

# An Exploration of the “Center of Excellence” Model for Information Services

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# Overview of talk

- Introduction and genesis of project
- Project methodology
- Reasons to start or fund a Center of Excellence
- Reactions to Center of Excellence definition
- Center of Excellence business models
- Next steps
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# Our Team



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# Genesis of Project

# Who and When

- Meeting of ARL Research Library Leadership Fellows with Mellon Foundation
- Brainstorming about future library directions: does every library need to develop all skills needed to fully support information services for 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarship?
- Planning grant awarded to explore Centers of Excellence for Information Services as shared expertise

# What

- New services for 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries include:
  - Digital archiving and preservation
  - Data management
  - Use of multimedia in teaching, learning and research
  - Information discovery
  - Scholarly communications
  - Digital humanities
- Goals
  - Assess viability of centers as an approach to provide services for multiple institutions
  - Provide guidance to centers and funders for the formation of centers of excellence for information services
- Developed profiles for 34 centers
- Interviewed 19 center directors and staff and 7 funders

# Methodology

# Our high-level questions

- How are effective and successful centers formed, how do they operate, and how are they sustained over time?
- What are the criteria for funding both the formation and long-term sustainability of centers?
- How are centers assessed?

# Semi-Structured Interviews

- Hewlett Foundation
- IMLS
- Mellon Foundation
- NEH
- NSF
- Rockefeller Foundation
- Sloan Foundation

# Centers

Berkman Center for Internet and Society

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Center of Excellence for Learning in  
Education, Science, and Technology  
(CELEST)

Center for Next Generation of Teaching  
and Learning

Center for Studies in Higher Education

DataONE

Digital Curation Centre (UK)

Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative

GRAND (Graphics, Animation and New  
Media / Graphisme, animation et nouveaux  
médias NCE Inc.)

HASTAC: Humanities, Arts, Science, and  
Technology Alliance and Collaboratory

Interuniversity Consortium for Political and  
Social Research (ICPSR)

Institute for Advanced Technologies in the  
Humanities (IATH)

MATRIX Center for Digital Humanities and  
Social Sciences

National Humanities Center

Public Knowledge Project (PKP)

RENCI: Renaissance Computing Institute

Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and  
New Media

Scholars' Lab

TAPOR: Text Analysis Portal for Research

# Our main questions

1. Could you describe for us the genesis of [name of center], the desired impacts of [name of center]'s work, and your role?
2. In what ways does the center foster and/or instigate innovation or entrepreneurship?
3. What kinds of assessments do you conduct to measure the performance and impact of the center?
4. What would you say are the biggest challenges facing the center currently?
5. When the center encounters internally initiatives or projects that are not working as expected, how does the center bring this forward and address the areas of challenge?
6. My understanding is that the [CoE] partners with \_\_\_\_\_. Are there other partners? Now, thinking of an example when a successful partnership was established, what contributed to its development and what were its benefits?
7. What is your current model for funding and for seeking funding?
8. What would you consider an ideal business model for a CoE?
9. We have been using the label "center of excellence" in our study. Do you perceive [CoE] to be a "center of excellence"? Why or why not?
10. Could you talk a little bit about future directions for the center?
11. What are some of your biggest "lessons learned" with running the center?

# Preliminary Analysis

- Individual team members - harvesting of “key quotes” and sections of interview transcripts into a single, shared document
- As a group - rapid-fire analysis:
  - approx 1 hour analysis/interview
  - identify patterns & best quotes
  - articulate high-level insights and reflective questions

What reasons did people give for starting or funding a CoE?

# Centers of Excellence

“Success here means that you’re reaching—that you’re creating something that would reach across institutions.”

# Creative Impulse

- *To forge multidisciplinary approaches*
- *To build common infrastructures*
- *To bridge disciplines*
- *To respond to significant cultural phenomena*
- *To create a sanctuary for scholars*
- *To respond to specific questions/solicitations*
- *To answer a particular RFP*

# Reality check

- *To understand the ethical role of technology*
- *To understand the internet's impact on society*
- *To transform all of scholarly publishing into an open form of communication*
- *To enhance scholarship*
- *To increase the flow and accessibility of e-science*
- *To advocate national and internationally*
- *To reach a variety of audiences*

# What funders seek

*Originality*

*Engines of innovation*

*Impact*

*Growth*

*Sustainability*

*Interdisciplinary*

*Common goals*

*Partnership*

*Technological Challenges*

*Didactic Potential*

*Agile model*

*Governance model*

*Leadership*

*Metrics*

# Reactions to Center of Excellence definition

# CoE Reactions ...

- Corporate-sounding; too operational
- **Pretentious; can't proclaim to be a CoE**
- Focused on status rather than value of efforts
- Missing ultimate goal or aspirations
- **Discourages innovation and collaboration**
- A CoE holds a gold star – is it for its services or product or is it in relation to others?
- Doesn't put leadership as central
- Doesn't value the people

# SEI definition of “Center of Excellence”

"A center of excellence is a premier organization providing an exceptional product or service in an assigned sphere of expertise and within a specific field of technology, business, or government, consistent with the unique requirements and capabilities of the COE organization."

Software Engineering Institute, Carnegie Mellon

William Craig, Matthew Fisher et al. *Generalized Criteria and Evaluation Method for Center of Excellence: A Preliminary Report* <http://repository.cmu.edu/sei/278/>

# CoE Characteristics

- Providing leadership or expertise in a field or specific area
- Innovative
- Interdisciplinary
- Collaborative and shares in a deliberative way
- Engages and listens to a broad community
- Transformative impact
- Agile, nimble, evolves, adapts, explores



# Alternative CoE Definition

- Network rather than a center
- Concept of nodes rather than the place
- Sphere of expertise
- Mechanism for sharing
- Focused expertise delivered broadly
- Produces an impact in the world

# Validation and Visibility

- Certification for a CoE – validate what they do
- Affirmation - being sought by others for the center's expertise
- Needs a public-facing personality
- Select experts who will shine
- Recruit different expertise periodically

“Excellence is a very unusual term.”

# Center of Excellence Business Models



# General funding model

Most based in institutional setting, partnership with other institutions, resourced with faculty sometimes grad students.

## Funding sources:

- grants (matching grants, sponsored research, federal, private foundations)
- university, state/provincial
- endowments
- membership, partner dues, in-kind contributions
- revenue from products, fee-based services, training opportunities (includes hosted conferences, workshops)

**Core funding:** multi-year grant, endowment, state funds (generally about 1/3 of incoming funds)

**Shorter term:** 2/3 soft money: grants, sponsored research, state funds



# Fundraising

- Time spent on seeking funding: 30-50%.
  - Some have a distributed fundraising approach where Director, managing director and others dedicate 10-15% of time on this activity.

**“grant funding time-consuming but it drives a lot of our innovation”**

**“I think it is really important to have grant funding model and to keep us hungry and innovative”**

# Ideal business model

## **Diversified funding portfolio with long term or permanent base funding in place**

- multiple revenue streams (not single source)
- stable base funding plus additional innovation funds
- Institutional support/permanent support for core activity

## **For long-term sustainability**

- Need smaller % of budget reliant on one-time funding
- Center has to have a clear sense of purpose and a strong leader who can sell the vision into the future.
- Strong community need for services they provide.

**“Nobody gives you money because you need it. What they want to hear is that you’re doing great things, you’re confident, you’re optimistic, you’re committed, and they support that.”**

# Funder perspective – Ideal is...

- Clear indication of why a “center” is needed and where is there community synergy.
- Blended revenue scheme/diversified funding -not a permanent dependence on grants
  - E.g. One that starts a business and uses profits of the business to cross-subsidize work
  - E.g. Production of knowledge products that can be sold.
- Evidence of stability: clear governance model
- Evidence of partnership & cross-institutional collaboration
- Evidence funding builds capacity for the future
- A champion



# Key insights

- Concept of diversified funding portfolio
- Funders not interested in forever funding - start-up/innovation
- Grant funding model difficult and time-consuming, but it's a motivator to innovation.
- Trusted champion/personality to lead and influence.

# Next Steps

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# A few more things to do

- Receive feedback on draft report
  - CNI audience
  - Centers and funders interviewed
- Focus session with library directors
  - Stakeholders most likely impacted by centers for information services
  - Determine likelihood of forming centers of excellence
- Release final report by end of June 2014
  - Will be posted online on CLIR website
  - Deliver to Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
  - Distribute to all individuals interviewed

Let's Talk