

Request for Proposals for Center Planning Grants

In 2010-2011, the Provost's office will fund planning for additional centers. Each of these one-year planning grants (of up to \$50,000 each) should be used to develop and submit a five-year operational plan for a new center. The first six center planning grant awards were made in summer of 2008 and announced in the Provost's Sept 5, 2008 newsletter (<http://www.wfu.edu/provost/newsletter/index.html>). Six planning grants were also announced and awarded over the 09/10 academic year (http://provost.wfu.edu/16.160.1/One_Year_Center_Planning_Grants)

The University hopes that these centers will enable faculty to accomplish scholarship and creative work which they otherwise could not have accomplished without reaching out to other scholars or artists for additional insight, inspiration, and assistance. Centers should help build the academic reputation of the institution in the focus area of the center and they should build intellectual community and engagement among faculty and students. Once centers are started they should have a spillover effect in attracting and mentoring new members with interests that can mesh with, and enhance, center programs.

Successful centers will engage faculty and students across disciplines, departments and/or schools and attract funding and scholars from both Wake Forest and other institutions. They will be led by interdisciplinary faculty teams. (For this purpose, a working definition of "interdisciplinary" is: two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines that are usually considered distinct.) In general, reviewers want to see what topics or questions will be addressed by center faculty and why they think the interdisciplinary group of scholars are qualified (or even better uniquely qualified) to work in this area or answer these questions. In particular, on collaborative proposals, reviewers want to be convinced that if this effort is funded the collaborative effort will yield more than the sum of the individual efforts.

Topics that should be addressed in the proposal are: What will the faculty group do together that is different from, and supplementary to, what they are currently doing individually and what important topics or questions will be addressed if a full 5 year center is funded? If the topics or questions to be addressed are not fully fleshed out, how will they be determined? Once they are determined, have you convinced reviewers that these topics or questions will not and cannot be adequately addressed without this funding?

Please note that the Provost's Office anticipates issuing another Request for Proposals in spring 2011.

Applications for Center Planning Grants should contain:

1. the proposed center title;

2. a brief description (no more than two pages) of the intellectual focus of the center and of how the center will advance the subject (both on and off campus) and teaching/research or creative activity;
3. names and affiliations of the principal WFU faculty (no more than four) proposing the center, with a two-page c.v. on each. The proposed center director must be a tenured faculty member.
4. names and affiliations of others who have agreed to be major participants if funded;
5. a plan for how the four critical center success factors (described below) will be determined, evaluated and developed over the year of the planning grant (no more than four pages); and
6. the proposed budget for the planning year. Eligible budget items include travel and (if necessary) modest honoraria for visitors, budgets for proposed site visits/workshops/seminars to determine best practices; and a course release for one member of the research team to lead the development of the full five-year center operational plan.
7. The completed planning grant application should be submitted electronically to hallsted@wfu.edu in the office of the Provost by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2010. These proposals are reviewed by an ad hoc committee that includes members of the Research Advisory Council (membership can be found at <http://www.wfu.edu/rsp/office.html>) who have no conflict of interest with the submitted proposals. If a conflict of interest between a proposal and a sitting RAC member is identified then a replacement representative from that division of the college or school is appointed by the Provost to review these proposals. Announcement of awards will be made in June/July.

Critical Center Success Factors

Each faculty group that receives a planning grant is expected to spend the planning term assessing the prospects for development of a full fledged center and in most cases then subsequently developing a five-year operational plan for that center. These plans will be evaluated on the basis of how they address four critical center success factors: 1) Mission/Focus; 2) Faculty; 3) Resources; and 4) Operating Guidelines.

1) Mission/Focus.

A center needs a purpose or focus that builds on and extends existing institutional academic strengths and interests and should enhance the academic reputation of the University. Centers are expected to be more transitory than traditional departments and the interdisciplinary mission/focus to be one that is better handled outside rather than inside traditional departmental boundaries. Centers typically focus their efforts on topics or problems which require interdisciplinary solutions and have cross-departmental affiliations.

Generally the University will not consider establishing a center unless there is a strong prospect that its existence will both increase the level of research and creative work already underway and serve the strategic plan priorities. Provost's Office Strategic Plan Initiatives can be found in WIN under infocentral in the forms and documents library under the Strategic Planning folder. In addition, the center is expected to be interdisciplinary and in most cases will draw expertise from multiple departments and/or schools within the university.

2) Faculty

Centers need faculty who are committed to the mission of the Center. The planning grant application should include information about who would contribute effort to the planning of the proposed center. To insure stability, a committed team of at least six cross-disciplinary faculty members (inclusive of the four primary faculty) is normally expected. The planning grant should define what academic strengths would be built upon and where investments in new faculty would be welcomed in conjunction with an operational center. Also, the grant application should address how information about best practices in faculty participation will be gained from similar centers at other institutions.

3) Resources.

All centers which are ultimately successful in securing full 5 year funding awards will need create a detailed budget. Competitive center proposals will also identify potential external sources of financial support. Planning grants should be used to investigate best practices in funding models for similar centers at other institutions.

A center budget should cover, as necessary, faculty, staff, students, supplies and space needs. Some examples of items that will be included in center budgets are: director's salary; salary support for staff; competitive summer stipends for faculty; money for Visiting Fellows from other institutions for short term visits; seminar support; graduate student or postdoctoral fellowships awarded to center members by the center director or Executive Committee, money for member's release time; equipment; and a mini-grants or seed money grants program.

Potential sources of funds must be addressed in the final center proposal. These may include service fees, external grant/foundation support, university budget, and/or endowment.

4) Operation or Operating Guidelines.

Planning grants should be used to investigate and ultimately propose long-term center operational guidelines.

The operational center will need a mechanism for deciding faculty selection and continued participation as well as financial oversight or accountability. Full five-year center operational plans will also need a formal plan for center leadership, including a director and an executive or steering committee. Identification of this group and their duties as well as a proposed meeting schedule should accompany five-year operational plans. Some, but not all, centers may need to develop handbooks or policy manuals that provide guidelines to internal and external users on how to access facilities and/or instrumentation housed in them.