

Complete Policy Title:

**Guidelines for the Governance  
and Review of Research  
Institutes, Centres and Groups**

Policy Number (if applicable):

Approved by:

**Senate  
Board of Governors**

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*(Guidelines for the Establishment of Research  
Groups, Centres and Institutes)*

Responsible Executive:

**Vice-President (Research and  
International Affairs)**

Enquiries:

[University Secretariat](#)

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## 1. Preamble

The pursuit and encouragement of excellent scholarship and research at McMaster University is dependent principally upon the efforts of its faculty members. Faculty members may form organizations to address research problems that are of mutual interest to them. The development of such research organizations can serve a number of strategic objectives, for example creating a critical mass of researchers and increasing their potential impact, enhancing research collaborations, facilitating interdisciplinary research, increasing the visibility of research at McMaster University nationally and internationally, increasing McMaster University's ability to secure funding for major research infrastructure, and facilitating the linkages between research and education. These research organizations may be located within a Department or Faculty or they may cut across such boundaries and have a University-wide mandate. With the evolution of the modern research university, such organizations are increasingly a requirement to address the most pressing and demanding problems facing society and therefore facing the University. This policy is designed to encourage substantive collaborations and to facilitate the benefits that researchers may find in establishing research organizations.

Research organizations can vary in type and structure depending on the objectives they are designed to accomplish and the scope of their activities. Some will require more formal governance structures than others. The ones whose activities are most closely aligned with the University's strategic objectives, and those whose success and failures

December 14, 2011

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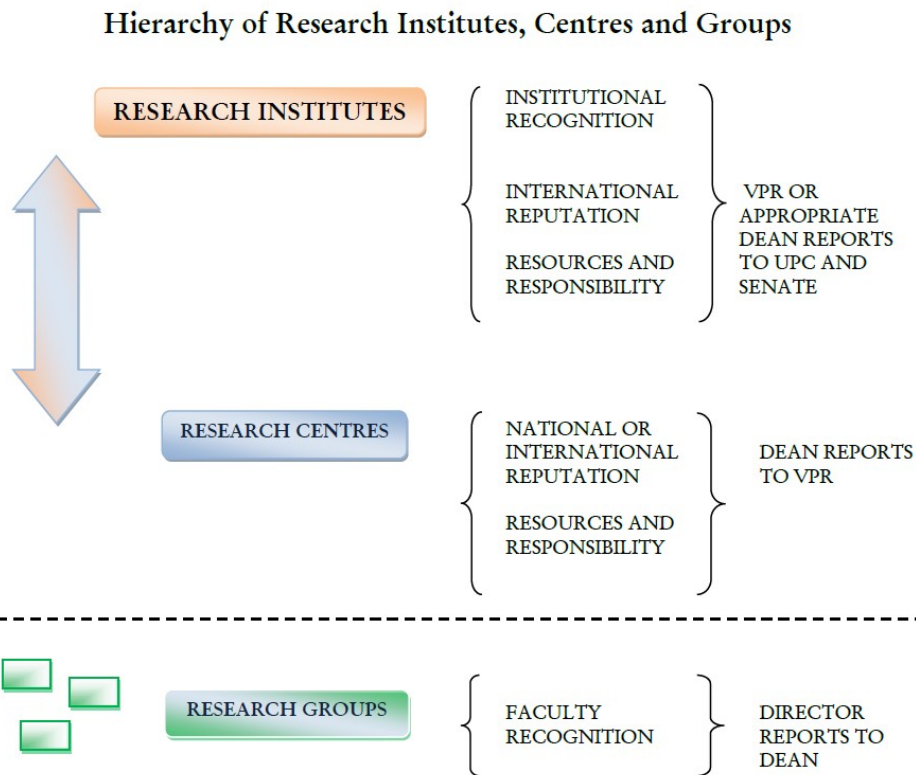
can have large financial implications for the University must receive approval from the Senate and the Board of Governors in accordance with the provisions of this Policy. Smaller research organizations may also form, and their needs and aspirations may be better met with a more flexible and nimble governance structure. In such cases, approval and financial implications would be more appropriately dealt with at the Faculty level.

A central feature of this Policy is the establishment of 3 categories for research organizations, which are referred to as Institutes, Centres, and Groups. These categories acknowledge both the spectrum of complexity that research organizations can achieve as well as the increased levels of governance required for the most complicated types of organizations. This Policy is also designed to provide guidance to faculty who are interested in establishing a research organization as well as to Directors of already established research organizations regarding their governance, reporting and review obligations to the University. The relative hierarchy of the research organizations and a summary of some of their characteristics and reporting are illustrated below.

## **2. Classes of Research Organizations:**

Different research organizations may be formed to address certain types of research problems; to plan for, manage and optimally exploit certain common research infrastructure; and to otherwise advance the interests of a group of researchers. These will be organized into three groupings, hereafter referred to as Institutes, Centres, and Groups. It may be that at present there are research organizations which fit into one of these categories, but which do not carry with them the appropriate name (eg. a research organization which is, and has been, referred to as an Institute, but which is structured and administered as a Centre as described below). Such organizations should consider the relative costs and benefits of changing their names to Institute, Centre and Group, as will be employed by the University, at the next occasion of their review. The onus is on the research organization to make a compelling case that a significant benefit will be lost by changing their names to one consistent with McMaster's new structure for research organizations.

December 14, 2011



#### a. Institutes

Institutes are the research organizations most closely aligned with the strategic interests of the university, by virtue of one or more of several criteria: their size, breadth, or national and international impact on their focus area of research. Institutes normally report to the VP (Research and International Affairs) (VPR). The VPR, in consultation with the Dean or Dean(s) most directly involved in the Institute, then reports annually on the status, progress and plans of the Institute to the University Planning Committee (UPC) and to Senate. In some cases, the Institutes would be expected to have membership spanning two or more faculties, and would be supported by major external funding. In others, the membership of the Institute would be mainly based in a single Faculty in which case the Institute would report to the appropriate Faculty Dean, and he or she would consult with appropriate Departmental chairs. The success of the Institute may have significant financial and other implications for the University and they would often be responsible for the operation and oversight of central research infrastructure.

#### b. Centres

Centres are similar to Institutes. Their mission for research and scholarship with a national and international impact in their areas of interest is the same, but their interests are less closely aligned with the university's strategic interests and they may have smaller budgetary implications for the university. Although their interests will often be largely internal to a particular Faculty, in some cases their membership will cross two or more

December 14, 2011

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Faculties. As such they would normally report to the appropriate Dean, to whom any requests for funding should be made. The Faculty Dean then reports for information on their status, progress, and plans to the VPR. There may also be instances where a Centre would report directly to the VPR, by virtue of having membership across more than one Faculty. The status, progress, and plans of Centres is not reported to Senate.

#### c. Groups

Groups are smaller research organizations, which can be as small as two faculty members and their respective teams of highly qualified personnel. They may be expected to form, grow, and dissolve on a relatively short time scale, although, in some cases, they can also be stable for relatively long time periods. They may or may not receive financial support from the University, and would normally report to the appropriate Faculty Dean, for groups whose research lies largely within the domain of a single Faculty, or to the VPR for groups whose research interests span the domains of two or more Faculties. Their status, progress, and plans are not reported to Senate.

### **3. Governance and Review of Institutes and Centres.**

The University must be informed on the status, progress, and financial viability of the research organizations which carry out its strategic interests. As such the University's Institutes and Centres must adhere to general practices of good governance with reporting structures that seek expert national and international advice and which ultimately informs the VPR and the Faculty Dean as to their activities and standing within the international or national research community. In the case of Institutes, the VPR then reports on the status, progress, and plans of Institutes to the UPC and to Senate.

Furthermore, change and renewal are critical if universities are to meet the challenges of modern research. Research organizations wax and wane as a result of their performance, the state of their research fields and because of the fluidity of the academic community at large. Thus, none of the organizations described in this document can be considered permanent fixtures; survival is dependent on performance, which must therefore be monitored on a regular basis. What follows is a discussion of the governance and reporting structures for the research organizations and a statement of principles concerning the review process.

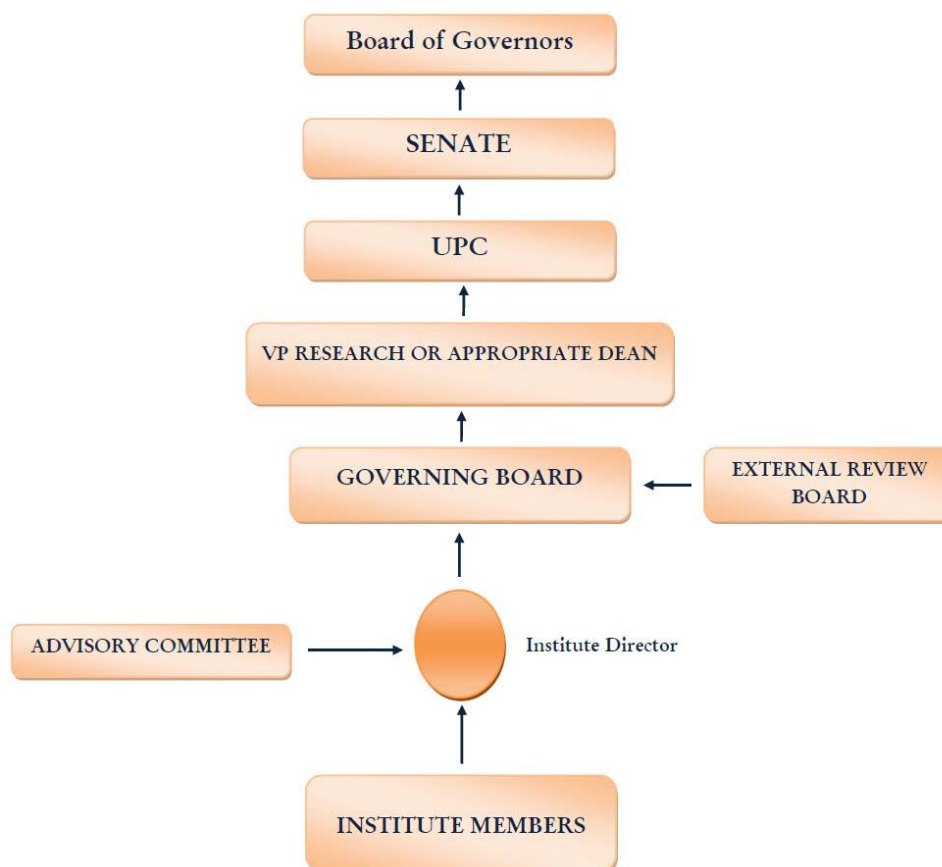
#### a. Governance of Institutes:

The governance structure of Institutes is illustrated below. An Institute is led by its Director, who is normally appointed for a 5 year term. The Director establishes an Advisory Committee (AC) whose purpose is to provide advice to the Director with regard to scientific or scholarly priorities and direction for the Institute. The AC is chosen by the Director, and is consulted at least every two years, or more frequently at the discretion of the Director.

December 14, 2011

The Institute Director reports to the Institute's Governing Board (GB) on an annual basis. The GB comprises the VPR (or designate) along with the Deans (or designate) from the Faculties which have a substantive investment in the success of the Institute. For Institutes which reside principally within a single Faculty, the GB is comprised of the Dean of the appropriate Faculty (or designate) and the Chairs of the Departments which have a substantive investment in the success of the Institute. The GB, in consultation with the Director, the AC, and members of the Institute, is responsible for constituting an External Review Board (ERB) at least every 5 years, and normally coincident with the final year of the Director's term.

### Reporting Lines for University Institutes



The GB reports annually to the VPR or appropriate Dean for Institutes which reside principally within a single Faculty, and the final authority for all matters regarding the direction and operation of the Institute rests with the VPR, or appropriate Dean. In the case of Institutes which reside principally within a single Faculty, the appropriate Dean will report on the Institute to the VPR for information only. The VPR or appropriate Dean then reports annually on the status, progress, and future plans of the Institute to the UPC and to Senate.

December 14, 2011

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b. Review of Institutes:

An External Review Board (ERB) will review each Institute every 5 years or sooner at the request of the Institute's GB. The composition of the ERB will be determined by the GB and should take into account the aspirations of the institute and the availability of funds to support the review. The ERB would normally comprise 3 high caliber scholars with an international perspective, who must be arms length from the Institute. The ERB will assess the performance of the Institute's Director and its scientific program. The ERB will be furnished with documents describing the University's policy on Research Institutes and will be asked whether performance is compatible with expectations described in the policy. The ERB is expected to use accepted measures of performance such as publication number and impact to assess the Institute's contributions in comparison with those of (a) the Institute during the preceding 5 years and (b) with the performance of institutes of similar size in the same field of research. The recommendations of the ERB will include the renewal of the Director, and whether the Institute's performance is consistent with that of an Institute at McMaster University. Their report will be submitted in confidence to the VPR or appropriate Dean. Normally, the VPR would share the ERB's report or major recommendations from the ERB's report with either the current Director, or the successor to the current Director, so that the leadership of the Institute benefits from the perspective of the ERB.

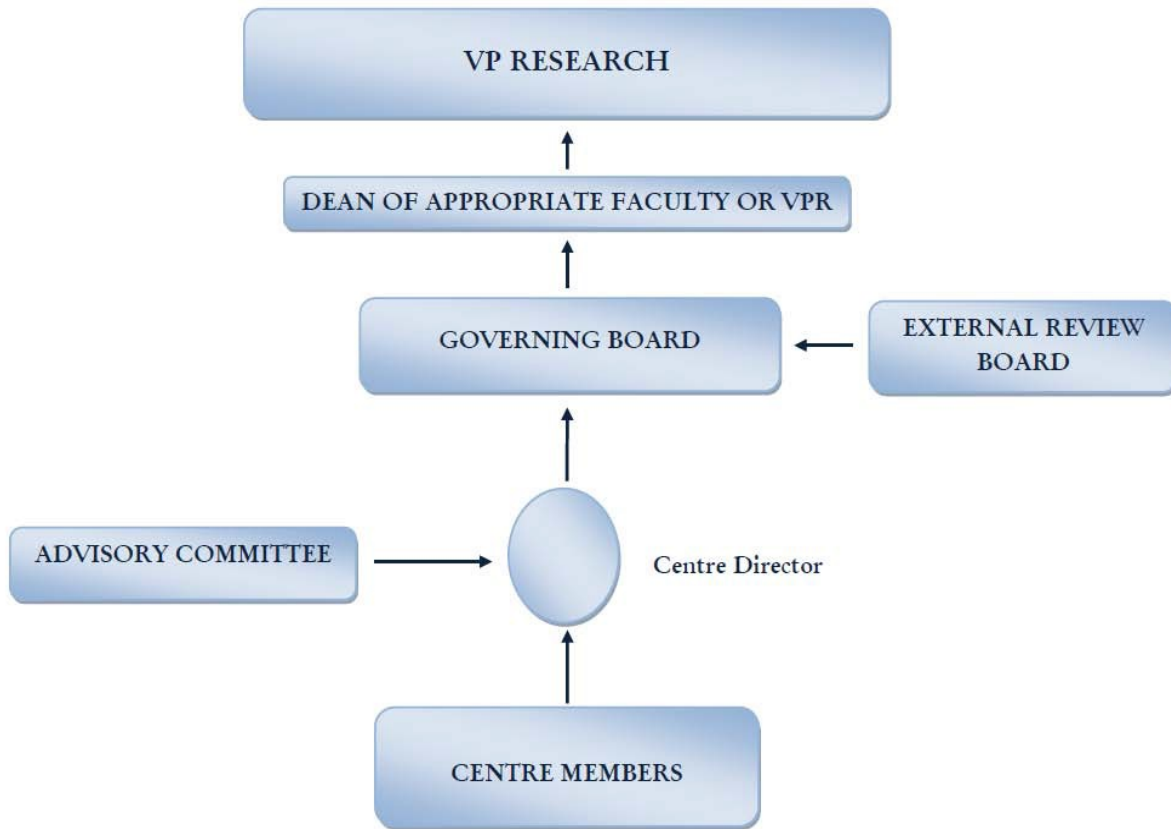
c. Governance of Centres:

The governance structure of Centres is illustrated below. It differs from an Institute in the final authority for all matters regarding the direction and operation of the Centre rests with the Dean of the Faculty appropriate to the Centre, or with the VPR for Centres for whom a substantial fraction of their membership is drawn from more than one Faculty. The Dean (or VPR) or designate does not report to Senate, and instead reports to the VPR for information only. In all other respects its governance structure is that of an Institute which resides principally within a single Faculty. The Centre's GB is normally chaired by the appropriate Dean (or VPR) or designate, and is composed of the Chairs (or designates) of the Departments most affected by the success or failure of the Centre.

December 14, 2011

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## Reporting Lines for University Centres





December 14, 2011

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#### d. Reviews of Centres:

Responsibility for monitoring the status, progress and plans for Centres resides with the Dean of the Faculty within which the members (or the majority of members) reside or with the VPR in cases where the Centre substantively spans more than one Faculty. Each Centre will be reviewed at least every 5 years. The composition of the ERB will be determined by the Dean or designate, or VPR or designate, as appropriate, and may consist of external or internal reviewers. The mandate of the review board is similar to that described for the ERB for institutes. A Governing Board chaired by the Dean or designate, or VPR or designate, and composed of the Departmental Chairs (or delegates) of the Centre members should monitor the activity of Centres every year.

### **4. Establishment, Termination and Transition of Research Institutes and Centres.**

#### a. Establishment:

The lead participants in either a proposed Institute or Centre should prepare a proposal for submission to the relevant Dean or VPR, as appropriate. The proposal is then considered by the Committee on Research Institutes (CRI), which is constituted by the VPR (as Chair), the Provost (VP Academic), the Dean of Graduate Studies, the University Secretary, and the Faculty Deans relevant to the specific Institute or Centre. The proposal will normally include:

- 1- The name, objectives, and proposed activities of the Institute or Centre.
- 2- A rationale for establishing the Institute or Centre.
- 3- A list of participants and criteria for expanding the membership.
- 4- A detailed business plan that includes the financial, space and human resource needs of the Institute or Centre. There must be an indication of the funding required to support the Institute or Centre, both initial start-up costs and the costs of on-going operations, and the internal and external sources of that funding.
- 5- A description of the Institute's or Centre's organizational structure, and its relationship (if any) with our affiliated hospitals or other institutions.

In the case of a proposed Centre, the appropriate Dean or VPR, in consultation with the CRI, considers the proposal and makes a decision as to whether or not to support the new Centre.

In the case of a proposed Institute, the University Planning Committee (UPC) shall consider whether the proposal is consistent with the academic priorities of the University and whether the resource requirements and sources of funding have been appropriately considered. If the proposal is endorsed by the UPC, it will recommend it to the Senate and the Board of Governors for approval. The proposed Institute will be formally established upon receiving the approval of the Board of Governors.

With the University's emphasis on linking research and education, Institutes may be involved in the delivery of academic programs. While the approval of research and



December 14, 2011

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academic programs may be linked, the approval of the academic component of such programs will follow the normal University procedures for approving academic programs. Administration of academic programs will be carried out through the appropriate Dean or Associate Vice-President (Academic).

An Institute will have a Director, appointed by the Senate and the Board of Governors, on the recommendation of a selection committee representing the stakeholders and chaired by the University officer to whom the Director of the Institute will report.

b. Termination:

An external review may conclude that the performance of an Institute or Centre is inconsistent with institutional expectations. The decision as to whether to disband the Institute or to transition it to a Centre is made by the Board of Governors, on the recommendation of the VPR or appropriate Dean, according to the Reporting Lines for University Institutes outlined on page 5. The decision as to whether to disband a Centre, or to transition it to a Group, shall rest with the Dean or VPR, on the advice of its Governing Board, and the recommendations of the relevant ERB.

c. Transitions:

- i) In some instances, following a negative review, the membership of an Institute will regroup as a Centre or a Group. It is also possible the VPR or Dean will dismiss the incumbent Director and instigate a search for a new Director who can address the deficiencies of the negative review and better serve the interests of the Institute and University. In other instances, an ERB may recommend that a Centre become an Institute, in which case a formal application should be made to the VPR and CRI for Institute status. It is also understood that Centres may wish to remain as Centres following an excellent ERB review.

The objective is to provide the institution's researchers with sufficient flexibility to optimize their productivity and impact.

- ii) Institutes and Centres which currently exist may have different governance procedures and reporting structures than those described in this document. In most cases these organizations will adopt the procedures and structures described here in a timely manner, and which would, at the latest, coincide with the beginning of the next term of the Institute or Centre's Director. That is, all Institutes and Centres would be expected to have transitioned to the procedures and structures outlined in this policy by no later than July, 2016. The VPR may choose to waive this requirement for exceptional cases.

## 5. Financial Matters

All Institutes, Centres and Groups are expected to adhere to the University's financial policies and procedures as established or amended from time to time.