

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**

Date of Most Recent Approval

**May 12, 2021 /
June 10, 2021**

Date of Original Approval(s)

May 17, 2005

Supersedes/Amends Policy dated

December 14, 2011 / December 15, 2011
November 14, 2007

Responsible Executive

Vice-President, Research

Policy Specific Enquiries

[Associate Vice-President \(Research\)](#)

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PREAMBLE

1. Excellence in research depends primarily on the efforts of our faculty members – efforts that may be amplified through, and participation in, a formal research organization. Such organizations allow faculty members to focus on the most pressing and demanding problems facing society, to pool their talents and resources, and to maximize institutional impact and output. They allow us to advance our strategic research objectives; to enhance research collaborations; to facilitate interdisciplinary research; to stimulate partnerships; to expand our research presence on the global stage; to increase our ability to secure funding for major research initiatives; and to strengthen the linkages between research and teaching.
2. Research organizations may be located within a single Department or Faculty, or may cut across such boundaries and have a multi-Faculty or University-wide mandate. They may vary in type and structure depending on their objective and the scope of their activities. Some will require formal governance structures. Those whose activities are closely aligned with the University's strategic objectives, and whose success and failure may have financial and reputational implications for the University must receive approval for establishment from the Senate and the Board of Governors in accordance with the provisions of this Policy. As such, a central feature of this Policy is the description of the process to establish Research Institutes and Centres. This Policy also provides Directors of Research Institutes and Centres with guidance regarding governance and reporting and review obligations to the University. Informal research organizations are also recognized, and these organizations will be referred to as Research Groups. Their formation and governance are flexible and not covered by this policy.
3. Where Research Institutes and Centres house significant research infrastructure, this policy should be viewed in conjunction with McMaster's Guidelines for the Governance and Review of Core Research Platforms.

CATEGORIES OF RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

4. Research organizations fall into three categories: Institutes, Centres and Groups. At the outset of the process to establish a research organization, the prospective membership should consult with the relevant Faculty Dean(s) and/or the Vice-President, Research to determine which category is appropriate. As research organizations evolve, the appropriate category may change. In such a case, research organizations should consider instigating a transition to a different category.

Institutes

5. Institutes are closely aligned with the strategic research interests of the University and play a critical role in advancing the University's research objectives. Their designation as an Institute is determined by virtue of one or more criteria which may include: comparative size; breadth of research; national and international impact of their work. In some cases, the membership of the Institute is predominantly based in a single Faculty and the Institute would thus report to the appropriate Faculty Dean. In others, the Institute will have membership spanning two or more Faculties and would report to the Vice-President, Research or to

the Dean of the most appropriate Faculty (in terms of membership or budgetary support). The success of the Institute will have significant implications for the University. Often, the Institute will be responsible for the operation and oversight of central research infrastructure. Some Institutes may be supported by major external funding.

Centres

6. Centres, like Institutes, support the strategic interests of the University, although their focus may be less broad and their operation may have smaller budgetary implications for the University. Research Centres normally report to the Dean of a Faculty, however in some cases a Centre will have membership spanning two or more Faculties. In this latter case, the Centre may report to the Vice-President, Research or to the Dean of the most appropriate Faculty (in terms of membership or budgetary support). The Centre may be responsible for the operation and oversight of central research infrastructure. Some Centres may be supported by major external funding.

Groups

7. Groups are self-designated research organizations. They 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 as members see fit. Their status, progress, and plans are not reported through the University's governing bodies.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Vice-President (Research)

8. The Vice-President (Research) (the "VPR") is the senior academic leader responsible for oversight of McMaster's Research Institutes and Centres. In some cases, the VPR (or designate) may act as Chair of the Governing Board of a Research Centre or Institute.

Dean

9. When a Research Centre or Institute reports directly to a Faculty Dean, the Dean shall be responsible for the oversight of the research organization and provide information to the Vice-President (Research) to allow the latter to fulfill their responsibilities. In this case, the Dean (or designate) is Chair of the Governing Board.

Director

10. A Research Institute or Centre is led by a Director who is appointed through the Senate Committee on Appointments, Senate, and Board of Governors for a fixed term, normally 5 years.

Governing Board

11. Each Research Institute or Centre is overseen by a Governing Board (the “GB”). Authority for all matters regarding the direction and operation of the Research Institute or Centre rests with the GB.

Advisory Committee:

12. The Advisory Committee (the “AC”) will provide advice to the Director on scientific and scholarly priorities and strategic guidance for the Research Institute or Centre. The AC is consulted at least annually at the discretion of the Director.

External Review Board

13. An External Review Board (the “ERB”) will assess the performance of the Institute and Director and the research which has taken place.

Centre Review Board

14. A Centre Review Board (the “CRB”) will assess the performance of the Centre and Director and the research which has taken place.

Committee on Research Institutes, Centres and Groups

15. The Committee on Research Institutes, Centres and Groups (the “CRI”) is responsible for reviewing proposals for the establishment of Research Institutes and Centres prior to submission to the University’s governing bodies.

ESTABLISHMENT OF RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND CENTRES

Establishment:

16. The lead participants of a proposed Research [Institute](#) or [Centre](#) should prepare a proposal for submission to the relevant Dean or VPR as appropriate. The proposal is considered by the [CRI](#), which is constituted of the [VPR](#) (Chair), the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), the Dean of Graduate Studies, the University Secretary, and the Faculty Deans relevant to the proposed Institute or Centre. The Proposal should be developed using the McMaster template (made available from the Office of the VPR) and will normally include:
 - i. the name, objectives, and proposed activities of the Institute or Centre;
 - ii. a rationale for establishing the Institute or Centre;
 - iii. a list of participants and criteria for expanding the membership;

- iv. 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;
 - v. a description of the Institute's or Centre's organizational structure, and its relationship (if any) with McMaster University affiliated hospitals or other institutions; and
 - vi. an explanation as to why the Institute or Centre is consistent with the University's Strategic Research Plan.
17. If endorsed by the [CRI](#), the proposal will be submitted to the University Planning Committee ("UPC"), who shall consider whether the proposal is consistent with the academic and research priorities of the University and whether the resource requirements and sources of funding have been appropriately considered. If endorsed by UPC, it will be recommended to the Senate and the Board of Governors for approval. The Research Institute or Centre will be formally established upon receiving the approval of the Board of Governors.
 18. The University supports the integration of research and education. Research Institutes and Centres may be thus involved in the delivery of academic programs. The approval of such programs will follow the normal University procedures. Specifically, administration of academic programs must be carried out through the appropriate Dean or Associate Vice-President (Academic).

GOVERNANCE AND REVIEW OF INSTITUTES AND CENTRES

19. The University must be informed on the status, progress, and financial viability of Research Institutes and Centres. As such, the University's Research Institutes and Centres must adhere to general practices of good governance with reporting structures that seek expert national and international advice, and which ultimately inform the governing bodies as to their activities and standing within the international or national research community.
20. All [Institutes](#), [Centres](#) and [Groups](#) are expected to adhere to the University's policies and procedures as established or amended from time to time. Ongoing University support for a Research Institute or Centre is not guaranteed.
21. Each Research Institute or Centre is overseen by a [GB](#). The GB is normally chaired by the appropriate Dean (or designate) or by the [VPR](#) (or designate) and is composed of other participating Deans and/or Department Chairs (or designates) whose Faculties and Departments are most affected by the success or failure of the Institute or Centre. It may be appropriate that additional members of the GB are drawn from beyond the VPR, Deans and Chairs. Authority for all matters regarding the direction and operation of the Institute or Centre rests with the GB.

22. A Research [Institute](#) or [Centre](#) is led by its Director who is normally appointed for a 5-year term. The selection process is managed by the Chair of the [GB](#) who, along with board members, will establish a selection committee representing the Institute's or Centre's stakeholders. The selection committee will recommend a candidate to the GB. If the recommendation is accepted, the GB will recommend the candidate to the Senate and the Board of Governors which, upon acceptance, approves the appointment of the Director.

The Director's term may be renewed, normally for a further 5 years, following assessment of the performance of the Institute or Centre by an [ERB](#), or [CRB](#). Normally, a Director will be limited to serving two consecutive terms, although some circumstances may lead to a Director serving more than two consecutive terms. In these instances, each renewal will follow assessment by the ERB or CRB. The selection process for a Director is separate from and additional to the establishment of a Research Centre or Institute.

23. In some exceptional circumstances, the appointment of a Director may occur as part of the process for hiring a new faculty member. Where the faculty hiring process also plans to appoint the new faculty member as Director of an Institute or Centre, the Chair of the Faculty Appointments Committee will inform the Chair of the Institute's or Centre's GB, at the outset of the hiring process. The Chair of the GB will be afforded the opportunity to comment on the appointment of a Director before the hiring process proceeds. Once a candidate accepts the offer, the Chair of the GB will be informed, and the Dean of the relevant Faculty will ensure that the Director appointment recommendation is provided as part of the appointment package to the Senate and Board of Governors for approval.
24. The Director, with the approval and agreement of the GB, establishes an [AC](#) whose purpose it is to provide advice to the Director with regard to scientific and scholarly priorities and strategic guidance for the Institute or Centre. The AC is consulted at least annually at the discretion of the Director. The AC is normally constituted from members of the McMaster community and external members with appropriate expertise relevant to the Research Institute or Centre.

Research Institutes - Annual Reporting

25. The GB monitors the activity of the Institute following the annual submission of a Director's report to the GB. In the case of Institutes whose GB is Chaired by a Faculty Dean, the Dean will report on the Institute to the VPR for information. The VPR subsequently provides [UPC](#), Senate and Board of Governors with an annual report on the status of the Institute for information, as part of a summary document reporting on all Research Institutes.
26. Where Research Institutes house significant research infrastructure, and are deemed Core Platforms, the Director's report will be aligned with the reporting needs outlined in McMaster's Guidelines for the Governance and Review of Core Research Platforms.

Research Institutes – Performance Review

27. The [GB](#), in consultation with the Director, the [AC](#), and members of the Institute, is responsible for periodically constituting an [ERB](#). An ERB will review each Research Institute at least every five years and normally coincident with the final year of the Director's term. An external review may be called prior to a five-year lapse since Institute establishment or prior review, 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 three high-caliber scholars with an international perspective, who must be at arms' length from the Institute. At least one of the ERB members should be external to the McMaster community. A member from the public or private sector could be considered as one of the three ERB members where such representation would be helpful in determining the value of the Institute's research.

The ERB will assess the performance of the Institute Director and the research which has taken place. The ERB may use several metrics to determine performance including: the number and quality of publications; knowledge transfer to external partners; societal impact; and advancement of the University's strategic priorities. These should be compared to:

- a) similar metrics for the Institute prior to a previous review or, if this is the first review, with the expectations in the Institute establishment proposal; and
- b) with the performance of Institutes of similar size in the same field of research.

The ERB report will include recommendation for the renewal of the Director, and whether Institute performance is consistent with the status of an Institute at McMaster University. The report will be submitted in confidence to the Chair of the GB and the [VPR](#); and the Chair of the GB would normally share the ERB's report and its recommendations with the GB and either the current Director, or the successor to the current Director.

The Director will prepare a response to the report to be shared with the GB and the VPR. Both the report and response will be provided to [UPC](#), Senate and the Board of Governors to review and receive.

Research Centres - Annual Reporting

28. The GB monitors the activity of the Centre following the annual submission of a Director's report to the GB. In the case of Centres whose GB is Chaired by a Faculty Dean, the Dean will report on the Centre to the VPR for information. The VPR subsequently provides UPC, Senate and Board of Governors with an annual status report for information, as part of a summary document reporting on all Research Centres.
29. Where Research Centres house significant research infrastructure, and are deemed Core Research Platforms, the Director's report will be aligned with the reporting needs outlined in McMaster's Guidelines for the Governance and Review of Core Research Platforms.

Research Centres – Performance Review

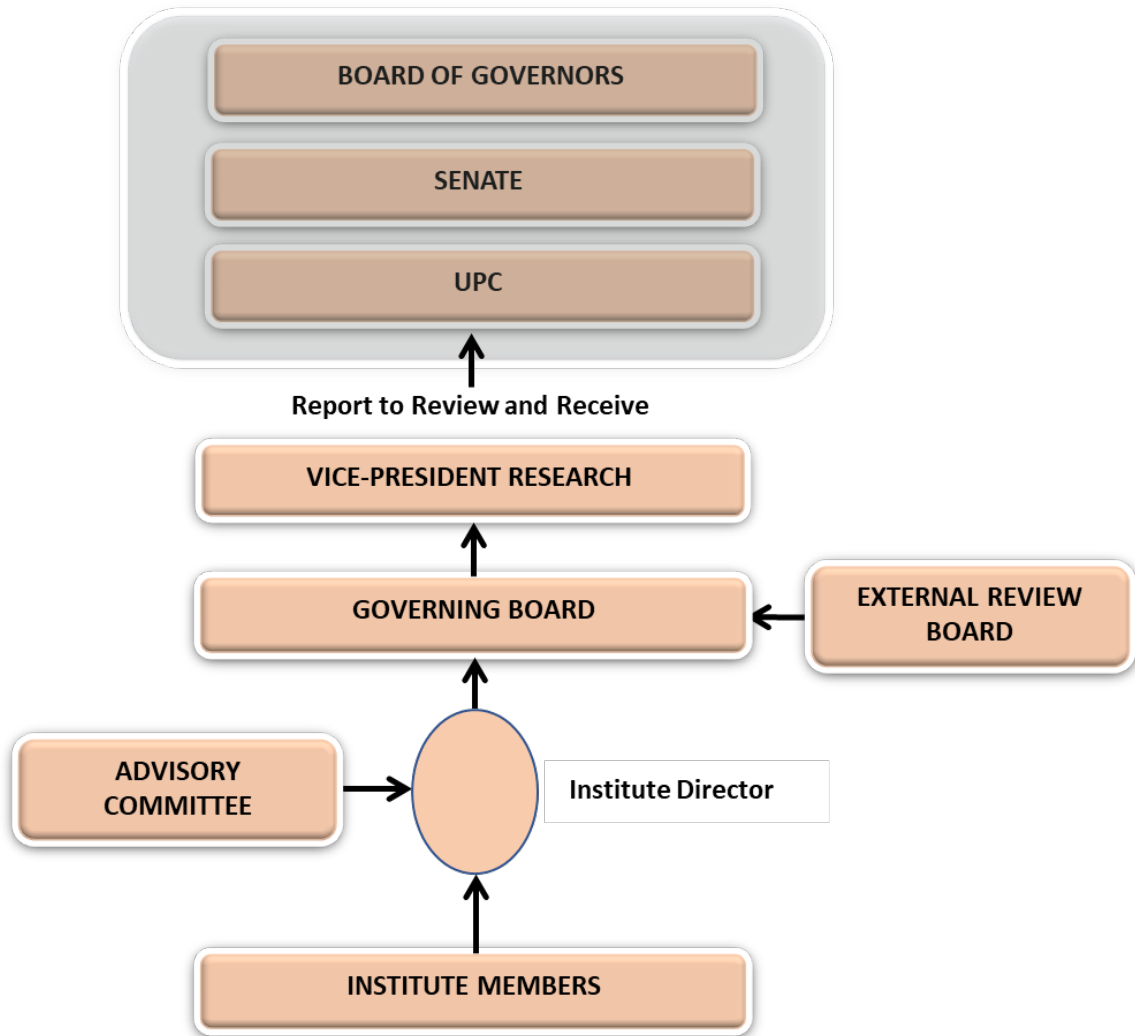
30. Each Centre will be reviewed at least every five years by a [CRB](#). The composition of the CRB will be determined by the [GB](#). The CRB would normally comprise three high-caliber scholars who may be internal or external to the McMaster community and who must be at arms' length from the Centre.

The mandate of the CRB is similar to that described for the [ERB](#) for Institutes. The CRB report will be submitted in confidence to the Chair of the GB and the [VPR](#) and the Chair of the GB would normally share the CRB's report and its recommendations with the GB and either the current Director, or the successor to the current Director.

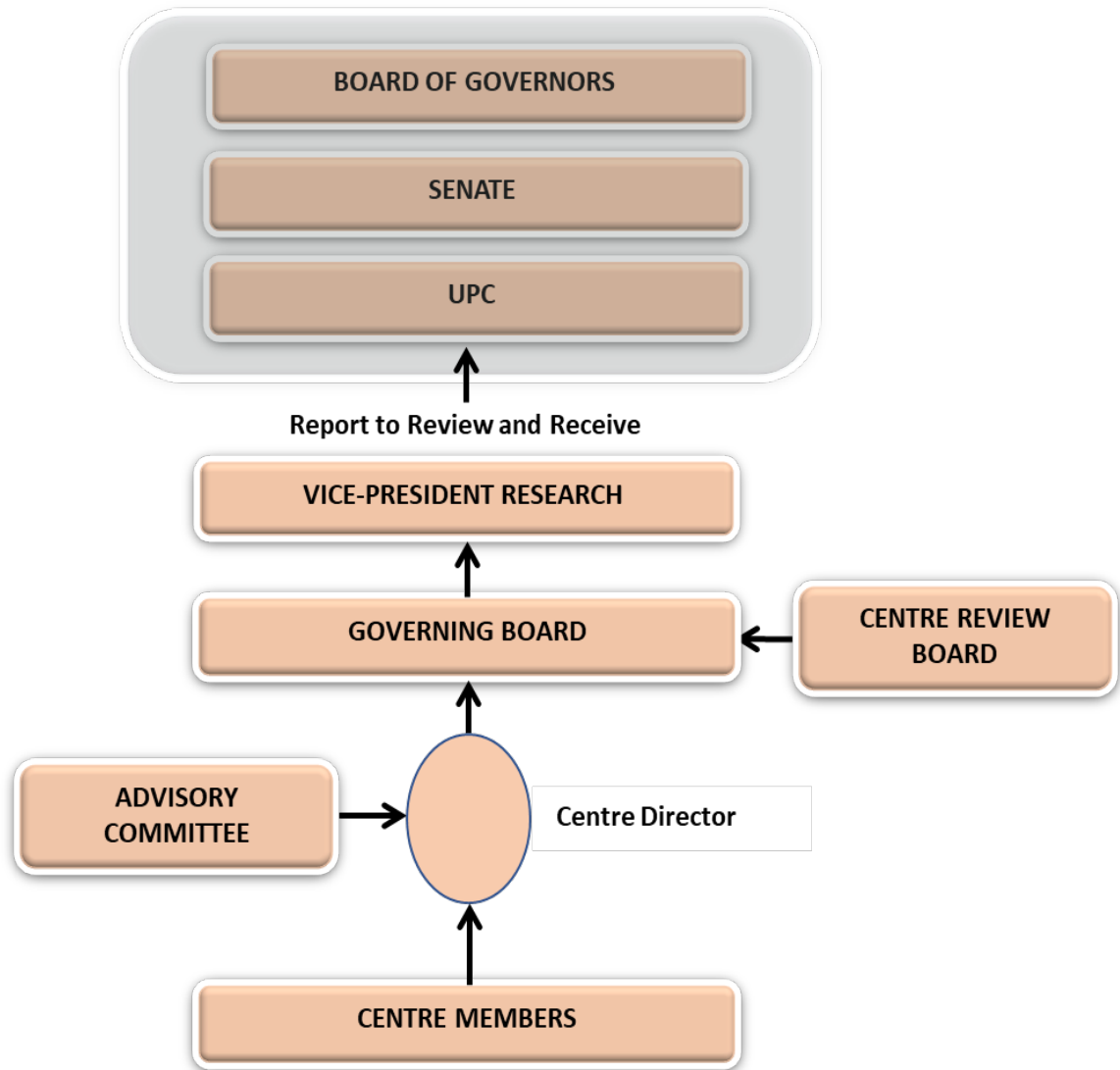
The Director will prepare a response to the report to be shared with the GB and the VPR. Both the report and response will be provided to [UPC](#), Senate and the Board of Governors to review and receive.

Flexibility for Governance and Review of Institutes and Centres in Exceptional Circumstances

31. It is possible that the governance structure, reporting and review of Research Institutes and Centres may need to vary from those described above. For example, the Research Institute or Centre could also be required to report to an external funding body, and that body may have specific governance and reporting criteria. In such a case, the governance structure, reporting and review of the Research Institute or Centre must conform as closely as possible to that outlined above, while fulfilling the mandatory requirements of the external body.



Example structure for a Research Institute. In this case, the Chair of the Governing Board is a Faculty Dean. This structure is provided as one possible example and other structures which conform with this policy are not excluded.



Example structure for a Research Centre. In this case, the Chair of the Governing Board is a Faculty Dean. This structure is provided as one possible example and other structures which conform with this policy are not excluded.

TERMINATION AND TRANSITION OF INSTITUTES AND CENTRES

Transition or Termination of a Research Institute or Centre

32. A review of an Institute or Centre may conclude that the performance is inconsistent with University expectations. In some instances, following a negative review, the membership of an [Institute](#) will re-form as a [Centre](#) or a [Group](#); or in the case of a Centre the membership will re-form as a Group. It is also possible that, following consultation with the [GB](#), the appropriate Faculty Dean or [VPR](#) 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 Research Institute or Centre and the University. In other instances, a [CRB](#) 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.

The objective of transition is to provide the researchers with sufficient flexibility to optimize their productivity and impact. It is thus possible that a Director, usually after consultation with the AC and membership, may seek transition at any time within the lifetime of the Institute or Centre (whether a review has been performed or not). This process is instigated through a request to the GB.

In some instances, a Director, usually in consultation with the [AC](#) and membership, may seek termination of the Institute or Centre (whether a review has been performed or not). For example, previously available funding to support the Institute or Centre may have ceased; or the Institute or Centre may have achieved its objectives removing the need for its existence. This process is instigated through a request to the GB.

The recommendation as to whether to terminate or transition a Research Institute or Centre, is made by the Institute's or Centre's GB. As establishment of an Institute or Centre is approved by [UPC](#), Senate and the Board of Governors, approval for terminating or transitioning a Centre or Institute is also required from UPC, Senate and the Board of Governors.

RELATED POLICIES

- [Guidelines for the Governance and Review of Core Research Platforms](#)
- [Financial Procedure for Research Grants](#)
- [Indirect Costs Associated with Research](#)
- [Internally Sponsored Research Accounts](#)
- [Joint Intellectual Property Policy](#)
- [Operating and Ancillary Budgets Policy](#)
- [Research Accounts Policy](#)
- [Research Ethics Policy](#)
- [Research Integrity Policy](#)
- [Research Residuals Policy](#)