



National Center for  
Research Resources

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

*Accelerating and enhancing research from basic discovery to improved patient care*

# Shared Access to Core Facilities

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# Why is it hard to centralize cores?

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Consider the issue from different points of view:

1. Principal Investigators who oversee core facilities
2. Users of core facilities
3. Institutions that manage cores
4. Funding organizations

# Full disclosure

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- Undergraduate at Penn State – successfully used a core NMR facility
- Graduate student at MIT – unsuccessful attempts, but not very vigorous attempts, to try to use several “cores”
- Postdoc at University of Wisconsin – very successful use of a core NMR facility
- Faculty member at Penn State – successful use of a core NMR facility, unsuccessfully used a core mass spectrometry facility, failed attempt to establish a core x-ray facility

# Why bother to use core facilities?



- Core labs are sometimes wonderful
- For critical experiments, you want to rely on your own resources
- It is often simpler to rely on “commercial” sources

It used to be true that most investigators just didn't bother with core facilities.

# What has changed?

- Funding for instrumentation/resources/startup packages in individual laboratories has decreased
- Instrumentation often requires experts to produce useful results even in small studies
- Experiments are often much more complicated than they used to be – clinical research, statistics, experimental designs to cover large numbers of unknowns
- As a result, institutions have many cores.



# Core Principal Investigator View

- It is convenient not to have to share resources across departments, locations or funding organizations.
- Change from the current situation is always difficult, especially when it means a budget reduction.
- Change also requires thinking about how experiments are done
- It might be true that the more a core really performs as a core the less likely these objections are to be voiced.
- PIs are likely to oppose core consolidation.



# Users of core facilities

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- Convenience
- Cost
- Quality of results
- Student access to instrumentation
- Hard to predict whether they would support or oppose core consolidation

# Institutions

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- Until the recent very tight budget times, institutions did not seem to be very interested in consolidating much of anything.
- In the past 10-15 years, it seems clear that centralization has been an important organizing principle in many institutions
- Centralized cores offer ways to save institutional funds since cores generally do not cover their total expenses.
- Many institutions are likely to think core consolidation is a good idea.

# Funding Organizations

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- Contradictory impulses
- We need core facilities to serve OUR research community.
- It would be great if we could reduce our expenditures on cores by merging them, even if that means cooperation with other funding organizations.
- Review criteria, renewal timelines are REAL barriers to successful consolidation.