

2023 (FY24) Ignite for Centers Program (Spring) 2023 Request for Proposals

The Division of Research (DR) is pleased to announce a new program, **Ignite for Centers (IC)**, which is an extension of the Ignite Planning Grants. The IC program is an opportunity for new pilot or existing centers.

Centers and institutes are established within the University to strengthen and enrich multidisciplinary programs of research, public service, or instruction conducted by the faculty and staff. Centers facilitate synergistic interactions to create knowledge that foster finding solutions to societal challenges. They provide undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with added research opportunities, facilities, and assistance, as well as enhance their involvement in public service and educational activities. Centers and institutes have a strong positive impact on the economic development of the state by providing job opportunities, supplying technical assistance and training, fostering community development, and enhancing the transfer of new technologies. By engaging in partnerships with organizations, such as private or corporate sponsors, educational institutions, and federal/state/local agencies, or nonprofits, centers serve as an important means to address the diverse mission of the University. Policies and procedures for centers at UNC Charlotte may be found [here](#).

IC grants are designed to support and incentivize stronger collaborative relationships among researchers from different colleges and disciplines with the goal of increasing UNC Charlotte's competitiveness in attracting extramural funding and research support, especially in the areas of focus and distinction identified in the [Top-tier Research Commission Report](#). Ultimately, the goal is to position these teams of researchers to obtain the external funding needed to sustain future activities and research related to the center.

IC grants seek to enhance existing areas of focus and distinction, accelerate the development of emerging research strengths, and foster interactions between UNC Charlotte faculty, scholars, students, industry, and community through: a) the establishment of pilot centers, b) infusion of resources for existing centers that are not fully approved by the system in order to expand and grow to this level, or c) collaborative resources for existing centers to elevate activities. There are two tracks:

Track 1: Emerging Pilot Centers. In an effort to eliminate barriers to building collaborative teams and coordinating, planning, and developing infrastructure for establishing a pilot center that can lead to preparing large, interdisciplinary multi-investigator research proposals, IC provides funds to (1) convene conferences and meetings, (2) coordinate workshops, (3) support travel costs for potential collaborators from other institutions, (4) hire grant-writing consultants and content specialists, (5) conduct other proposal-development and team-development activities and (6) general center support (e.g., administrative or other needs). Recipients of these one-time awards are expected to develop a center operations plan for sustainability within the first 9-months of the award and submit applications/proposals for significant funding (e.g., >\$1M) from diverse sources within the 18-month award period. This may include a large center proposal. Exceptions to these amounts may be granted for centers focused on areas in which funding opportunities are limited (e.g., arts, humanities, community engaged research).

Track 2: Existing Centers. In an effort to eliminate barriers to building collaborative teams and coordinating, planning, and preparing large, interdisciplinary multi-investigator research proposals, IC provides funds to (1) convene conferences and meetings, (2) coordinate workshops, (3) support travel costs for potential collaborators from other institutions, (4) hire grant-writing consultants and

content specialists, (5) conduct other proposal-development and team-development activities and (6) general center support (e.g., administrative or other needs). Recipients of these one-time awards are expected to revise or develop a center operations plan for sustainability and submit at least one application/proposal for significant funding (e.g., >\$1M) within the first 12-month award period and multiple applications and proposals for significant funding (e.g., >\$5M) from diverse sources within the 24-month award period. Exceptions to these amounts may be granted for centers focused on areas in which funding opportunities are limited (e.g., arts, humanities, community engaged research).

Award Focus and Scope

IC awards are intended to build capacity in research areas that are strategically important at regional, state, and national levels. While the **IC** program is open to all fields, proposals that focus on one or more of the areas of research focus and distinction identified by the [Top-Tier Research Commission](#) are of particular interest.

Regardless of the research theme or focus, proposers must fully describe how their research aligns with priority areas identified by state and federal agencies and policy offices (e.g., [National Science Foundation's Strategic Plan](#), [NIH Strategic Plan](#), [Office of Science and Technology Policy Priorities](#), and [National Endowment for the Humanities Strategic Plan](#)) and/or national organizations and professional societies.

Award Amount and Duration

Faculty and staff teams can apply for one-time grants of **up to \$50,000 per year** for up to two years (24 months; \$100,000 maximum direct costs). Facility and Administrative (F&A) costs are waived. We anticipate funding up to 6 awards in Track 1 and up to 3 awards in Track 2. The second year of funding will be contingent upon the team's performance and progress during year 1, including submission of an annual report and successful attainment of proposed milestones. Annual reports detailing the activities and progress of the planning efforts will be due 45 days prior to the anniversary date of the project. Late reports will not be accepted.

Required Match Funding:

- Awards will be made in 2:1 ratio up to 50K/year. For example, an award from the Division of Research for \$50k requires at least **\$25k/year** in support from the college, department and/or PI/Co-PI support (for a total of up to **\$75k/year**). This may be a financial match and/or faculty course-release time, administrative support, or other similar cost-sharing activities. If multiple colleges are involved in an application, they can split the matching funds accordingly.

Workshop Engagement:

- All teams will participate in a kickoff meeting and an annual grantee meeting.

The expected start date for FY2024 awards is July 1, 2023

Who Can Serve as PI?

Current or proposed center directors serve as the principal investigator (PI) on **IC** proposals. UNC Charlotte faculty (tenured/tenure-track, teaching, adjunct, and/or research faculty), instructors, post-docs, and staff, as well as faculty and researchers from other institutions, are eligible to serve as

senior personnel. There is no limit to the number of senior personnel in a center. Each Center Director is limited to one proposal as PI. However, individuals may participate as senior personnel on multiple proposals and/or awards.

Proposal Preparation Guidelines and Requirements

Proposals must be submitted electronically in *NinerResearch* by **5 pm EDT on April 15, 2023**. All proposal components must be compiled in the order listed below and submitted as a single pdf file.

Proposals must contain the following sections in the order listed and with the headings indicated below (minimum 11-point font, single-spaced, minimum 1-inch margins):

- a) **Cover Page** (1 page) with the (1) center title; (2) names, departments, and institutional affiliations of all participating personnel (only one faculty member can serve as PI; remaining team members should be listed as senior personnel); (3) total amount requested; and (4) anticipated activities of the center and their duration.
- b) **Center Summary** (2000 characters): A short (2000 characters with spaces) synopsis of the proposed center describing the nature of the collaboration, the theme of the proposed research, and the center's potential contribution to existing areas of excellence and research strength at UNC Charlotte. The summary should be written for a general, non-technical audience.
- c) **Center Description** (5 pages maximum, single spaced) describing the goals and objectives of the center and the plan of work, including activities intended to facilitate and stimulate collaboration among team members and steps that will be taken to assist the team in developing competitive applications for external funding. Proposed activities may include workshops and planning sessions, stakeholder engagement meetings, collaborator workshops and conferences, team-building training sessions, pilot studies, travel to explore potential collaborations and establish new partnerships, travel to meet and interact with federal and state program officers, and engagement of consultants and grant-writers. The Project Description should include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess the feasibility of the proposed plans and how the research contributes to existing and emerging university research strengths (see [Top-tier Commission Report](#)) and aligns with national priority areas.

The Center Description should also (1) outline the participants' respective areas of expertise and anticipated contributions to the center, (2) describe the nature and success of prior or existing collaborations among group members, and (3) identify the process for identifying additional collaborators that may be needed to expand the capabilities of the team. **Centers that are highly interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary and include unusual and non-traditional combinations of participants from diverse disciplines and backgrounds are highly encouraged.**

- d) **Expected Outcomes and Planning Roadmap** (1 page, single spaced) that includes:
 1. a projected schedule of activities with a list of anticipated milestones and deliverables during each year of the award.
 2. a detailed list and analysis of existing and anticipated external funding opportunities that will be targeted by the team and a timeline (with due dates) for application.
 3. an initial sustainability plan (i.e. how will the center efforts continue after the IC funding has ended).

- e) **NSF-style Biographical Sketches** (2 pages max per participant) for the PI and all senior personnel listed on the cover page.
- f) **Budget and Budget Justification** detailing how requested funds will be used to support the activities outlined in the Center Description. Annual and summary budgets should be listed on a single page and formatted using the required budget template from Dr. LaVerne Ellerbe. The Budget Justification is limited to 2 pages.

Allowable expenses: travel (including per diem), workshop and training materials and supplies (including meals and coffee breaks), speaker fees, transportation, consulting services and fees, computing services, and other expendable materials and supplies.

- g) **Current and Pending Support** for all senior personnel (formatted using the standard NSF-format available [here](#)).

h) **References Cited**

- i) **Letters of Collaboration** from all non-UNC Charlotte senior personnel listed on the Cover Page. The contents of the letters should be limited to the following statement:

If the planning grant submitted by Dr. [insert name of the Principal Investigator] entitled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding, it is my intent to collaborate and participate in the activities detailed in the Center Description section of the proposal.

- j) Brief note of support from the Dean and/or Associate Research Dean.

Review Criteria and Evaluation

Proposals will be reviewed using the criteria listed below, but special consideration will be given to Centers that (1) include highly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teams and approaches, (2) complement existing research strengths, (3) align with areas and themes of state and national priority and (4) are likely to result in successful center operation past the **IC** grant. Preference will be given to centers with the potential to enhance UNC Charlotte's competitiveness for large-scale grants, including but not limited to NSF Science and Technology Center (STC) grants, NSF Engineering Research Center (ERC) grants, NSF Materials Research Science Engineering Center (MRSEC) grants, NSF Research Traineeship (NRT) grants, NSF Convergence Accelerator Grants, DOD Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative (MURI) grants, NIH program project/center grants, NIH T32 training grants, U.S. Department of Education grants etc. An example of interdisciplinary opportunities at NSF is available [here](#). While seeking external funding is a priority for the **IC** seed money, proposals for innovative, interdisciplinary centers in areas that may not be as competitive for external funding (e.g., arts, humanities, community engaged research) are encouraged to submit.

IC proposal evaluation criteria were adapted from NSF's Merit Review Criteria and include:

Intellectual Merit:

- What is the potential for the proposed research to advance knowledge and understanding within the fields and disciplines represented in the center?

- To what extent does the proposed research explore creative and original concepts?
- Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well organized, and based on sound rationale?
- How well qualified is the team to conduct the proposed activity?
- Does the proposed research align with regional, state and national priorities?
- Does the proposed research theme complement and enhance existing and emerging areas of research focus and distinction at UNC Charlotte (see [Top-tier Commission Report](#))?

Broader Impacts:

- To what extent does the proposed center encourage new collaborative partnerships among university researchers? Among UNC Charlotte researchers and faculty at other institutions?
- Does the center include a diverse group of researchers representing a range of disciplines?
- What is the potential of the center to enhance the ability of UNC Charlotte to compete for large-scale grants from federal and state agencies?

Timeline for Review and Award

March 3, 2023	Call for Proposals Released
April 14, 2023	Proposals Due
June 15, 2023	Awards Announced
July 1, 2023	Anticipated Start Date

Questions and Inquiries

Questions regarding this program announcement should be directed to Dr. LaVerne Ellerbe, Director of the Center for Research Excellence, at lellerb1@uncc.edu.