

Research 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 for the establishment of an institutionally supported Advocate Health/Wake Forest University School of Medicine research center. This document outlines the framework for submitting a new application and for renewal of an existing center. Research centers are designed to support well-established research areas that reflect significant depth in translational, clinical, and/or basic science research. A separate RFA is available for emerging research centers.

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

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.

Within this approach, applicants should provide a comprehensive plan for expanding the extramural research portfolio in the proposed area. Additionally, components may include details on the center's organizational structure, leadership roles, membership criteria, and strategies for engaging members. If applicable, the proposal should outline collaborations with clinical teams to identify patient- and health system-oriented research questions. Furthermore, it should describe mentorship initiatives for early-career research faculty and students, plans for team training and development, and the center's role in supporting the academic learning health system. The proposal should also highlight initiatives focused on health promotion and well-being, which includes approaches that enhance healthcare accessibility, improve patient-centered outcomes, and support the overall advancement of health for all individuals. While applicants may describe unique needs such as faculty recruitment, infrastructure, or technologies, the budget is unlikely to allow for the support of these elements.

To ensure broad institutional engagement, the center must include representation from multiple markets of Advocate Health. Each applicant should also provide current NIH-format biosketches for the center's director(s) and core team members. The application will include a 5-year budget and budget justification covering necessary expenses such as administrative staff (limited support), pilot funding, symposium costs, team training, and honoraria. However, support for the center director(s) will be provided from another funding source and should not be included in the proposed 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 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 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 competitive renewal application is required in Year 5 and should follow a short NIH format (maximum 6 pages). This format includes specific aims (1 page) and a research strategy (5 pages), which must address progress to date, significance, innovation, approach, investigators, and timeline. 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.