

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION	Academic Affairs
POLICY NUMBER	ACAF 2.01
POLICY TITLE	Establishment and Modification of Centers and Institutes
SCOPE OF POLICY	USC System
DATE OF REVISION	March 2, 2026
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE	Office of the Provost

PURPOSE

The University of South Carolina encourages faculty to collaborate across and within academic departments, programs, schools and colleges to promote shared teaching, research and community engagement interests. Centers and institutes serve a valuable function in organizing activities for faculty, staff, students, and others who wish to work together. The university establishes centers and institutes to facilitate, support and manage these collaborations. Centers and institutes are administrative units.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Center: A mechanism for faculty, staff and students to collaborate and develop depth in a defined range of problems within a discipline or apply a broader vision to issues across traditional departmental structures. A center provides a useful structure to develop emerging or multidisciplinary approaches to research or teaching, provides a relevant focus for service to external or internal constituencies, promotes sharing of resources (e.g., equipment or laboratories), or otherwise supports the focused scholarship of groups of faculty and staff in their areas of specialty.

Institute: A mechanism for faculty, staff and students to collaborate and develop depth in a defined range of problems within a discipline or apply a broader vision to issues broader in scope than a center. Typically institutes comprise many different disciplines, departments, schools/colleges, and even external entities.

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy governs the establishment, modification or termination of centers and institutes on the University of South Carolina campuses. This policy ensures these entities support the university’s mission, align with its strategic objectives, promote academic and research excellence, and maintain financial and operational sustainability.

This policy does not apply to centers and institutes established through internal competitive processes or research centers and institutes created solely with external funding that are overseen by the Office of the Vice President for Research unless they are funded by or are seeking state appropriation. Research centers and institutes funded by the Office of the Vice President for Research follow the review process set by that office.

A. Approval Process

1. New centers and institutes require internal approval through the appropriate campus, college or school faculty; the campus, college or school dean (hereafter referred to as "dean;") the provost or the executive vice chancellor, or the senior vice chancellor as appropriate; the chancellor; the president; and the Board of Trustees. Centers or institutes seeking or receiving state funding require approval by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE). Centers or institutes which encompass more than one school or college must be reviewed and approved by each dean.
2. Modification of the name or purpose of a center or institute, or termination of a center or institute also requires the approvals outlined above.
3. The Academic Program Liaison (APL) serves as the main information resource on academic administrative unit actions. Units starting new centers and institutes should work with their APL in drafting the proposal.

Draft documents and notifications may be forwarded to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for the Columbia and Regional Campuses. All formal center/institute actions must be forwarded directly by the dean on the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses or the respective chief academic affairs officer of the USC Aiken, Beaufort or Upstate campuses to the Provost's Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for Board of Trustee consideration as the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support is the sole liaison to the University Board of Trustees for all campuses.

B. Criteria for the Establishment or Review of Centers and Institutes

All centers and institutes at the University must address each of the following criteria:

1. Is the focal area critically important to the success of the University? Does it strengthen the USC mission? The center or institute must be driven by potential research, instruction, community engagement, and/or creative activities that contribute to the University's overall mission, but that are not academic degree or credit granting activities.
2. Is the center or institute potentially transforming? Will it allow us to become a leading program among peer institutions?
3. Will the center or institute influence others beyond those participating in the initiative itself? Does it draw new kinds of exceptionally talented faculty and students?
4. Will it make an impact on the outside world?

5. Will it successfully raise funds to support itself?

C. Funding

Centers and Institutes are expected to seek external funding to support their activities. The University will consider requests for support from those centers and institutes that:

- express a major priority of the University;
- are stipulated by line-item state appropriations;
- require matching support for funding rather than full support; and/or
- are broadly interdisciplinary.

D. Five-Year Review Cycle

New centers and institutes on all USC campuses are approved for a five-year period. Existing centers and institutes must be reviewed every five years. For the Columbia campus, university wide centers and centers that span multiple colleges are reviewed by the provost while centers and institutes housed within a single college or school are reviewed by the dean. The comprehensive self-evaluation report, final review report, evaluation report, and plan to address any recommendations identified (if applicable) must be sent to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support. Existing centers on the Aiken, Beaufort, Upstate and Regional campuses are reviewed by the chancellors or his/her designee.

E. Center and Institute Directors

Center and institute directors for university wide centers and centers that span multiple colleges report to the provost and centers and institutes housed within a single college or school report to the dean for the Columbia campus unless otherwise indicated during establishment of the center or institute. Center and institute directors on the Aiken, Beaufort, Upstate and Regional campuses report to the chancellors or his/her designee unless otherwise indicated during establishment of the center or institute. Center and institute directors are appointed to serve by a dean, provost, or chancellor, and any specific commitments to the director are to be indicated in a formal appointment letter. Directors may be released from some responsibility to their home academic units by their dean, provost, or chancellor.

F. University Centers and Institutes Inventory

The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support in the Office of the Provost maintains the official inventory of university-recognized centers and institutes on the Columbia campus. The inventory is updated annually and as changes occur. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support notifies the Office of the Vice President for Research of all changes to the official list of centers and institutes, and the Office of the Vice President for Research maintains the current list of research centers and institutes on its website. The Aiken, Beaufort, Upstate and Regional campuses each maintain their own official inventory.

G. Publications

Final approval by the Board of Trustees and CHE, if appropriate, is required prior to publication of a center or institute in any university bulletins, brochures, websites and other internal and external materials.

PROCEDURES

A. Procedure for all USC Campuses

1. Establishment of Centers and Institutes

a. Preliminary Discussion with Academic Program Liaison (APL)

Before preparing a letter of intent or other proposal for a new center or institute on any campus, the faculty member or dean should contact the APL to review the required approval.

b. Pre-authorization Process for USC Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses.

A pre-authorization request must be submitted for initial approval for USC Columbia and the regional Palmetto College campuses.

c. College-Level Approval

A proposal for a new center or institute, comprised of a letter of intent, outlining the purposed purpose, structure, and rationale for the unit, and the attached documents outlined below, must be approved by the dean(s) or their designee prior to university review and approval. The proposal must be no more than five pages, including the budget page, and must include the following:

- i. A justification, concisely stating the need for the proposed center or institute, a statement of purpose, the proposed activities of the center or institute and proposed date of implementation.
- ii. A statement explicitly defining the value added to the University as a result of the establishment of the center or institute. The relationship of the proposed center or institute to the University's mission and to other established centers or institutes or relevant University academic units should be described.
- iii. A list of the lead faculty members who will participate in the activities of the center or institute, to include an explanation of how each individual will add value to the proposed entity.

- iv. A proposed budget with an estimate of the financial resources necessary and sources of financing for the center or institute. Any requests for university support must be justified. Any financing described as “reallocation of existing funds” must also be explained.
- v. Draft assessment plan that clearly outlines the criteria to be used to determine the success of the proposed center or institute at the end of five years.
- vi. Proposals for new centers or institutes must include the CHE New Center Proposal Form.

The following must be provided as attachments to the proposal:

- i. Current one page bio sketch for each lead faculty member.
- ii. Letters of support from participating faculty and administration.

d. Review of Proposal

For USC Columbia, the dean will send the new center proposal and attached documents to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for provost review. Proposals from Regional campuses will be reviewed by the chancellor of Palmetto College then sent to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for provost review. Proposals from USC Aiken, Beaufort and Upstate will be reviewed by the chief academic officer and chancellor and then sent to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support by the chief academic officer.

The provost or chancellor will consider proposals with respect to the criteria outlined on page 2. For all proposals pertaining to research, the provost or chief academic affairs officer will consult with the Vice President for Research. After the provost or chancellor’s review and approval, the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will submit the proposal to the President and the Board of Trustees for approval. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support is the sole liaison to the University Board of Trustees for all campuses.

e. State Appropriations and Approval by or Notification to the Commission on Higher Education

If new state appropriations are required or requested for the proposed center or institute, it must be submitted to CHE to review and approval. After approval by the Board of Trustees, the New Center Proposal Form is

then submitted to CHE by the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support for the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses or the chief academic affairs officer of the USC Aiken, Beaufort, or Upstate campus. If new state appropriations are not required or requested for the proposed center or institute, it must be submitted to CHE as a notification. Guidelines for new center approval are on the CHE website.

2. Review of Existing Centers and Institutes

a. Annual Reporting

Centers and institutes must submit an annual report in which they address the following:

- i. Changes from the prior year;
- ii. Progress toward prior year objectives;
- iii. Objectives (updated, both long- and short- term);
- iv. Quantitative benchmarks;
- v. Publications; and
- vi. Funding awards and proposals.

Annual reports should be submitted at the end of each academic year. University wide centers and centers that span multiple colleges submit the report to the provost and centers and institutes housed within a single college or school submit the report to the dean.

In preparation for the five-year review process outlined below, the report submitted at the end of the fourth year of existence for a new center or the fourth year following the last review for existing centers should be a comprehensive self-evaluation report.

b. Five-Year Review Cycle

i. New Centers and Institutes

New centers and institutes will be approved initially for a five-year period. During the first semester of the fifth year, the center or institute will be evaluated by the provost or chancellor to determine if continuation is justified. This review must include a peer review, which may be external at the discretion of the dean (for centers or institutes housed within a single college or school),

provost, or chancellor.

The center or institute will be reviewed in a similar manner by the provost or chancellor every five years thereafter. For the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses, the comprehensive self-evaluation reports, final review reports, evaluation report and plan, if any, to address any recommendations identified must be sent to the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support.

ii. Existing Centers and Institutes

Existing centers and institutes should be reviewed every five years. For the Columbia and regional Palmetto College campuses, in consultation with the deans, the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will establish a review schedule for all existing centers which is prioritized according to center or institute longevity and history of past reviews. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will contact the deans at the beginning of each academic year to indicate which centers and institutes are scheduled for review during that year. The comprehensive self-evaluation reports, final review reports, evaluation report and plan, if any, to address any recommendations identified must be sent to the provost through the Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support.

c. Review Criteria

New and existing centers and institutes will be evaluated according to the criteria outlined on page 2 as well as:

- i. the extent to which they have met the stated goals and objectives as originally proposed;
- ii. the extent to which the long-term funding objectives have been met in a progression towards financial stability; and
- iii. evidence of effectiveness or impact.

Such evaluations will also provide recommendations for enhancement of the center's productivity and assess the national and international standing and impact of the center.

d. Peer Reviewers

The center or institute director should develop a list of up to ten names of recognized scholars with the appropriate expertise, and who do not have a conflict of interest or formal relationship with the existing center or institute. The choice of whether to conduct an external review, an internal

review, or a blend of the two is at discretion of the dean (for centers or institutes housed within a single college or school), provost, or chancellor. The review panel is responsible for reporting their findings to the dean(s), provost, and chancellor.

e. Coordination and Funding of Review

The dean(s) are responsible for coordination of the review as well as covering all costs associated with the review process.

f. Evaluation Report

Following the review process, the dean(s) will prepare an evaluation report based on the review criteria provided earlier and on the peer review panel report, with a specific recommendation to the provost. The report should be submitted no later than three months prior to the end of the second semester of the academic year.

g. Outcome of the Review Process

The provost will review the evaluation report, consulting with the vice president for research for all centers and institutes pertaining to research, and then make a final decision regarding the future of the center or institute.

3. Modification and Terminations

a. Name Changes or Other Modifications of a Center or Institute

Name changes and other modifications to a center or institute must be approved by the provost, the president, and the Board of Trustees. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will update the university inventory and notify CHE, and the Office of the Vice President for Research for the Columbia and Regional Campuses. USC Aiken, Beaufort and Upstate maintain their own inventory and notify CHE of changes to their centers and institutes.

b. Termination of a Center or Institute

Terminations may be initiated by the unit(s) housing the center or institute, or by the provost. If initiated by the provost, provisions will be made for timely notification of the dean(s) and the center or institute director.

If a decision is made to terminate a center or institute at the level of the unit(s) housing the center or institute, the dean(s) must make a recommendation to the provost. Terminations will normally be the result of lack of adequate progress, changes in University priorities or strategic

direction, or changes in the availability of sufficient financial resources to sustain a viable center.

If the final decision is to terminate, the center or institute will be deleted from the campus inventories. The Office of Academic Program Planning and Decision Support will notify the Board of Trustees and each campus will notify CHE as appropriate.

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 2.02 Establishment and Modification of Academic Administrative Units](#)
[ACAF 2.00 Creation and Revision of Academic Programs](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
September 10, 2002	New policy approval
April 14, 2016	Revised to clarify approval process and updated to reflect current practices. Initial approval period changed from three to five years. Procedures added regarding name changes, terminations, and the five-year review cycle.
October 8, 2025	Policy updated to reflect current practices, clarify that the policy does not apply to centers and institutes established through internal competitive processes or created solely with external funding that are overseen by the Office of the Vice President for Research, and specify that university wide centers or centers that span multiple colleges report to the Provost.
December 18, 2025	Clarify procedure for terminating a center or institute.
March 2, 2026	Updated references within the document.