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 polices exist to protect these valuable resources. University-wide policies are described by the UNC-Chapel Hill Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) "Operating Standards and Procedures," section 900. 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 "micromanage" cores, while still acknowledging that the Office of Research Technologies (ORT), 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 Office of Research Technologies (ORT) is ready to provide advice on best-practices and assistance with all aspects of core operations. The ORT has developed procedures to recommend how SOM and some university-wide resources are distributed (such as core support from the University Cancer Research Funds). Therefore, cores in the University that support biomedical research and adhere to these policies are eligible for access to resources coordinated by ORT and the SOM Office of Research.

Organizational Chart
Research Core Facilities
Oversight

School of Medicine

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 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 only when the scope of grant work is beyond the person's normal job responsibilities for the core.
Occasionally these sources are insufficient. Core directors are often highly trained individuals who guide development and use of technology, and high-end equipment service agreements are a necessary expense for many current technologies. It is critical that cores develop a long-term plan to stably support these and other operating costs.

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 held responsible for payment. Usage of one of the approved billing programs available to the cores will ensure that their users have active accounts.

OSR and the Dean's Office/ORT have access to core accounts and will monitor ongoing financial trends monthly. If a continuing deficit is observed, the core (director and department chair or center director) will be asked to explain and this may trigger a need to review the core's business plan. While OSR has the authority to request these reviews, ORT 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 apply for funds for equipment, method development, and other budget categories including operational support through a review process administered by the ORT 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 School of Medicine Deans Office funds.
Some emergency support (e.g. to replace broken critical equipment or partial coverage of service contracts) can be requested from the CFAC. Major new equipment can also be obtained from Shared Instrumentation Grants (e.g. NIH, NSF, or NCBC IIG's). When these grants require matching institutional support, it can be requested from the ORT Core Facility Advocacy committee 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).

Deficits
Good core operation, current rate structures, and adherence to Research Core Facility Policies should in principle eliminate development of debts.
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, the home department will be responsible for the debt.

Annual Planning Survey
To better understand and assist cores with planning the VDR will request an annual survey from each core on its financial, operational and scientific plans and concerns and goals for the coming year. The ORT will assist with data collection and review. Reports will be prepared by the core director with assistance from the accounting staff and Chair or Center director.
Exemption from review should be negotiated with ORT. Cores that do not complete annual planning surveys will not be considered for ORT or CFAC funding.

Creating 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, to be eligible for SOM funding and support, all proposals for new cores should be evaluated by the Core Facility Advocacy Committee. New cores should avoid creating overlap or duplication of services and equipment with existing cores and should demonstrate a sufficiently sized interest/user group so that the core has the expectation to become self-supporting over time.

Cores that are not reviewed and approved by ORT/CFAC will not be eligible for ORT or CFAC funding or 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 ORT/CFAC and the VDR.
Such cores will not have as high priority when requesting institutional resources through formal mechanisms available to Recharge Centers
Approved 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.

Consolidating and Ending Cores
There are times when a core technology has outgrown its usefulness or has a deficit which cannot be reduced through usage fees. In such cases sunsetting or merging a core with another may be the best option. ORT and the VDR will assist with core closure or a merge with another compatible core, working to preserve needed technology and maintain personnel resources as much as possible.

Initiating changes to cores will follow the criteria detailed in the "Guidelines for Starting, Sustaining, Consolidating an Ending Core Facilities" document on the Core Facilities Website

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 core operating plans and review and approve recharge mechanisms.

SOM and Vice Dean for Research
The Dean and Vice Dean of Research for the School of Medicine 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 Research Technologies 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 Research Technologies 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 Research Technologies (ORT) in their assigned role of maintaining excellence of our research infrastructure.**

> Office of Research Technologies: ORT exists to help cores be successful. ORT staff work directly with core directors and staff and can assist with developing business plans, developing service rates, applications for recharge accounts, website setup and maintenance, process improvement and business skills training. They are a key liaison between the resources of the SOM Office of Research and the cores.

> Core Facility Advocacy Committee: This committee is appointed by and reports to the VDR through the ORT. It is chaired by the Director of the Office of Research 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 ORT and Vice Dean's office to reach recommendations that have an effect on cores.

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 assisting the Core Director accessing and upgrading core technology and services, and reporting 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 ORT 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 ORT, who will inform 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 ORT 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

- 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 may be open-access, fee for service, or may instead operate with a different model such as expenses paid directly by PI grants.

- These cores will be supported by the director's grants, collaborations with established with users of the core. These may not receive the highest priority for support from ORT and CFAC.

- 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. As a departmental shared resource, the department 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 apply 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 cannot 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.

Contacts, Websites and Additional Resources

Core Facilities Website: Listing of core facilities and a searchable database of available services and equipment, core news, and information on core management and guidelines.
http://www.med.unc.edu/corefacilities

Office of Research 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.

https://www.med.unc.edu/corefacilities/office-of-research-technologies/
corefacilities@med.unc.edu

    Christopher W. Gregory, PhD, Director
    5014 Genetic Medicine Bldg., Campus Box 7264
    919-843-6367
    Christopher_gregory@med.unc.edu

    Kara A. Clissold, M.A., Associate Director

    5013 Genetic Medicine Bldg.
    kara_clissold@med.unc.edu

Core Facility Advocacy Committee
Chair, Christopher W. Gregory, PhD
Animal Models Cores Advocate: Li Qian, PhD
Biochemistry Cores Advocate: John Sondek, PhD
Genomics Cores Advocate: Terry Furey, PhD
Clinical/Translational Cores Advocate: Chad Pecot, MD
Imaging Cores Advocate: Richard Cheney, PhD
CAS Cores Representative: James Cahoon, PhD
Office of Research: Jen Brennan, PhD
LCCC Administrative Representative: Meghan Kraft
Office of Research Technologies: Kara Clissold

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.
https://policies.unc.edu/TDClient/2833/Portal/KB/ArticleDet?ID=132339

Office of Sponsored Research
CB#1350
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-1350

Asset Management Office: Notify Asset Management whenever there is a change in status of equipment
https://finance.unc.edu/services/assets-management/
Campus Box 1070
104 Airport Drive, Suite 2500
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-1100
Phone: 962-1382
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

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