

Frequently Asked Questions about Core Facilities

Q1: What is the mission (goal) of a core facility?

A1: The mission of a core facility is to support researchers who wish to extend the breadth of their research programs and integrate their programs across disciplines in novel ways.

Q2: What is the function (role) of a core facility?

A2: The function of a core facility is to provide state-of-the-art equipment, services and technical expertise for researchers who do not have these capabilities in their own labs.

Q3: Who is responsible for deciding whether a core facility is needed?

A3: Core facilities are created by faculty with support from departments, schools, centers and/or the Office for Research to meet the collective needs of researchers. These collaborators are active participants in the creation, operation and ongoing support of a core facility.

Q4: Is there a charge for use of core facilities?

A4: Yes. The cost per service is directly related to the cost of providing the service, and it is regulated by federal guidelines and good cost accounting practices.

Q5: Do core facilities reduce the cost of research to investigators?

A5: Yes. By sharing the cost, researchers have access to capabilities that would otherwise be too expensive to fund in their own labs.

Q6: Does the University subsidize the cost of providing services?

A6: This depends upon the facility. Some facilities recover all of their costs through user fees, while others recover a portion of their costs through subsidies from schools, departments, centers and grants. It is the responsibility of the faculty director overseeing a facility to determine which model of recovery works best for the facility.

Q7: Does the University support core facilities in other ways?

A7: Yes. The Office for Research (OR) provides equipment grants and loans to facilities on a competitive basis to help maintain state-of-the-art instrumentation and services. OR also provides operating support for activities in core facilities that are not allowed to be recovered through recharge (e.g., grant writing, workshops, etc.).

Q8: How does one go about creating a new core facility?

A8: First, check the OR core facility website (<https://www.facilities.research.northwestern.edu/>) to determine whether a facility already exists that will meet your needs. If it doesn't, then contact Phil Hockberger, Assistant Vice President for Research, or your school's research dean to discuss your needs and whether it makes sense to create a new facility.

Q9: Are there conditions when creating a new core facility may not make sense?

A9: Yes. Creating a core facility requires careful planning and investment by stakeholders. A facility based upon a single instrument or service line is unlikely to be a sustainable model. Likewise, a facility with a small user base may not be able to support the necessary service contracts and technical expertise. In these cases, it may be sensible to place the instrument or service line in an existing core facility with expertise that can handle the service and additional costs.

Q10: Can Northwestern researchers use core facilities at other institutions?

A10: Yes. There are no University restrictions in this regard. Northwestern is a partner in the Open Access Initiative with the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. This initiative allows researchers at partner institutions to use each other's facilities without having to pay indirect costs. Please check with individual facilities to be sure they are participating in this initiative (they can opt out, if they wish).

Q11: Can researchers outside of Northwestern use our core facilities?

A11: Yes. Researchers at both nonprofit and for-profit organizations may use Northwestern core facilities at approved external (unsubsidized) rates.