official will be presented by the Vice President for Research to the Provost, the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences and the President. The President and the President's Cabinet will make final decisions regarding IC disposition following any 7 year review.

Recommendations for substantial modification or discontinuation of an IC must follow the procedures outlined below.

MODIFICATION OF AN INSTITUTE OR CENTER (IC)

If the mission and goals of an IC change substantially from those in the originally approved proposal, a request for modification outlining the changes and rationale for the changes must be reviewed and approved. Approval of modifications must follow the same procedure as for the initial approval.

1. General ICs: Approval must be obtained from relevant administrator(s), VCU Committee on ICs and the appropriate academic vice president.

2. Chartered ICs: Approvals must be obtained from the relevant administrator(s), VCU Committee on ICS, President's Cabinet, University Council, and VCU Board of Visitors or VCU Health System Board of Directors, as appropriate.

DISCONTINUATION OF AN INSTITUTE OR CENTER (IC):

It is not uncommon for specialized ICs to decline in activity after many years of service. ICs, whose activities have declined to the point where these designations are no longer appropriate or of value to VCU, may begin a process of disposition as follows:

1. Following a formal written request by the IC Oversight Official a decision for discontinuation can be made to the Committee on ICs and the OVPR under the following circumstances:
 - a) The unit unnecessarily duplicated the mission and/or activities of another unit.
 - b) Insufficient financial, human, or facilities resources are available to support the unit.
 - c) The major supporting grant or award has been terminated.
 - d) The IC had failed to achieve its mission, goals or objectives.
 - e) The mission, goals and objectives of the IC are no longer congruent with those of the administrative unit to which it reports or the University.
2. The OVPR will forward the IC Committee's assessment and the recommendation for discontinuation to the President and the President's Cabinet.
 - a. General ICs: The President and President's Cabinet will be notified of the action.
 - b. Charter ICs: The President and President's Cabinet will be asked to approve the action. The Board of Visitors will be notified of the action.
3. If discontinuation is approved, the IC Oversight Official, in collaboration with the IC director, will develop a plan for phasing out the unit to allow orderly termination or transfer of contractual obligations. The phase-out period may not be more than one year in duration, except for units with collections or facilities requiring additional time for responsible disposition.

Forms

1. Example of template for annual evaluation including spreadsheets for: grants awarded, inventions; pending proposals and planned proposals (IC Performance Data Template http://www.research.vcu.edu/centers_cores/institutes.htm)

Related Documents

There are no related documents associated with this policy and procedures.

Revision History

This policy supersedes the following archived policies:

Minor Revisions Date: November 5, 2014	<i>Research-Related Institutes and Centers</i>
Approval Date: March 4, 2014	<i>Research-Related Institutes and Centers</i>
Initial Approval Date: February 8, 2008	<i>A Framework for Institutes and Centers (IC) at Virginia Commonwealth University, (Recommendations of the VCU Institutes and Centers Committee)</i>

FAQs

1. **Question:** Is my Center “Research-Related”?

Answer: Research ICs have self-defining criteria that typically include:

- Creation of new knowledge and the publication of research results in the peer-reviewed, scholarly literature
- Enhancement of interdepartmental and interschool interactions and collaborations leading to significant multi-investigator sponsored awards
- Promotion of strategic initiatives that position the institution to develop and expand its research enterprise
- Playing a significant role in transferring science into practice
- Playing a significant role in ensuring the recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty
- Create a mentoring environment for faculty that augments and extends beyond that provided by individual departments
- Provide unique educational opportunities for faculty and trainees
- Develop and maintain core facilities or services that promote and support research
- Build linkages between the university and the community.

Proposal for ICs that do not fulfill these criteria may be discussed for development by members of the VCU community working with someone in an appropriate VCU leadership position (e.g., Dean or vice president) who will serve as the oversight official for the non-research center. The IC director and the oversight official may use the *Research-Related Institutes and Centers Policy* to guide the operation and evaluation of the IC or they may develop a mutually agreeable policy document for that purpose.

Non-research centers and institutes may not compete for IC budget funds that have been allocated for research-related centers.

1. **Question:** If my research-related center/institute is created as the result of a grant, do I still need to prepare a proposal to create a center or institute?

Answer: Yes. In the case of any grant funded entity that, by definition, must be called an institute or center, the proposal document may be derived from the submitted application to the funding agency.

2. Question: I have to submit an annual (progress) report to my outside funding agency. Do I still have to submit an annual report to VCU?

Answer: Yes. If the IC is supported from a grant dedicated to the operation of the IC, the report to the funding agency may suffice. This option will be exercised at the discretion of the dean or vice president. Otherwise, the format of the annual report must cover the elements articulated in the planning proposal and contain quantitative and qualitative information about the performance of the IC.

3. Question: I have a great idea for a Research-Related Center. Can I create it and then solicit members?

Answer: The IC Policy Committee, as well as your dean or relevant vice president must approve the center. You must follow the process outlined in this policy to create the center/institute. One element of the proposal must comment on the proposed definition of faculty membership.

4. Question: Are there restrictions on nomenclature for research-related institutes and centers?

Answer: Only chartered centers can use VCU as a prefix in their name. All ICs (chartered or general) should state that they are part of Virginia Commonwealth University, and use the appropriate VCU logo when communicating with internal and external audiences. For guidance, please visit the identity website: <http://www.identity.vcu.edu/>