Research Core Facility Policies

School of Medicine
UNC-Chapel Hill
Rationale for Research Core Facility Policies

Our Research Core Facilities (“Cores”) enable and enhance research by providing access to technologies and services that are generally beyond the technical or financial capability of individual investigators. University and School of Medicine policies exist to protect these valuable resources. University-wide policies are described by the UNC-Chapel Hill Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) in a document titled, “Operating Guidelines for Institutional Research Service Centers” (attached as an Appendix). That document presents federal, state and UNC policies which are implemented at UNC-Chapel Hill under the authority the Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development.

The policies presented here further define policies for cores which are administered by Departments and Centers of the School of Medicine (SOM). These policies guide the School of Medicine’s approach to core administration with the goal of maintaining cores with financially sustainable business plans, the most relevant and cutting-edge technologies, quality services, open access and where possible an educational component. Cores in the SOM operate using a variety of business models and exist to serve different user groups. Cores that operate as Recharge Centers and consistent with the guidelines presented here can expect the highest priority for institutional support which is administered by the school, including financial support, space, assistance with maintaining sustainable business plans, websites and marketing and assistance with educational programs. These policies are intended to assist not to “micromanage” cores, while still acknowledging that the Dean, working through the Vice Dean for Research, has authority for all policies related to core personnel, space, finances and resources. It is OSR policy that implementation of policies and responsibility for the successful operation of cores resides in the Department or Center which house them.

The North Carolina Translational and Clinical Sciences Institute (NIH-funded CTSA) provides a University-wide administrative structure for supporting research infrastructure. TraCS is charged with assisting existing and emerging cores and developing procedures for recommending institutional resources. The TraCS Office of Translational Technologies (OTT) is ready to provide advice on best-practices and assistance with all aspects of core operations. The OTT of TraCS has developed procedures to recommend how some university-wide resources are distributed (such as core support from the University Cancer Research Funds). Therefore, any core in the University that supports biomedical research and adheres to these policies is eligible for access to resources coordinated by NC TraCS.
Contacts, Websites and Additional Resources

Directory of Core Facilities: List of core facilities, their technologies, prices and a searchable database of services and equipment.
http://www.med.unc.edu/www/research/core-facilities

Office of Translational Technologies: Consultation and assistance with establishment of new recharge facilities, revisions to existing recharges, accounting and invoicing, marketing, advocacy and other issues affecting core facilities.
www.med.unc.edu/ott

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Core Facility Advocacy Committee
Chair, Michael Topal, PhD
Professor of Pathology & Lab Medicine and Biochemistry and Biophysics
32-003 Lineberger Cancer Center
CB# 7295
966-8208

Office of Sponsored Research Cost Analysis and Compliance Office: Guidance and interpretation of state, federal and other applicable regulations as they apply to recharge service centers.

Kevin Maynor, Director, Cost Analysis and Compliance
Office of Sponsored Research
CB#1350, 2114 Administrative Office Building
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-1350
Telephone: 962-4453; Fax: 843-2610
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Asset Management Office: Notify Asset Management whenever there is a change in status of equipment
http://finance.unc.edu/material--disbursement-services/asset-management/welcome.html
Campus Box 1070
104 Airport Drive, Suite 2500
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-1100
Phone: 962-1382 Fax: 962-6271
Email: assets_team@unc.edu

Accounting Services Cash Management Office: Reporting and assistance with collections of past due invoices
CB # 1210
Telephone: 962-0036
Email: accounting@unc.edu


Office of Sponsored Research Policy 13: Information about Recharge Service Centers

Umstead Act Article 11: Relevant to setting charges for commercial clients whose payments are not from grants paying UNC F&A.
http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter_66/GS_66-58.html
Key Organizing and Operational Principles Specific to the SOM

**Administration of Cores**
The UNC Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) is ultimately responsible for establishing policies ensuring that cores operate within federal, state and UNC guidelines. Further authority for setting policy within the SOM resides with the Dean, working through the Vice Dean for Research. Finally, authority for directing core operations (e.g. accounting, personnel, space assignment and service quality) and responsibility for adhering to these policies rests with the Department or Center housing the core. A more detailed description of core administration is presented under Oversight of Cores (pp. 9-10) and schematically in the Organizational Chart above.

**Financing of Cores**
Cores must have a sustainable business plan and balance their budgets. They can do so through a variety of sources; preferably from fees-for-services and support from infrastructure core grants (e.g. NIH P series), specific purpose sponsored agreements, start-up funds or department or center funds. Personnel costs can be shared with the grants of individual major faculty clients but only when the scope of grant work is beyond the person's normal job responsibilities for the core.

Occasionally these sources are insufficient, most often because of the salaries for highly trained directors and equipment service contracts. It is critical that cores develop a long term plan to stably support their directors. These are often highly trained individuals who guide development and use of technology. In such cases the responsible Department or Center may assess a fee (prorated by use) on departments and centers of the cores clients. The Vice Dean for Research of the School of Medicine must approve the justification for these fees.
assessments and negotiate obtaining them from clients outside the SOM. In exceptional cases salary support may be negotiated from the VDR or requested on a competitive basis from UCRF funds designated for core support.

If an investigator is unable to pay a bill (for example if the investigator is invoiced after their grant has ended) then the investigator’s Department or Center will be asked to pay. Costs are distributed among units in proportion to how the investigators’ indirect funds are distributed. Any appeals should be made to the VDR. Ideally cores will develop mechanism to assure users have active accounts.

OSR and the Dean’s Office/TraCS have access to core accounts and will monitor ongoing financial trends monthly. If a continuing deficit is discovered the core (director and department chair or center director) will be asked to explain and this may trigger a need to review the cores business plan. While OSR has the authority to request these reviews, TraCS staff are available to assist the core in its review.

**Supplemental Support for Cores through the Office for Research (Vice Dean for Research)**

Cores can compete for funds for equipment and other budget categories including salary support through a review process administered by the OTT Core Facility Advocacy Committee. This committee is tasked with assisting the Vice Dean for Research of the School of Medicine with evaluating cores and recommending priorities for receiving resources. Solicitation of core requests occurs several times each year. The major sources of these funds are currently the University Cancer Research Fund and Office of Research of the School of Medicine.

Some emergency support (e.g. to replace broken critical equipment or partial coverage of service contracts) can be requested from the Vice Dean for Research of the School of Medicine. Major new equipment can also be obtained from Shared Instrumentation Grants (e.g. NIH, NSF, or NCBC). When these grants require matching institutional support it can be requested from the Vice Dean for Research and the Vice Chancellor for Research and Development.

**Setting Rates**

All internal UNC clients must be charged the same rates. However, grants or administrative units that subsidize a core may at their discretion provide support to assist their members in paying the campus-wide rate. External academic clients must be charged the internal rate plus at least the UNC-Chapel Hill Facilities and Administrative rate. External commercial clients should be charged whatever the market will bear above the addition of the F&A rate.

Rates should be reviewed annually with the goal of adjusting upward to cover costs or downward if an unacceptable excess is being generated (see OSR parameters).

**Annual Planning Survey**

To better understand and assist cores with planning the VDR will request a brief annual survey from each core on its financial, operational and scientific plans and concerns and goals for the coming year. The OTT of TraCS will assist with data collection and review, acting for the VDR. Reports will be prepared by the core director with assistance from the accounting staff and Chair or Center director.

Reports will only be requested from cores which are requesting institutional support. Exemption from review should be negotiated with VDR.

**Creating and Combining Cores**

It is crucial that we create new and evolve current cores so they provide the most enabling technologies for our research. Proposals for new cores can come from institutional leadership as a result of strategic initiatives or from individual investigators or groups. However, resources and space for cores is finite. Consequently, all proposals for new cores or for additional space will be evaluated by the Core Facility Advocacy Committee as the advisory body for the SOM Space Committee. New cores may request startup funding with the expectation they will be self-sustaining (typically after three years); it is uncommon for the institution to provide ongoing personnel support. No new core will be supported by institutional resources unless it works toward becoming a Full Service Recharge Core Facility. Exemptions (e.g. a Program Project core) must be negotiated with the VDR or Chair or Center Director. Such closed cores are not eligible to compete for institutional resources through formal mechanisms available to Recharge Centers.

The Space Committee may recommend combining redundant cores based on evaluations provided by the Core Facility Advocacy Committee.
Ending Cores
The Dean has authority to terminate cores for financial, space or scientific reasons.

If there is an ongoing operating deficit which cannot be eliminated over a reasonable period of time by increasing rates, or other means listed above then the core will be closed. Repayment of debt will be negotiated by the VDR. For example, in the case of mismanagement or neglect the responsible unit will be held accountable. Good core operation and adherence to Research Core Facility Policies should in principle eliminate development of debts.

If a Department or Center requests additional new space this may trigger review of their core operations. If the Space Committee determines their core(s) are redundant or of limited utility they may be asked to terminate that core(s) and reassign the space within their unit rather than be given additional space. Cores that provide poor or unjustified services (i.e. commercial services are cheaper and better) on an ongoing basis may be closed by the Dean following a recommendation by the Space Committee.
Oversight of Cores

University Oversight: Office of Sponsored Research
The Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development working through the Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) is ultimately responsible for setting UNC policies for cores and assuring that they adhere to federal and state guidelines. OSR will periodically review financial trends, business plans and review and approve recharge mechanisms (Appendix item).

SOM and Vice Dean for Research
The Dean and Vice Dean of the School of Medicine working through the Vice Dean for Research (VDR) have authority and responsibility for cores operating within space assigned to the school. When operation of a core is shared with another school or program, or shared between units of the SOM, the VDR must approve the terms of these agreements.

Office of Translational Technologies (NC TraCS) and Core Facility Advocacy Committee
Detailed knowledge of the operation of all SOM cores is required in order to provide institutional oversight and transparent and equitable mechanisms for distribution of resources. The Office of Translational Technologies (NC TraCS) and Core Facility Advocacy Committee are charged with assisting the VDR with collecting and interpreting the data required for effective core operation. Cores which expect to receive resources from the SOM must work with the Core Facility Advocacy Committee and the Office of Translational Technologies (OTT) in their assigned role of maintaining excellence of our research infrastructure.

Office of Translational Technologies of the NC TraCS: OTT exists to help cores be successful. OTT staff work directly with core directors and can assist with developing business plans, enhancing billing methods, reviewing service rates, applications for become Recharge Centers, website and sample-archiving software development, marketing and organizing and funding educational activities. They are a key liaison between the resources of NC TraCS and the cores, with a specific goal of enhancing translational research.

Core Facility Advocacy Committee: This committee is appointed by and reports to the VDR. It is chaired by the Executive Director of Core Technologies.

Reviewing the scientific and operational status of cores is a major function of the committee. The committee includes faculty members chosen for their expertise in specific categories of technology and for their interest in strengthening core facilities at UNC. Current categories, each of which include multiple cores, include 1) Animal Models and Phenotyping, 2) Biochemistry, 3) Clinical, 4) Genomics and 5) Imaging. Committee members work directly with core facility directors to evaluate and recommend upgrading of technology and to ensure high-quality services and user satisfaction. The committee reviews requests and makes recommendations to the VDR for establishment of new cores and the closing of existing cores that are redundant or have lost value.

A key function of the committee is to recommend distribution of institutional resources and space for the cores. The committee and its chair work closely with the OSR liaison/business manager, TraCS staff and Vice Dean's office to reach recommendations that have an effect on cores.

The Vice Dean for Research has additional support for cores, which is distributed independent of the Core Facility Advocacy Committee and can also be used for cores that are not considered an institution-wide priority, but may be of value to a specific group of investigators, or support certain Center and Program Project grants. The funds are distributed at the discretion of the Vice Dean for Research.

Departmental and Center Oversight
As defined by the Office of Sponsored Research and university policy, all cores are housed in a UNC Department or Center whose Chair or Director is responsible for monitoring operational and administrative activities of the core. The Department or Center is responsible for establishing a billing and receivables system to ensure timely and accurate invoicing and collections, and that charges are in accord with the approved rate schedule. Controls should be in place to ensure that only expenses incurred by the recharge center are billed to the recharge center account, and that these expenses relate exclusively to recharge center operations, including personnel costs. These controls should include a timely review of financial reports on a monthly basis. Reports on monthly account activity should be provided to the research core facility director on a timely basis. Departments and Centers are also responsible for human resource issues of personnel employed in the core.
In the uncommon situation that a core is administered by more than one unit, or personnel report to different administrative heads, there should be a written agreement on the authority and responsibility of each unit.

**Core Director and Faculty Director**

Each core must have a designated Core Director responsible for overseeing provision of services, core personnel and accounting with assistance from the units accounting and administrative staff. In some cases the Core Director is a Research Track Faculty member who is dedicated to this role. When the Core Director is not a faculty member the Department or Center is encouraged to appoint a Faculty Core Director who is responsible for accessing and upgrading core technology and services and who with the Core Director reports to their department chair or center director. Cores should have a process for obtaining user feedback on the quality of core services and use this feedback to improve. The OTT staff can assist with these evaluations and work with department chairs and center directors to improve operations.

**Individual Core Scientific Advisory Committees**

Technically or administratively complex cores are encouraged to establish scientific advisory committees of faculty who are knowledgeable about the technologies employed by the core facility, have a stake in the core facility’s success, and broadly represent the user base. They should meet regularly with the core facility director to review the success of services, need for technology renewal, personnel, financial and other issues required to ensure success of the core. These committees make recommendations to the Director, Chair or Center Director and the VDR.
Categories of Core Facilities

Research cores are organized using a variety of administrative and financial models. They can provide technical services or consultation and support for basic, translational and clinical research. The SOM recognizes the following definitions for use in prioritizing distribution of resources and space. Highest priority goes to the Full Service Recharge Core Facilities. The OTT is available to work with cores that wish to become a Full Service Recharge Core Facility.

A. Full Service Recharge Core Facilities. These are OSR-approved Recharge Centers which also have the following characteristics:

- Fill a need for services and equipment that fall beyond the financial reach or regular use of an individual investigator.
- Demonstrate demand beyond home department or center, with majority of users being from UNC.
- Operates with regular hours and on a first-come first-served basis.
- Have a fee-for-service structure (i.e. are an OSR-approved Recharge Center).
- Have a business plan that is consistent with OSR guidelines as judged by the Core Oversight Committee.
- Have a strategic plan that has been reviewed and approved yearly by Core Oversight Committee. The purpose of the yearly review is to consider the direction of the core with respect to rapid changes in technology, the direction and development of other cores, and the changing needs of our faculty.
- Have up-to-date invoicing (≤60 day cycle).
- Have a process to identify and correct progressive deficits. Cores run deficits occasionally because of their business and need to purchase large amounts of supplies in advance, but this should not be a progressive trend.
- Have cost accounting that meets OSR requirements (see OSR Policies and Guidelines). This will ensure that we do not run into auditing trouble in the future.
- Ideally a Full Service Recharge Core Facility will also provide an educational service. This can include hands-on technical training, workshops, vendor-sponsored seminars, etc. Many core directors already participate in the graduate teaching program.

B. Collaborative Core Facilities

- These are research-oriented cores that have special expertise and equipment that do not fit unit pricing. In many cases investigators accomplish their work by collaborating with members of the core. They are not open-access or fee for service. Examples are the Technology Development Mass Spectrometry Core and the Olympus Microscopy Center.
- These cores will be supported by the director’s grants, collaborations established with users of the core, and support negotiated directly from the Vice Dean for Research based on criteria established by the VDR. These may not receive the highest priority for support from the UCRF or TraCS.
- Continuation and growth of these cores will be dependent on grant support.

C. Limited Access Core Facilities

Some Core facilities exist to serve a restricted group of investigators who are associated with a specific grant (e.g. NIH “P class” grants) or support investigators within a specific department or center. Many of these cores do not
operate as fee-for service, first come-first-served Recharge Centers. The institution values these efforts but they will not be given the same priority for institutional resources or for new space outside of their current administrative unit. They may still negotiate for resources directly with their Dean’s Office based on criteria established by the VDR. In particular, matching funds to support grant applications may be available where appropriate. Some NIH P grant cores evolve into Full Service Recharge Core Facilities and can compete for resources in that category.

Policies for Space Assignment for Research Core Facilities
Within the School of Medicine

The Dean working through the Space Committee has authority for making all space assignments. The Space Committee will take into consideration recommendations from the Core Facility Advocacy Committee when considering requests for additional core space or space to establish a new core. As always, Departments and Centers may reassign space within their own units; these policies pertain only to requests for additional space. The process for requesting space includes the following considerations:

1. All cores are in space assigned to a department or center and requests for space must be represented and endorsed by their head.
2. Requests must include a statement of the current space, requested space, core’s mission, services, personnel and user base.
3. Expansion must be justified (i.e. the core can not meet user demand or they must introduce new equipment or technology).
4. The Core Facility Advocacy Committee will recommend a priority to the Space Committee based on the cores priority for receiving institutional resources.