

Guide for Creating and Managing USA Centers and Institutes

1. Introduction

The primary and related goals of the University of South Alabama (USA) are to strengthen its position as a research university of national stature and to provide the best possible education to its students and to all citizens through outreach programs and other professional activities. These goals are typically realized through the work of faculty in discipline-based academic departments, but increasingly the university aims to foster partnerships that cross boundaries between disciplines, academic departments, and colleges/schools. Some of the most effective partnerships are commonly known as either Centers or Institutes. Centers or Institutes employ highly competent faculty, staff, and students and offer constituents a critical mass of talent that surpasses the capabilities of each of their individual efforts or organizations. Supported by strong academic goals, these partnerships create new and diverse opportunities that expand the knowledge, economic condition, and quality of life of our region and the nation.

2. Scope

2.1 This Guide is specifically intended to facilitate the establishment and operation of appropriate USA institutional Centers or Institutes, to prevent the creation of units that unnecessarily duplicate the mission and programs of existing units, and to give USA administrators responsibility for their management. This regulation will apply to all organized research, instructional, or public service units that represent themselves to the university community and to the general public as being a USA “Center” or “Institute” except service centers or specialized facilities that provide routine activities such as testing or analysis.

2.2 Inter-institutional centers, institutes, or consortia are defined as involving the participation of multiple institutions, where USA participates as a member. These inter-institutional activities are usually managed administratively and financially with substantial involvement of one of the participating members.

2.3 Because the designation as a USA Center or Institute connotes an organizational representation of the university’s significant programmatic capacity, such designations are only reserved for those proposed units that have complied with this guide.

3. Definitions

3.1 Center

Centers endeavor to cross disciplines and merge complementary fields of exploration that may exist in different departments but that when joined in partnership serve to advance knowledge or service in directions not previously envisioned. A USA Center is an organized unit designed to facilitate interdisciplinary activity in any university mission (instruction, research, or outreach). A Center may be designated as a research, public service, and/or instructional unit. Centers may also be Membership Centers, and/or seek shared industrial support to maximize technology transfer impact.

3.2 Institute

An Institute is an organized unit that has a much larger-scale mission and set of goals and objectives than a Center and usually involves significant contributions of faculty. An Institute may create Centers as administrative units within its organization. If funding is given to an Institute with the specification that it be used for a Center, that Center must be established as a separate unit of the Institute using this Guide.

3.3 Membership Centers and Institutes

Membership Centers or Institutes derive the bulk of their funds from fees or assessments paid by members and deposited into a common university account. Guidance on organizing and operating Membership Centers or Institutes may be found in this guide.

3.4 USA Mitchell Cancer Institute

The USA Mitchell Cancer Institute (USAMCI) is an established Division of USA, organized directly under the Office of the President. The USAMCI comprises dedicated facilities, budget, and mission-specific, interdisciplinary faculty tracks. The USAMCI Director is appointed by the President and reports directly to the President.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Vice President for Research and Lead-Vice-Presidents

The Vice President for Research, has been delegated the responsibility to act on behalf of the President in all compliance matters related to Centers or Institutes. For each Center or Institute within an existing College, a lead Vice-President will be appointed by the President. The Director of the USAMCI serves as the lead for the USAMCI. Each lead Vice-President and the Director of USAMCI and/or his/her designee will provide leadership, oversight, and management of a Center or Institute.

4.2 Responsible Administrators

In collaboration with the Research Office, it will be the responsibility of the Deans of the College(s) in which the Center or Institute is established, Director of USAMCI, Vice Presidents, the President or the appointed designee(s) of these officers (hereinafter collectively referred to as the “responsible administrator”) to establish by-laws, the internal procedures by which his/her unit will review a Center or Institute proposal, or any other action proposed for a Center or Institute. All such Center or Institute proposal reviews or any other recommended action(s) made to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) by the responsible administrator(s) will have been made in accordance with the aforementioned internal procedures. All actions will be made only upon the final recommendation of the responsible administrator(s).

4.3 The Director and Advisory Committee(s)

All Centers or Institutes must have a Director appointed by the President or lead Vice-President with the concurrence of the President. The by-laws for each Center/Institute should specify reporting lines of authority. Typically the Director will report directly to the Dean for centers or institutes located within an existing college or school. Directors of intercollegiate centers or institutes normally will report to a Vice President. The appointed Center/Institute Director, with the concurrence of the President and the lead Vice-President, will have the option of appointing an Advisory Committee (which is recommended). The Advisory Committee has only advisory responsibilities to the Center or Institute and gives immediate assistance to the Director and to the responsible administrator(s) in the form of recommendations. An Advisory Committee is responsible for advising the Center or Institute on programmatic direction, and in the case of membership centers, on the distribution of membership fees for project funding.

The Center or Institute Director shall provide overall coordination of all programmatic activities, seek external funding where appropriate, oversee the management of day-to-day center operations, convene periodic Advisory Committee meetings, receive advice, execute the directions provided by the Advisory Committee and ensure the viability of the Center or Institute in meeting its objectives.

5. Creating and Managing USA Centers or Institutes

5.1 Creating Centers or Institutes is a two-step authorization process requested through the President. The first step is the Authorization to Plan, which will last for no more than two (2) years and must be approved by the President; and the second step is the Authorization to Establish, which must be approved by the President.

5.1.1 Authorization to Plan

In consultation with appropriate responsible administrators, the lead faculty and/or staff will prepare an electronic "authorization to plan" letter that must clearly address the following points:

- Relationship of the Center or Institute to the mission of USA.
- Goals and objectives.
- The value added beyond the existing structure of USA or through existing Centers and Institutes.
- Similar units that exist elsewhere in the state/region, and any proposed relationships with them.
- Organizational structure, including the units involved and the composition of an optional advisory committee(s).
- Faculty and staff involved (including the name of the proposed Director).

- Instructional programs, research programs, and/or service programs to be established with intended outcomes.
- Sources, amounts, and duration of funds required and available for at least five (5) years.
- Required matching or cost sharing funds.
- Space and capital equipment requirements.
- Support and mentoring plans regarding the promotion and tenure of participating junior faculty.

The “Authorization to Plan” letter must be forwarded by the appropriate, responsible administrator(s) to the lead Vice-President (or Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate). In consultation with the responsible administrator(s) and appropriate mission-specific Executive Officer(s) (such as the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Health Sciences, the Director of the Mitchell Cancer Institute, or the Vice President for Research) the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) will assess completeness of the request and determine the most appropriate review and oversight bodies (particularly relevant faculty committees such as University Standing Committees) from which to solicit comments and coordinate a comment period.. Upon resolution of requested edits and consideration of other comments, the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate), and after consultation with other Executive Officers, shall make a recommendation to the President regarding the authorization to plan the Center or Institute. If the President approves the recommendation, planning may begin. The lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) shall notify the relevant administrators of the President’s decision and, under usual circumstances, designate a Dean to oversee the director of the Center or Institute in developing the Authorization plan.

5.1.2 Authorization to Establish

At any time during the two-year planning period, the lead faculty/staff may submit a request to establish the Center or Institute. The faculty involved will prepare a written proposal that will include an electronic draft of the Charter of the Center or Institute (and draft Bylaws, and Membership Agreement, if required). The draft must include all of the following:

- The name of the proposed Center or Institute.
- The specific mission, objectives, and goals of the proposed Center or Institute, including proposed programs and their expected outcomes.
- The Center or Institute's relationship to or potential impact upon the existing academic departments, colleges and/or schools, and other Centers and Institutes at USA.
- The name of the proposed Director, and a detailed description of any proposed advisory committees or directive boards.

- Budget estimates for the first (1st) year of operation, projections for the following four (4) years, and anticipated sources of funding.
- A statement identifying the current space and capital equipment that have been secured for the operation of the Center or Institute and realistic projections of future needs.
- A statement regarding the efficacy of plans implemented to assure proper recognition of participating junior faculty where relevant.
- A statement about anticipated effects of the proposed unit on the instructional programs of USA, and the provisions for advanced or graduate training or degree programs.
- A description of the proposed Center or Institute's administrative structure, including an organizational chart showing the relationship of the proposed Center or Institute to the existing organizations of USA and the internal organization of the proposed Center or Institute.
- Any additional information that may bear directly upon the proposal.

The proposal must be forwarded, with the responsible administrator(s) endorsement, to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate). In consultation with the responsible administrator and appropriate mission-specific Executive Officer(s), the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) will assess completeness of the request and determine the most appropriate review and oversight bodies (particularly relevant faculty committees such as University Standing Committees) from which to solicit comments and coordinate a comment period as more fully described in the Guide for Creating and Managing USA Centers and Institutes. Upon resolution of requested edits and a reasonable consideration of other comments, the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) shall make a recommendation to the President For approval. If the decision is to discontinue planning, the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) will notify the responsible administrator(s) of the decision.

5.2 Managing an Established Center or Institute

Management of an established Center or Institute includes monitoring and reviewing activities and plans through periodic contact (site visits, advisory committee meetings, internal and external professional evaluations, etc.) and reporting (annual University and Center/Institute written reports), modifying Center or Institute activities and plans as required, or when warranted, disestablishing a Center or Institute.

5.2.1 Center or Institute Reports

Each Center or Institute is required to submit annual reports to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) using the institution's normal reporting process for assessment (i.e., TracDat). Copies of the assessment report must be made available to all responsible administrators including the Vice President for Research. 5.2.2 Periodic Center or Institute Reviews.

Centers and Institutes must be evaluated at least once in the first five (5) years after initial establishment, and at least once every seven years after the initial review. This Center/Institute review is analogous to the program review process used by academic programs at USA. The review will be made by a professional evaluation panel assembled by the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate), or by an internal evaluation panel assembled by the responsible administrator(s) and approved by the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate). Additional or more frequent reviews may be necessary if mandated by the Charter, Bylaws, or funding agency, or if required by USA administration.

The specific questions that will be addressed in the course of the review are as follows:

- Is current funding of the Center or Institute sufficient to continue its operation?
- Are support, training, and graduation rates of students consistent with the Center or Institute's stated goals and objectives?
- Is faculty participation sufficient to continue Center or Institute operations?
- Are faculty being appropriately mentored toward tenure and/or promotion? Are contributions of junior faculty appropriately recognized by the Center or Institute and the faculty member's home department?
- Is the quality of scholarly activity by faculty, professional staff, and students reflected in its output (publications, patents, copyrights, etc.)?
- Do current operations of the Center or Institute agree with the most recent Charter, goals, and objectives of the Center or Institute? (Does it duplicate the efforts of other Centers and Institutes?)
- Does the financial audit and professional evaluation demonstrate that the Center or Institute is being managed properly? (Were any serious problems discovered?)
- Are required matching funds, start-up funds, or capital equipment still appropriate and available? (If the Center or Institute was originally funded with finite-term [three (3) year, five (5) year, etc.] start-up funds from the University or other granting agencies, has it been able to attract sufficient outside funds to continue without additional institutional support?)
- Is space required for operation of the Center or Institute available?
- Are the Center or Institute clients being served?

Upon completion of the Review, the responsible administrator(s) shall make a recommendation to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) regarding the continuation of the Center or Institute. The lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate), after consultation with the Executive Officers, shall make a recommendation to the President for action.

5.2.3 Changes to the Name, Mission, or Personnel of a Center or Institute

In the normal operation of a Center or Institute, it is expected that there will be evolutionary changes to the Center's name, mission and personnel. For changes in personnel, such as the center director, the responsible administrator(s) will report the intended change in writing to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate). Any changes to the name and/or the mission of the Center or Institute must be reviewed and approved by the responsible administrator(s), the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate), and appropriate Executive Officers. The Center Director must submit a written proposal to the responsible administrator(s) and/or to the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate) justifying the need for the proposed changes and illustrating how the change will better reflect the current activities of the Center or Institute. A request for a change in name may not be used to make major changes to the fundamental mission(s) of the Center or Institute as stated in its Request to Establish.

5.2.4 Disestablishment of an USA Center or Institute

If the focus, performance or mission of a Center or Institute is no longer appropriate, the Center or Institute will be disestablished by the President.

5.2.5 Intellectual Property

All intellectual property created by USA Centers or Institutes is the property of the university as provided under published university policies and regulations. Whenever intellectual property terms and conditions are to be included in official documents (e.g., research agreements, member or industry affiliate agreements, etc.), such terms shall be presented to the Vice President for Research by the lead Vice-President (or the Director of the USAMCI, as appropriate), the designated Dean (if there is one), and the Director of the Center or Institute for a coordinated review with the Office of Technology Transfer. Intellectual property provisions must be clearly defined in the Center/Institute Membership Agreement, even if they are included in the Bylaws.

Tenure Issues. Because tenure resides only in a college or department, no person shall hold tenure or a rank leading to tenure in any center with the exception of those faculty appointed to the Mitchell Cancer Institute. A faculty member holding tenure or tenure-track status in an academic unit may hold a term appointment or a joint appointment in a center. That person's tenure or tenure-track status shall remain, however, in the academic unit that granted it. The appointment of a faculty member to a center must be approved by the lead Vice-President after review and approval by the Dean and Department Chair, or in the case of an appointment in the USAMCI, by the Director of the USAMCI. The rights that a faculty member may have to return to an academic unit ("retreat rights") shall be determined under that individual's employment contract.