



## Centers and Institutes: Establishment, Governance and Programmatic Oversight

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**1.0 Purpose**  
**2.0 Policy**  
**3.0 Procedures**  
**4.0 Definitions**  
**5.0 References**  
**6.0 Approval and Revisions**

### 1.0 Purpose

Centers and institutes are proven, effective means of supporting interdisciplinary research, instruction, and outreach. They allow faculty and their associates from varied backgrounds and expertise to come together to solve common problems that cannot otherwise be addressed, be formally recognized as an operational entity within the university, and they provide substantial growth in support for faculty, students, and facilities across the university.

Because of the financial, personnel, and reputational investment that the university puts into these entities, consistent mechanisms for approving, inventorying, reviewing, and terminating *centers* are important. This policy document provides guidance regarding the establishment, governance and programmatic functions and responsibilities of these *centers*.

### 2.0 Policy

The university encourages the formation of centers that enhance the achievement of its instructional, research, and outreach missions in ways that cannot be achieved through existing organizations or means. In order to consolidate discussion throughout this policy, the italicized term center is used to describe the collection of centers and institutes. Clarification is provided when relevant.

Goals accomplished by establishing a center include: (1) facilitating research collaborations seeking external research funding; (2) disseminating research results through conferences, meetings, and other activities; (3) strengthening graduate and/or undergraduate education by providing students with specialized learning opportunities; (4) providing services and facilities that enable research by other university entities; and/or (5) providing outreach programs related to the unit's technical areas of expertise.

To effectively further the mission of the university, centers must meet several criteria:

- Fulfill a need that cannot be adequately addressed through existing organizational units;
- Have a clear, unique mission and strategic vision that is directly tied to the mission of Virginia Tech and the administrative unit in which the *center* is housed;
- Have an identified director who is equipped to effectively lead the *center*;
- Have sufficient breadth of faculty participation to ensure that its success does not depend either intellectually or financially on a single individual;
- Have well-defined governance structure and expectations of participants;
- Have strong support from its administrative leadership and participating units;
- Have a comprehensive financial plan to operate sustainably;
- Have concrete goals and metrics for progress and success; and
- Have a unique, descriptive name and acronym that does not overlap with other *centers* and units at Virginia Tech.



## Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Centers are established in one of four categories of administrative homes: in a department (a “department center”), a college (a “college center”), an Institute (an “institute center”), or a senior administrative office (a “university center”). The administrative home is determined by the scope of the *center* and units involved.

On occasion, external sponsorship or new mandates motivate the creation of a *center*. The “sponsored centers” have different thresholds for meeting these criteria and different requirements for reporting and review than those founded through primarily university resources and strategic intent.

Institutes are the primary means for coordinating and supporting large, cross-university, interdisciplinary endeavors across strategic focus areas. Due to the expansive scope, broad mission, and substantial resource investment in Institutes, they require additional oversight and cross-university engagement. Requests to establish a new Institute are expected to occur infrequently and only after careful, deliberative consideration. Centers are generally not established at the university-level, and the university does not have sponsored institutes.

All matters relating to research, instruction, and outreach at Virginia Tech, including the entities described herein, fall under the jurisdiction and purview of the Executive Vice President and Provost (“Provost”) as Chief Academic Officer of the university. The provost engages other university leadership in an oversight role for these entities that align with their respective domain areas.

This policy does not apply to cultural or community centers, nor to administrative centers.

### 2.1 Records

Maintenance of a central archive of records related to *centers* is integral to the successful governance and oversight of these units. The Office of the Provost maintains a comprehensive archive of records that document the authorization of *centers*, including the communication approving the *center*, a copy of the current charter, timetables for periodic review of the *center* and its director, the reports generated by those reviews, and annual reports. The Office of the Provost maintains an online list of all approved *centers*, their directors, and administrative affiliations.

The *center* director is responsible for ensuring an up-to-date charter for the *center* is available at all times. The charter includes:

- **Vision and Mission;**
- **Description:** Overview of the purpose of the *center* and the unique benefit it brings to the university, identification of which mission areas (research, education, outreach) the *center* engages with and description of mechanisms for that engagement;
- **Governance:** Director, administrator, members of the stakeholders’ committee and advisory committee (as appropriate), and mechanisms for faculty and student involvement;
- **Financial plan:** the budget for the *center*, including sources and uses of funds, to sustain the center over its first five years;
- **Metrics and goals:** concrete metrics and goals, including methodology for acquiring data, for a five year period of *center* operation.

The director and administrator are responsible for maintaining the official records, including minutes of stakeholder committee and advisory committee (as appropriate) meetings, annual reports, and periodic audit reports.



## 2.2 Compliance

The provost or designee will request a review of all *centers* that are not in compliance with their review and reporting requirements.

Newly established *centers* must have their complete Proposal on record with the Office of the Provost database. Existing *centers* must submit a revised charter to the Office of the Provost within six months of the delivery of the final report of their next scheduled five-year review.

The use of the terms “center” and “institute” are restricted to entities formed through the procedures described in this policy. Existing entities that use “center” or “institute” in their name have until 10/1/2025 to change their name, submit a letter of intent to become an established center, or work with the provost or designee to clarify the purpose and name of the organization as a legacy designation.

## 3.0 Procedures

### 3.1 Establishment of New Centers and Institutes

Inasmuch as a new *center* creates additional demands for resources, oversight, reporting and review, and represents a major commitment of duties for one or more faculty members, there shall be compelling, strategic reasons to establish a new *center*.

To create a new *center*, the director and administrator of the proposed center submits a letter of intent to the Office of the Provost, which initiates a consultation process, which culminates in a formal proposal describing how the *center* meets the criteria in Section 2.0 is submitted to, reviewed by, and approved by the appropriate vice president or provost.

In the case of a new Institute, the provost establishes a committee that includes the proposed administrator, appropriate deans, institute directors, and the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer (or designee), and chair of the appropriate commission(s) to engage in the consultation process. Neither the University Council, its cabinet, nor the representative senate to which a commission reports has a role in the establishment of a *center*.

The table below summarizes who is involved in the consultation process for establishing a new *center*, who has the authority to approve a new *center*, and who is notified of the creation of a new *center*. The vice president(s) or vice provost(s) (VP) and commission(s) involved in *center* review and approval are determined by the mission area(s) the *center* plans to engage with.

Administrative Category	Consultation	Commission review	Approval
Department-level Center	VP	no	VP
College-level Center	VP	no	VP
Institute-level Center	VP	no	VP
University-level Center	VP	yes	VP
Sponsored Center	None	no	Provost
Institute	Review team established by the provost	yes	Provost



Decisions may be appealed to the provost, whose decision is final.

### 3.1.1 Review and Approval Process for New Centers

#### Letter of Intent

The initial step in requesting to establish a new *center* is the submission of a letter of intent (letter) to the Office of the Provost. The submission of the letter begins a consultative process involving the approving administrative offices and other organizations across the university to help define the *center*.

The letter addresses as many of the criteria for establishment as possible, but at minimum includes the mission and vision and describes how the *center* will interact with other entities at the university with apparent similar areas of mission-related focus in a way that bolsters the university's success and visibility in supporting complex academic activities through collaborative research, instruction, and/or outreach. The letter identifies the mission areas that the *center* anticipates engaging with. The letter must be endorsed by both its proposed administrator and director.

Provost or designee notifies the vice president(s) or vice provost(s) (VP) in each identified mission area to advise the proposers in developing the proposal for the *center*. This advisory process includes identification of potential partners, feedback on the financial model or governance structure, or provision of examples, best practices, and templates. This consultation may also result in a decision not to move forward with a proposal.

#### Proposal

If the proposed administrator and director decide to move forward, they develop a proposal for the *center*. The proposal addresses all of the criteria necessary for an effective *center* described in Section 2.0. Components of the proposal include:

- **Rationale** – Description of how the *center* addresses all of the criteria, especially the requirement to fulfill a need not otherwise met;
- **Charter** – The official governing document for the proposed *center*, see section 2.1 on Records;
- **Letters of endorsement** - Letters from all units that provide monetary or other support for the *center*, or are otherwise significantly involved.

#### Review and Approval

The proposal is forwarded to the appropriate VP(s) for next steps. For department, college, and institute centers, the VP(s) evaluate and approve, decline, or invite revision of the proposal. This evaluation is completed within 30 business days.

For university-level centers, the proposal is forwarded to the commission(s) that oversee the relevant mission areas for review. The commission reviews the proposal and makes recommendations for revision to ensure they adequately and clearly address the criteria for establishing a new center. After consideration of the proposal, the commission(s) vote on recommending whether the cognizant VP should authorize the center under the terms specified. The recommendation is forwarded to the cognizant VP, who reviews this input in reaching a decision regarding the proposed center. Neither the University Council, its cabinet, nor the representative senate to which a commission reports has a role in the establishment of a center.



The final decision regarding approval or denial of a proposed new *center* is transmitted to the proposers. This documentation includes a copy of the final proposal. A decision by a VP to approve a new center is forwarded to the provost. A denial may be appealed to the provost; the decision reached by the provost is final.

Approved proposals are also reviewed by the Office of the University's Senior Vice President and Chief Business Officer or their designee. Upon review of the proposal, training and/or management consulting for financial and administrative operations may be recommended for the proposed director and other administrative personnel within the center.

### **3.1.2 Review and Approval Process for New Institutes**

#### **Letter of Intent**

The initial step in requesting to establish a new Institute is the submission of a letter of intent to the provost. The letter addresses as many of the criteria for establishment as possible, but at minimum identifies the mission and vision, and a justification that the institute would fill a need not otherwise met. The letter must be endorsed by both its proposed administrator and director.

The provost appoints a review team to study and advise on the proposal for the new Institute. The review team includes:

- The proposed administrator,
- The Senior Vice President and Chief Business Officer (or their designee),
- Two or more college deans,
- One or more directors from existing institutes, and
- The chair of the appropriate commission(s).

This review team serves in an advisory role.

If favorable, a formal proposal for the new institute is requested and the commission in the corresponding mission area(s) is notified for planning purposes. The review team advises the proposer in the development of the formal proposal to establish the Institute.

#### **Proposal**

The proposal for an institute contains the same information as the proposal for a center. The proposal is developed with the advice and endorsement of the review team. The endorsement of the review team is appended to the proposal.

#### **Review and Approval**

The commission reviews the drafted institute proposal and makes recommendations for revision to ensure clear specification of objectives, sources of support, and criteria for future performance assessment. After consideration of the draft proposal, the commission votes on recommending whether the provost should authorize the institute under the terms specified. The provost reviews this input in reaching a decision regarding the proposed institute.

The provost's decision is final.



### 3.1.3 Review and Approval Process for New Sponsored Centers

Because of their external motivation and support, sponsored centers do not require all of the steps for establishment for other *centers*. However, it is considered best practice for sponsored centers to meet the criteria in section 2.0. At a minimum, new sponsored centers must have a different name from existing organizational units and must not share an acronym with an existing center. If university resources are also required for the sponsored center, the existing process for obtaining a university commitment must be followed prior to commitment to the sponsor.

Upon award or agreement for the sponsored center, the center director sends to the provost a letter than includes: The unique name and acronym of the proposed sponsored center (in accordance with Policy 12005 on Commemorative Tributes, as appropriate);

- The director, administrator and stakeholder committee (if applicable) of the sponsored center;
- The mission, vision, and scope of the sponsored center;
- The anticipated lifetime of the sponsored center supported by on sponsored funds; and
- The anticipated reporting and review processes required by the sponsor; and
- If the sponsored center also has university financial, space, or personnel support, the director also submits a detailed letter of support for these commitments.

The provost decides what additional reporting and review requirements are necessary for the university support of the sponsored center, per Section 3.3.

## 3.2 Governance and Administration of Centers

### 3.2.1 Governance

The proposal to establish a *center* details the governance structure in its charter. The governance structure reflects the scope and mission of the respective *center* but has several attributes in common with all *centers*. The requirements of the administrator and the stakeholders committee are determined by the administrative category and scope of the center.

Administrative Category	Administrator	Stakeholders Committee Required?
University-level Center	VP	Yes
Institute-level Center	Institute Director	No
College-level Center	Dean	Yes, if units outside the college provide resources
Department-level Center	Department Head or Chair	Yes, if units outside the department provide resources
Sponsored Center	Variable, may be any level	No
Institute	VP	Yes



### 3.2.1.1 The Director

The director is the individual to whom authority is delegated for fiscal, administrative, and programmatic/scholarly functions of the *center*. They are primarily responsible for establishing business practices and internal controls within their organization to ensure compliance with university policies and procedures and ensure fiscal accountability and the proper stewardship of university resources. This responsibility includes compliance with [Policy 3100, Fiscal Responsibility](#), which requires managers to perform monthly financial reviews of the funds (accounts) assigned to them.

The director is responsible for recruiting, hiring, evaluating and dismissing employees of the *center* consistent with university policy and procedures, and to include Board of Visitors approval as appropriate.

In addition, the director is responsible for engaging faculty who are affiliated or associated with the *center* but are employed by other departments. In this capacity, the director recruits, selects, supports the evaluation of, and if necessary, dismisses faculty from their affiliation with the *center*. The procedures, obligations, and expectations of faculty affiliation is determined by the director in collaboration with the administrator and stakeholders committee (as appropriate).

The director, in conjunction with the administrator and the University Controller, is responsible for setting up the appropriate accounting organization structure within the university's accounting system. All administrative financial transactions are processed in accordance with university policies and procedures.

The director, in conjunction with the administrator, Vice President for Human Resources, and the University Controller, is responsible for setting up the appropriate signature authority for both personnel and accounting transactions of the *center*, and for keeping authorization up to date as personnel and responsibilities change. Signature authority approval lies with the administrator and may be delegated as appropriate within university rules and regulations.

### 3.2.1.2 The Administrator

For matters related to operations of the *center*, the director shall report *solely* to the administrator. The director may report to someone other than the administrator for their scholarly, instructional, or other duties not related to the *center*.

The authority to appoint and dismiss the director ultimately resides with the administrator. The administrator seeks the advice of the stakeholders committee (as appropriate) in matters related to the appointment or dismissal of the director.

The administrator has responsibility for fiscal oversight and accountability at the operational level. The *center's* financial records are within the Banner hierarchy of the administrator. It is the responsibility of the administrator to perform monitoring and oversight review activities to assure that all administrative and financial activities of all *centers* within their purview are in compliance with all applicable policies and standards. This oversight may be conducted with similar processes the administrator uses for other units in their purview. Documentation of this oversight is retained by the administrator for audit purposes.



A vice president, vice provost, or dean may designate the conduct of certain duties of the administrator role to an appropriate associate vice president or associate dean. However, the vice president or dean retains ultimate authority and responsibility for the financial and administrative affairs of the *center*.

### 3.2.1.3 Stakeholders Committee

Stakeholders Committees provide strategic oversight and advice for *centers* where multiple units outside the administrative home have substantial financial and programmatic interest. They are required for all institutes and university-level centers, and for *centers* with substantial programmatic or financial support from multiple units outside of the administrative home.

The stakeholders committee is responsible for governance of the *center*, reviews the financial and administrative functions of the *center*, and receives annual reports from the director as well as internal audit reports of the *center*. They meet at least once per year to review the financial and administrative functions and programmatic activities and outcomes of the *center* and receive annual reports from the director as well as internal audit reports of the *center*.

The stakeholders committee is composed of the administrator, a senior leader for finance for the administrative home, and leadership of all units with significant engagement with the *center*. For an institute or university-level center, the stakeholders committee includes the Vice President for Finance and deans of participating colleges.

The director is an ex-officio member of the stakeholders committee but can be excluded from meetings, or portions of meetings, where matters of that individual's performance and continued service are discussed.

The Chair of the Stakeholders Committee is elected by members of that committee or appointed by mutual agreement except that the chair is not the administrator to whom the director reports, unless an exception is approved by the provost or designee. Designees are permitted to serve as proxies at meetings of the stakeholders committee.

### 3.2.1.4 Employee Reporting Relationships

Faculty (except tenure track faculty) and staff may have their primary appointment in the *center*. They are most commonly research faculty on restricted appointments, consistent with university policies. Instructional faculty (e.g., collegiate faculty, clinical faculty, professor of practice faculty, and instructors) will typically have a primary appointment in an academic department. Regular appointments in *centers* may be approved if the unit has sufficient evidence of the ability to pay salary, fringe, and other benefits for at least three years (see the faculty handbook for details). Exceptions to these practices should be coordinated with the Office of Faculty Affairs prior to implementation.

*Centers* may not grant tenure nor be the tenure home of tenure track faculty. For tenure track faculty spending a substantial amount of time associated with activities of the *center*, the center director will be consulted by the department head, chair, or school director of the tenure track faculty members' home department regarding the annual evaluation and promotion and tenure evaluations.



### 3.3 Financial Oversight and Periodic Review

All *centers* and their directors are subject to regular reviews to help ensure that established *centers* are making progress towards the objectives defined in their charters and maintaining their strategic alignment with the university's mission.

#### 3.3.1 Annual Evaluation

##### 3.3.1.1 Annual Performance Evaluation of Directors

Annual reviews of *center* directors are informal evaluations and rely on information readily available such as the director's faculty activity report for the evaluation period and the *center's* annual report. The director's annual review of their duties related to the *center* is performed by the *center's* administrator. This review informs their annual performance evaluation and recommendation of salary adjustments in proportion to the level of effort the director has in their duties related to the *center*.

For example, the director for a small *center* of limited scope is likely to spend most of their time on research and teaching that is not uniquely for the benefit of the *center*. In this case, the administrator provides input to the annual evaluation process conducted by the director's home department head. On the other extreme, an institute director spends the vast majority of their time in work conducted for the benefit of the institute, and their administrator leads the annual performance evaluation.

Annual performance evaluations and salary recommendations are otherwise conducted in accordance with applicable university policies.

##### 3.3.1.2 Annual Programmatic Evaluation of Centers

For all *centers*, programmatic performance (as distinct from fiscal and administrative matters) is addressed on an ongoing basis by the director, participating faculty, the administrator, the stakeholders committee (where relevant) and, ultimately, the provost.

#### 3.3.2 Periodic Evaluation

In addition to an annual evaluation of *centers* and their directors, both are subject to formal evaluations every five years. The Office of the Provost notifies the administrator of each *center* when a periodic review of the unit or its director is scheduled for that fiscal year. For institutes or university-level centers, the chair(s) of the appropriate university commission(s) is also notified regarding reviews each fiscal year.

Based upon a review of ongoing circumstances and input received from individuals involved with the *center*, the administrator to whom the director reports may decide that a more frequent review is warranted.

The administrator may choose to review the *center* and its director separately or simultaneously. If the reviews are conducted simultaneously, the review process should follow that for the *center* review, and the final report must separately address the performance of the *center* and of its director.

Some *centers*, especially sponsored or legally mandated *centers*, have director and programmatic reviews dictated by those sponsors. In most circumstances, those reviews are considered adequate for the purposes of this policy,



and additional reviews are not necessary. The reports resulting from those reviews are maintained by the administrator.

### 3.3.2.1 Center or Institute Director Review

Periodic reviews of *center* directors are conducted in accordance with the general principles below:

1. The administrator is responsible for appointing the review committee and its chair. The review committee is composed of individuals who have personal knowledge and experience of the director's leadership but are not direct reports of the director.
2. The review assesses both the director's operational management and their programmatic leadership of the *center's* activities and personnel.
3. Input is solicited from faculty, staff, and students (as appropriate) who have substantial engagement with the director. This input is gathered via surveys or interviews. Standard survey instruments are available from the [Research and Innovation Center Resources website](#). The administrator determines the survey recipients.
4. External reviewers are not typically involved in the review of the director.
5. The report of the committee is confidential.

Following the completion of the review, the review committee submits a report to the administrator, who meets with the review committee to discuss the submitted report. The administrator reviews the report with the chair of the stakeholders committee (as appropriate) and makes a decision regarding the reappointment of the director. The administrator then reviews the report and the decision regarding reappointment with the director within 15 days of the meeting between the administrator and the chair of the stakeholders committee (as appropriate).

Within 15 days of this conversation, the administrator notifies the relevant entities (e.g., the Office of the Provost, the commission as appropriate, stakeholders committee and advisory board as appropriate, director's home department head for tenured or tenure-track faculty, etc.) regarding the decision on reappointment as the *center* director.

### 3.3.2.2 Center or Institute Review

*Centers* undergo a formal review every five years are conducted in accordance with the general principles below:

1. The administrator is responsible for appointing the review committee and its chair. The review committee is composed of representatives of organizations involved in the center but does not include employees of the center. Review committees for institutes and university centers have at least five members; and must include a representative of the appropriate governance commission(s) and a director for another institute or university center.
2. The review assesses the accomplishments and performance of the center against its established purpose and goals as described in its charter.
3. The review's assessment includes the adequacy and efficacy of the center's resources (including financial, personnel, and facilities), and reaffirms that the center is not duplicative of other units at the university.
4. Input is solicited from faculty, staff, students, and external partners or parties (as appropriate) who have substantial engagement with the center. This input is gathered via surveys or interviews. Standard survey



instruments are available from the [Research and Innovation Center Resources website](#) and may be modified by the committee as appropriate. The administrator determines the survey recipients.

5. Reviews for university centers and Institutes solicit substantial input from external parties who work in one or more of the disciplinary focus areas of the unit under review.
6. The report provides an overview of key accomplishments towards the center's mission, as well as recommendations to the director and the administrator for improved mission delivery and operations of the center and recommends re-authorization or termination of the center.

Before the report is finalized, the director is asked to review the draft report and respond with corrections to factual data in the draft report. Recommendations of the review committee are not shared with the director at this stage.

The committee then prepares a final report. In the case of university centers and institutes, the final report is presented to the governance commission(s) involved in its establishment. The commission is asked to vote on the question of accepting the report. The report, along with the outcome of the commission's vote, is then submitted to the university center or institute and the administrator.

Neither the University Council, its cabinet, nor the representative senate to which a commission reports has a role in the review process.

The administrator meets with the review committee to discuss the submitted report. The administrator has 45 days to act on the recommendations of the review committee. The administrator has the final decision regarding the expansion, continuation, or termination of the *center*.

A copy of the final written report as well as a written statement from the administrator regarding final actions made following the review process is sent to relevant entities (e.g., the Office of the Provost, the commission as appropriate, stakeholder committee and advisory board as appropriate).

### **3.3.2. Response to the Review**

Following the review, the director, in collaboration with the administrator and stakeholder committee, revises the *center* charter as necessary in response to the recommendations in the report. This revision includes, at least, updated goals and metrics for the next five year period. These revised documents are submitted to the Office of the Provost within six months of the final report.

### **3.3.3 Requested Reviews**

*Center* inactivity or non-compliance with this policy will prompt a request for review by the provost or designee. In addition, the administrator, stakeholder's committee, provost or designee may request a review outside of the periodic review cycle.

The administrator conducts the review using procedures appropriate for the scope of the *center* and the circumstances motivating the review. Regardless of the procedures used, the review must result in specific suggestions for ameliorating the deficiencies or a recommendation of termination. The administrator establishes specific metrics and a well-defined timeline, not to exceed two years, for the *center* to address deficiencies in order to avoid termination.



### 3.3.4 Annual Reports

The directors of all *centers* shall provide an annual report to the administrator and the stakeholder committee (as appropriate). This report is submitted to the Office of the Provost for archive. The report is tailored to the scope and mission of the *center*, but at a minimum includes:

- Accomplishments for the reporting period along the key metrics specified in the *center's* proposal, or agreed to by the administrator and director;
- Prior fiscal year income and expenditures, including Virginia Tech Foundation accounts, associated with the unit;
- Proposed budget for the coming fiscal year.

An example template is available at [Research and Innovation Center Resources website](#). The reporting period is determined by mutual agreement between the director and administrator; however, university centers and institutes must report on accomplishments on a fiscal year basis. All reports must be submitted within three months of the end of the reporting period.

Sponsored centers, or those with other annual reporting requirements, may use the reporting template and timeline dictated by their sponsor as the basis for reporting accomplishments. Supplemental reporting is required for Sponsored centers with substantial university support, as determined by the provost.

The provost or designee creates an annual report of all centers created, changed, or terminated in the prior fiscal year. This report is distributed to the Commission on Research.

### 3.3.5 Periodic Audit

Audits of *centers* are scheduled by university Internal Audit according to the level of risk associated with the operations of the organization. The audit report is distributed to the director, the stakeholders committee, the administrator and appropriate vice president or dean, as well as the President, the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, the Vice President for Finance, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the Compliance, Audit, and Risk Committee of the Board of Visitors.

## 3.4 Substantial Change or Termination

*Centers* are not considered permanent entities; they have clearly defined missions that address specific goals. With the passage of time, issues that drove establishment of these units evolve, and the administrator and director consider the ongoing need for the *center*. In addition, changes in participating faculty and staff; the evolution of institutional, collegiate, or departmental priorities; or lack of resources or leadership motivate substantial change or termination of the *center*.

The motivation for substantial change or termination of a *center* is typically the result of:

1. Consensus among the administrator, director, stakeholders committee (as appropriate) and participating faculty;
2. The result of a periodic or requested review of the *center*.

The administrator has final authority to change or terminate a *center*.



### 3.4.1 Substantial Change

Directors and administrators maintain up-to-date *center* charters, in consultation with their stakeholders committee (as appropriate). Changes may occur at any time but must at least be made in response to the latest five-year review. Changes should not compromise any of the criteria for a successful *center*, as described in section 2.0 of this policy.

The director submits a letter describing changes to a *center* to the provost or designee for notification or approval, depending on the nature of the changes per the table below. This letter must include endorsements by the administrator, leaders of other units with substantial resource or programmatic investment in the center, and the stakeholders committee (as appropriate), and a copy of the updated charter.

Nature of Change	Administrative level of <i>center</i>		Notes
	University	Other	
Name or Acronym	Provost approval	Provost approval	Reviews for uniqueness
Administrative level or alignment	Provost approval if new or old alignment is at university-level	Provost notification	Must include endorsement from both prior and new Administrator and plan for transitioning resources.
Addition of activity in new mission area	Appropriate Vice President and governance Commission approval	Provost and appropriate Vice President notification	Review only necessary when <i>center</i> enters a new mission area, not for adding activities in existing mission area
Discontinuation of activity in mission area	Appropriate Vice President and governance Commission approval	Provost and appropriate Vice President notification	Review only necessary when <i>center</i> discontinues all activity in a mission area
Merger of two or more centers	Commission and Vice President review, Provost approval	Provost notification	<i>Refer to section 3.4.2 on Termination</i>
Spin off of a center (i.e., creation of an independent center from a portion of the resources and mission line of another center)	Provost notification	Provost notification	Existing <i>center</i> documents reduction of budget or scope with Provost; Spun-out center established through process described in section 3.1
Change of Director	Provost notification	Provost notification	
Change of Governance	Provost approval	Provost notification	Substantial change of governance, such as creation or elimination of a Stakeholder or Advisory Board
Major change to financial plan	Provost notification	Provost notification	Major changes include: addition or elimination of unit providing financial support; establishment or elimination of College's F&A distribution; changes to financial plans typically accompanied by other changes to the center



### 3.4.2 Termination

To terminate a *center*, the administrator submits written notification to the provost that includes the reasoning behind the termination and a detailed plan to transfer to appropriate entities the oversight of resources, both human and material, that have been under *center* jurisdiction. This letter must be endorsed by the other units with financial, space, or personnel contributions to the *center*. Prevailing policies regarding re-assignment of FTEs and the custody/ownership of any capital equipment within the *center* apply.

In the case of university centers and institutes, the provost or designee reviews and approves the termination plan. Once approved, the appropriate governance commission is notified of the impending changes. In the case of institute, college, or department centers, no approval is necessary. The plan is implemented with all deliberate speed by the director working in conjunction with the administrator.

## 4.0 Definitions

A **CENTER** is a group of faculty in long-term affiliation and their associates formally recognized as part of the structure of the university, joined together to pursue research, instruction, and/or outreach goals that require the competence and capabilities of more than one faculty member.

*Centers* adopt names that reflect the preferences of the faculty or the norms of the academic discipline.

- A **UNIVERSITY CENTER** has objectives that require the substantial input of two or more disciplines or colleges, and involvement across a broad spectrum of the university. As a defining element, university centers are typically funded by appropriations, grants or contracts, for which administrative and fiscal control is assigned to the Office of the Provost or a relevant Vice President/Provost, rather than to a college or department.
- A **COLLEGE CENTER** has objectives that require the substantial input of two or more disciplines and typically involves faculty from two or more departments in a single college. College centers may include faculty from more than one college, as appropriate, but are typically smaller in scope than university centers and institutes.
- A **DEPARTMENTAL CENTER** has objectives that require the competence and capabilities of more than one faculty member, but primarily within the province of a single department or cooperating departments.
- AN **INSTITUTE CENTER** has objectives that require the competence and capabilities of faculty members from a broad spectrum of the university. As a defining element, institute centers receive funding and other support from the university institute to which it reports.

A **SPONSORED CENTER** is one that exists because the university received a grant, contract, or gift from an external sponsor or donor, and that sponsor or donor requires the designation of a *center* as a condition of the award. Sponsored centers may exist at any administrative level. A sponsored center typically exists so designated only until the grant, contract or gift is fully executed. This type of center may evolve into a different type of center through the process of establishing that type of center.

An **ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER** is an administrative office that provides services, oversight, or administrative support to faculty, staff, and students across the university.



An **INSTITUTE** furthers a major strategic objective of the university and receives a substantial annual investment of university funds for the conduct of its mission. Otherwise, an Institute has many of the same goals as previously defined for a university center. An Institute exists at the university level and the administrative home is either the Office of the Provost or other appropriate senior academic leader. University institutes may be categorized as either thematic or investment in nature:

- An **INVESTMENT INSTITUTE** leverages university funds to invest in targeted research areas with a particular emphasis on interdisciplinary programs. Such investments may include support for recruitment, retention and recognition of faculty, seed funds for new research projects, equipment purchases, support and management of core facilities, graduate student recruitment, undergraduate experiential learning opportunities, and research-related outreach activities. Programs and faculty receiving investment institute support have academic homes and are aligned with participating academic units.
- A **THEMATIC INSTITUTE** houses unique research facilities, faculty, staff and student talent, usually having physical infrastructure that carries out leading-edge interdisciplinary research in a particular area that aligns with the university's vision and mission. In addition to receiving investments of university funds, thematic institutes also have deep relationships with sponsors and receive substantial extramural research grants and/or contract funding through them.

The **ADMINISTRATOR** is the person holding the position of authority in the administrative home of the *center* (e.g., VP, institute director, dean, department head). The administrator has responsibility for fiscal oversight and accountability at the operational level. The director reports to the administrator for all fiscal and administrative matters.

The **DIRECTOR** is the individual who has the day-to-day authority for the fiscal, administrative, fiduciary, and programmatic/scholarly functions of a *center*.

The **MISSION AREA** is the component of Virginia Tech's tripartite mission (research, education, and outreach) that the *center* engages with. *centers* may engage with multiple aspects of the mission and may identify multiple mission areas as part of their scope. The mission areas determine which vice president(s), vice provost(s), and university commission(s) have oversight responsibilities for the *center*.

## 5.0 References

Policy on Commemorative Tributes, No. 12005  
<https://policies.vt.edu/assets/12005.pdf>

Policy on Commemorative Tributes provides guidance on commemorative naming, under the purview of the Commemorative Tributes Committee. Because the life of a university center or institute is not expected to continue indefinitely, gift funding for an institute or a center may be accomplished by endowment or current gifts. If accomplished by a current gift, the name of the institute or center shall generally be limited to the term during which the expendable gift provides funding. The policies and procedures for naming the center or institute shall be the same as for naming other major academic units of the university.



## 6.0 Approval and Revisions

Approved December 12, 1990, by Commission on Research Approved November 5, 1991, by University Council  
Revised and approved October 23, 1996

- Revision 1
  - Section 2.2. Changed title from Associate Provost for Research to Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs.
  - Section 2.5 eliminated "small operating budget" as possible center funding from the Research Division.
  - Section 2.9. Revised process for reauthorization of a center.

Approved August 1, 1999, by Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs, Kenneth L. Reifsnider.

Annual review October 30, 2001 by Vice Provost for Research, Leonard K. Peters. No revisions.

- Revision 2
  - Entire policy reviewed and revised to reflect evolution of research, outreach, and instructional centers at Virginia Tech and to establish guidelines for consistent treatment and accountability.
  - Policy retitled from Interdisciplinary Centers to Centers and University Institutes: Establishment, Governance and Programmatic Oversight to reflect applicability to all types of centers at the university.
  - Expectation that all centers across the mission areas of research, outreach and instruction would be subject to guidelines, such as establishment of charter and periodic review, not just university-level research centers.
  - Differentiation of key University Institutes with requirements for their establishment and review from other types of centers.

Approved April 6, 2011 by the Commission on Research

Approved May 2, 2011 by University Council

Approved May 2, 2011 by the President

- Revision 3
  - Clarification to Sections 3.4.2 and 3.5.1 was made with respect to the need to consider the recommendations of prior reviews and subsequent actions taken in response to those reviews when review committees conduct programmatic reviews of centers and University-level institutes as well as when conducting performance reviews of center/institute directors, per recommendation by Internal Audit.

Approved May 14, 2014, by Commission on Research

Approved May 14, 2014, by Robert Walters, Vice President for Research

Approved May 14, 2014, by President Charles W. Steger

Revision 4

Updates to titles reflecting organizational structure.

Approved November 21 2019 by Vice President for Policy and Governance, Kim O'Rourke.



- Revision 5

Entire policy reviewed and revised to reflect evolution of research, outreach, and instructional centers at Virginia Tech, stakeholder titles, and to consolidate discussion.

- Correction of titles of key stakeholders (Executive Vice President and Provost and of the Vice President for Research and Innovation) made throughout.
- Consolidation of discussion was performed (with graphics) to better clarify common expectations and key distinctions between operational entities addressed under this policy.
- Addition of statement of potential benefits of forming a center (section 2).
- Added the requirement that university level *centers* should have an advisory committee with external members (section 3.1).
- Added requirement that *centers* be uniquely identified in the universities financial management system. (section 3.3).
- Clarified the responsibility of reviews to that defined by the Charter and Stakeholders Committee, enabling streamlined evaluation of Departmental, College, and Institute *centers*, particularly those that do not receive institutional investment (section 3.4.2.2).
- Updated the definition of a Center to reflect the long-term nature of the faculty affiliations (section 4).
- Added language to permit center to adopt alternative names (section 4).

Approved April 20, 2020, by Commission on Research

Approved April 20, 2020, by Don Taylor, Vice President for Research and Innovation

Approved April 20, 2020, by President Tim Sands

- Revision 6

Technical update to titles and addition of section 5.0 referencing the Policy on Commemorative Tributes, No. 12005.

Approved August 27, 2020 by Vice President for Policy and Governance, Kim O'Rourke.

- Revision 7

A comprehensive revision to the policy included:

- Combining content from policies 13005 and 3020 into this policy and retiring policy 3020.
- Removed distinction between mission areas to allow centers to be involved in more than one mission.
- Created category of sponsored center.
- Provided criteria for establishing and reauthorizing a center.
- Updated expectations for metrics, goals, and compliance, including consequences of noncompliance.
- Simplified center review and reporting aspects, allowing administrator flexibility for establishing processes.

Approved November 7, 2023 by Faculty Senate

Approved November 9, 2023 by Commission on Research

Approved February 5, 2024 by University Council.

Approved February 5, 2024 by President Tim Sands.