

Emerging Centers Request for Applications (RFA) **For New and Competitive Renewal Applications**

Purpose and Definition

An institutionally supported research center is a collaborative interdepartmental unit dedicated to advancing translational, clinical, and/or basic science research. These centers foster the development of a cohesive research agenda that aligns with strategic priorities by integrating expertise from multiple disciplines, including other centers, divisions, departments, and programs.

The purpose of this RFA is to invite applications to develop an institutionally supported Advocate Health/Wake Forest University School of Medicine Emerging Research Center. This document outlines the framework for submitting a new application and for renewal of an existing center. Emerging Research Centers are intended to cultivate innovative, high-potential research ideas that require initial investment to achieve meaningful development. Centers may pursue research across a range of domains, including translational, clinical, and basic sciences, with the expectation that this early support will lay the groundwork for a sustainable and impactful research enterprise.

New Applications (Revolving)

Letter of Intent

Prospective applicants are required to submit a 2-page Letter of Intent (LOI) that includes the following sections:

- Center Title
- Mission and Vision Statement
- Names and Affiliations of leaders and potential members
- Rationale and Institutional Alignment, demonstrating how the center supports institutional priorities
- Existing Expertise, Resources, and Strengths within the enterprise
- Strategic Vision for Growth
- Summary of Current Extramural Funding Portfolio
- Estimated budget, outlining projected personnel and non-personnel costs (a detailed budget is not required for the LOI)

The LOI will be evaluated by a subcommittee of the Dean's Cabinet to determine eligibility for submitting a full application. LOIs may be submitted at any time to the Dean's Office (contact details provided below).

Full Applications

Applicants invited to submit a full application for an Emerging Research Center are encouraged to follow a clear yet adaptable format, recognizing that centers may be at various stages of development. The general structure of the proposal should follow a short NIH format (maximum 6 pages) including specific aims (1 page), and a research strategy (5 pages) that addresses significance, innovation, approach, investigators, and timeline. The application must also incorporate feedback received from the review of the LOI.

A major focus of the first year should be the establishment of the foundational elements needed to launch a successful and sustainable research center. Applicants should describe their vision and outline a detailed plan for building a center that is both impactful and enduring. This may include leadership development strategies, member engagement plans, and the execution of a formal SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to guide center activities.

A strategic planning framework should be included, accompanied by clearly defined milestones for Years 1, 2, and 3, as well as a robust evaluation plan to monitor progress over time. In addition to these core components, applicants are encouraged to describe how their center will engage with clinical teams to identify patient-centered and health system-oriented research questions. Proposals should include plans for mentoring early-career faculty and trainees, as well as initiatives that foster team-based training and development. Finally, to ensure broad engagement across the Advocate Health enterprise, each Center must include representation from multiple markets within the system. This collaborative approach will help strengthen the Center's reach and potential for institutional impact.

Each proposal must be accompanied by NIH-format biosketches for the Center Director(s) and core team members. A detailed three-year budget and justification should also be included. The proposed budget should reflect the exploratory nature of an Emerging Center and may include expenses such as limited administrative staff support, funding for pilot projects, symposium-related costs, team training, and honoraria for guest speakers or external advisors. Notably, support for the Center Director(s) will be provided through a separate institutional mechanism and should not be included in the submitted budget.

Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by a subcommittee of the Dean's Cabinet, with recommendations forwarded to the Dean and Academic Finance for final decisions. The evaluation process will include the following:

- Goals support and align with institutional research priorities and the mission to improve health
- Involves collaboration of members whose research and practice span the translational spectrum (preclinical, clinical, population sciences) and includes multiple markets
- Strategic plan to grow the extramural funding portfolio that would not be achievable without center's leadership and infrastructure
- Serves as an intellectual hub, providing support and engagement opportunities for its members, including early-career investigators, around a shared thematic focus
- Structured plan for soliciting, reviewing, and evaluating pilot projects
- Effectively disseminates new knowledge to both internal and external audiences

Annual Performance Review (Applies to New and Competitive Renewal Applications)

Each Emerging Research center is required to submit an annual performance review (*aka: annual progress report*), which must include a budget for the subsequent year. The budget will be reviewed and may be adjusted based on the emerging center's progress toward its stated goals. In addition, center members are surveyed annually to provide feedback, and these insights will be reviewed by the Vice Dean to inform ongoing evaluation and strategic direction.

Competitive Renewal (due June 15th)

A renewal application is expected in the third year of funding. By this time, an Emerging Research Center should have demonstrated significant progress and development, positioning it for potential transition to full Research Center status. To initiate this transition, applicants must first submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) in Year 3 and receive approval to proceed with a formal renewal application. Applicants should refer to the *Accountability and Expectations* section below for guidance on required content.

Accountability and Expectations

Institutional support of research centers is not guaranteed indefinitely. Centers must demonstrate responsible stewardship of institutional resources along with measurable growth in extramural funding and collaborations. To maintain institutional support, centers are expected to meet the following metrics:

- Enhance national visibility for Advocate Health/Wake Forest University School of Medicine
- Secure investigator-initiated funding (e.g., R01s or equivalent) to support research, infrastructure, and implementation/dissemination projects, including grants stemming from pilot funds
- Pursue large-scale funding opportunities, such as program project grants and/or center-level funding
- Demonstrate a strong return on investment, particularly in the effective use of pilot funding to drive new research initiatives
- Support early-career faculty development through mentorship programs and/or collaborative project opportunities
- Foster active engagement among center members, ensuring they have a voice in center activities and strategic direction.

Contacts

Direct questions and applications to Lynne Wagenknecht, Vice Dean for Population Health Research, and/or Lindsay Trost, Associate Vice President.