

# GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSING NEW CENTERS AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY

## September 2012

These guidelines outline the steps necessary to develop a written proposal and to obtain the approvals prerequisite to the creation of new centers, institutes, and other similar non-departmental academic units.

### **Overview**

Non-departmental units such as centers and institutes can be loci of multidisciplinary and cross-school engagement and a source of exciting new collaborations. They can be nimble in directing their activities toward emerging topics, questions, and methodologies, and can help advance research or intellectual exchange that requires a specialized interdisciplinary focus and dynamic, sustained attention. They can bring together teams of investigators for specific projects as well as foster larger informal communities of faculty, students, and staff from different parts of the university who share a common intellectual interest.

Ideas for new centers may arise in response to a variety of circumstances and opportunities, including: the emergence of new disciplines or changes in existing disciplines; the potential for achieving excellence through new interdisciplinary and interschool programs; and the outcome of thoughtful strategic planning. Regardless of who initiates a proposal for a center, it must pass through a formal approval process before it can be implemented.

Proposals for center or institutes that will cross school lines must fully explain the details of academic and administrative responsibility between or among the organizational units involved, including cost sharing, overhead sharing, and reporting lines. Interdisciplinary centers, either embedded within a school or established university-wide, must be designed to ensure that their programs fit the mission of the university, have potential for excellence, and have adequate resources and oversight.

Key criteria for a successful new center include:

- At least two strong faculty advocates,
- A critical mass of other committed faculty members who are to be involved in the program and who have an established record of collaboration,
- A distinguishing niche or role in fulfilling an unmet need,
- The ability to leverage other strengths at Tufts,
- Strong academic administrative support in the department(s), program(s), and school(s) involved,
- A comprehensive financial plan that addresses the viability and sustainability of the proposed program.

The following steps are applicable in their entirety for all new non-departmental academic units. For all cross-school centers, the Office of the Provost will work with the proposal writers to ensure that University-wide planning is taken into account.

### **REQUIRED STEPS**

#### **1. Center Conceptualization**

The key faculty members should discuss their concept with the appropriate deans of the school(s) that will host the center and with the provost for any proposal that may be university-wide. Since multiple

schools may be involved in the sustained success of the center, other school deans, academic deans, and deans of research besides the host dean may also need to be consulted. Once the dean(s) affirms his/her support of the concept, the center concept leaders should:

- a. Establish preliminary versions of center mission and goals, develop a timeline for establishing the center, estimate approximate start-up costs as well as ongoing administrative costs, and indicate a possible administrative structure.
- b. Discuss the concept and proposal process with the chair(s) of the department(s) that will play a central role in program development and delivery;
- c. Identify members for a Planning Committee; and
- d. Contact the Office of the Provost to discuss the concept and proposal if more than one school will be involved in the center's creation, support, or programming.

## **2. Form a Planning Committee to develop a formal and detailed center proposal.**

The Office of the Provost will assist the relevant Academic Deans and the planning committee with the planning and submission steps. For proposals involving key strategic areas for the University, the Provost may participate in the formation of the planning committee.

The planning committee should:

- a. Consider the unit's provisional **name** and imagine acceptable alternatives. It is strongly advised that special care be taken with formulating the name and that proposal leaders consult with the Office of the Provost about the name's appropriateness in order to avoid unintended duplication or confusion with other programs. The central administration and/or sponsoring schools will reserve the right to approve the final version of the center's name.
- b. Prepare a concise **mission statement** to guide the planning process. What are the educational, research, and societal goals for the center? What needs does it meet? Why does it make sense for Tufts at this time?
- c. Gather information to support the **rationale** and **feasibility** of the center. The planning committee should consult key administrative units about specific issues as they develop the plan. The enclosed **appendix** entitled "**Preliminary Questions for Center Creation**" contains a set of exploratory questions that should be thoroughly considered prior to the composition of a formal proposal. Answers to many of these questions may need to be included in the formal proposal itself.
- d. Envision how the center will be **governed, administered, and housed**. Regarding the Director—who and what % release time? What kind of Steering Committee will be involved? Where will staff assistance come from? Who will be responsible for core administrative tasks such as financial management, event planning, procurement, and communications? Would any new demands that might be placed on existing staff be reasonable and within the scope of their job descriptions and salary levels? Location? Can the center be a virtual entity or does it require a unique physical space of its own?
- e. Consider how the achievement of the center's goals will be **assessed**. With the help of the Office of the Provost, a timetable and process for evaluation should be proposed along with an ongoing mechanism for ensuring that the center is following its mission and fulfilling its goals. The assessment and evaluation plan must be implemented before the end of the fifth year of program operation and may include an external evaluation component to be directed by the dean or the provost.

3. **Prepare the formal proposal in draft form.** Please try to limit the proposal to approximately twenty pages, excluding the appendices and letters of support. Please include the required information in subtitled text sections as follows:
- **Executive Summary:** name, description of the center and brief rationale (1/2 page)
  - **Introduction:** Overview of center mission, goals, and organization (1/2-1 page)
  - **Rationale:** Why this proposal is a good idea at the present time, why at Tufts, compare to other similar entities, discuss the fit with academic priorities, etc. (1-2 pages)
  - **Proposed outcomes:** Describe the outputs (products) and outcomes (impact) this center is intended to produce.
  - **Center programming:** the primary and secondary activities that the center will undertake, sponsor, or coordinate. For each such activity, the proposal should explain which members will be responsible for ensuring that the activities are properly conducted.
  - **Competitive landscape:** describe similar or at least potentially competing institutions at other universities or organizations. How will the proposed Center distinguish itself from other centers so that it will be able to successfully compete for funding and human resources?
  - **List of faculty likely to be involved:** Include brief notation of subject area expertise and possible roles and/or contributions to center activities.
  - **Administration and Governance:** Director(s), faculty governance, relations to school deans, Provost, and other relevant sponsors, and an organizational chart showing how the center fits into a school framework. For interschool centers especially, explain which office will be responsible for administrative/financial oversight.
  - **Plans for Roll-out:** Timetable for center development.
  - **3-5 Year Business Plan:** If relevant, show grant income and its distribution to participating school units; other up-front school investment or grant income. All real costs including O&M, faculty and administrative compensation, financial aid, advertising, operating office expenses, start-up costs, and IT, etc.
  - **Risks:** What are the risks in creating this center? These might include reputational, operational, legal, environmental or other risks.
  - **Evaluation:** Give a plan and timetable for periodic evaluation of the center in relation to stated educational, research, and financial goals. Include explicit steps for an external evaluation component. Propose a timetable for follow-up reports to the deans and/or Provost that use specific measures to compare outcomes with expectations.
  - **Appendices:** Relevant charts, capital plans, equipment lists, abbreviated faculty CVs (no more than 5 pages per person), programs at other institutions, etc.
  - **Letters of interest from participating faculty and other contributing partners:** A compilation of letters from participating faculty members, relevant department chairs, and other key internal and external colleagues expressing their intention to support the center and contribute to its ongoing success.

4. **Reviews and Approvals required prior to submitting to Provost**

For interschool centers, the Office of the Provost should review the proposal before initiating the formal approval process with the deans and provost. When a final proposal is ready, it should be distributed as follows:

- a. **Executive Administrative Dean.** The Executive Administrative Dean (EAD) of each school involved should review the proposal and be given an opportunity to comment prior to its approval by the dean.
- b. **Department Chair.** Similarly, the faculty chairpersons of the departments involved should receive a copy of the proposal and be given an opportunity to review what is stipulated therein.

- c. **Dean.** A cover letter from the dean of each school involved, addressed to the Provost documenting his/her support of the center.
- d. **Vice President for Finance.** Those occasional proposals that involve significant start-up investments and/or have significant ongoing budgetary impact may be subject to review and comment by the Vice President for Finance.

## Preliminary Questions for Center Creation

The following questions are part of new Tufts University guidelines developed for the creation and review of centers, institutes, and other non-departmental academic units.

### Mission and purpose

- Are there other centers or institutes at Tufts, including all of its component schools, working in the same disciplines and/or pursuing a similar set of intellectual goals? If so, what have been the discussions with those units regarding the possibility of a new center being created? How would the proposed center be sufficiently distinctive to justify its creation? How would it coordinate with other centers sharing similar goals? How would it manage unhealthy competition for personnel, resources, audience, and funding?
- Are there centers dedicated to similar topics at other institutions in the Boston area and/or elsewhere in the country that are good models for what is being proposed at Tufts? What makes these entities successful and good models for Tufts? Are there unsuccessful or inappropriate models that should be avoided?
- How would the proposed center fit into a larger strategic priority for the school/university?
- How would the proposed center ensure that it remains engaged with the activities of other schools, departments, and centers, and not become a silo of activity?
- How would the proposed center accommodate the interests of more than one Tufts school or department? Are there opportunities for it to be a truly multidisciplinary endeavor?
- In what ways would the proposed center allow for a new scale of activity in the areas it seeks to cover? How would it demonstrate that its activities are more than the sum of the activities of the individuals involved? What would be gained by the creation of the proposed center that would otherwise be impractical or unlikely to take place without the center's existence?

### Activities

- Is there currently a critical mass of faculty and students who would be excited by the creation of the proposed center and be able to contribute immediately to the start-up and launch phases of the center's development?
- Thereafter, what is the likelihood that participating faculty would be committed to the ongoing success of the proposed center's activities rather than merely filling out its roster? Would key faculty participants be willing, for example, to collaborate on research, help write grants, attend special events and sponsored lectures, take part in relevant governance meetings, make available their professional networks for the benefit of the center, share time and resources with the center, etc.?
- How would the proposed center enhance the educational and research experiences of undergraduates as well as graduate and professional students from across the University?
- How would center activities such as sponsored lectures or the provision of seed grants to students, post-docs, or faculty complement and be coordinated with similar activities offered by participating departments or schools?
- What are the incentives, disincentives, and tradeoffs that would affect the quality and duration of faculty and student participation and their ability to balance engagement with the proposed center and commitments to home departments, programs, or schools?
- What facilities, resources, equipment, etc. would the proposed center need to access or share with other departments, offices, laboratories, etc.?
- Would the proposed center involve undergraduates, graduate or professional students, or post-doctoral scholars in its core activities, and if so, how would this involvement be managed to

ensure a meaningful level of participation that is balanced with their other academic commitments?

- If applicable, how will the proposed center strengthen our faculty's competitiveness for external grant funding?

### Start Up

- Which school deans will need to approve and/or be consulted about the creation of the proposed center?
- How much seed funding would be needed to begin operations?
- What are the most appropriate sources of external funds (for example, state and federal grant programs, foundations, for-profit corporations, private individuals and donors, etc.) that will be needed to keep the center viable? How will the proposed center integrate its ongoing pursuit of funding into its activities?
- What fraction of annual operating expenses would the proposed center likely require from the host school/s or central administration as a subvention?
- What are the essential new investments in equipment or facilities that would be required for the proposed center to begin its activities? Would the cost and use of these resources be shared with other units? Are there external funds to cover these investments for which the center would be competitive?

### Administration and Management

- What are the mission-critical administrative needs of the proposed center? If applicable, would the center be able to afford the appropriate level of professional and/or technical staff?
- Which administrative model would be most effective in ensuring efficient use of resources, proper allocation of responsibilities, and full compliance with University and federal policies?
- Are there ways to leverage existing business operations of other units to ensure professionalized management of finances, operations, communications, event planning, etc.?
- How would the center give credit to participating faculty for bringing in funding that is most pertinent to the center's activities?
- If applicable, have financial arrangements for sharing in indirect cost recovery /overhead funds been agreed to and clarified in advance with input from all relevant deans and/or financial officers?

### Evaluation and Self-Assessment

- What are the benchmarks that the center would use to determine whether it is making progress in its first five years towards meeting its goals?
- How would the proposed center go about measuring its performance and impact at regular intervals?
- All new centers will be established with the condition that they may be discontinued if certain criteria are no longer being met: for example, financial sustainability, academic excellence, critical mass of engaged participants, or compelling goals that serve the mission and strategic priorities of the University and/or host school/s. Periodic reviews will be used to assess whether such conditions are being met. What are the other criteria by which the center's performance should be evaluated?
- All faculty directors of new centers will have terms of appointment that may be renewable contingent upon the successful outcome of a performance review and the mutual agreement of the responsible academic sponsor (provost and/or school dean) and the director. What are the criteria by which the director's performance should be evaluated?