An ARC perspective on Centre establishment and best practice activities

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Topics

- What are good Centre activities from the ARC’s perspective?
- Key things to consider when establishing a new Centre
- Key administrative matters
  - Postaward management
  - Mid Term Review
  - Future Planning
- Questions
The ARC Centres of Excellence – objectives

a. highly innovative and potentially transformational research
b. interdisciplinary, collaborative approaches
c. develop relationships and build new networks
d. build Australia’s human capacity
e. postgraduate and postdoctoral training
f. large-scale problems over longer periods
g. points of interaction between unis, business, govt, private sector
Seven year vision

- Create and share a **seven year vision** and beyond – **workshop it** to get staff ownership. Input from partners.
- **Plans** focus your work
  - strategic plan,
  - business plan
  - internal **milestones are critical**
- **Integration** – a Centre is a **national entity** not a network of nodes or the Admin organisation.
- **Performance** – establish benchmarks and always strive for excellence.
Seven year vision

• Its OK to revise research directions and shift dollars – embed change management practices
• Success management – develop an effective method to filter incoming partnership requests. They can overwhelm.
• People management
• Governance – best practice
• A whole new level of communications and dissemination of results…
Culture eats Strategy for breakfast….

- Set up a **culture of research excellence, collaboration and international standing**
- **No discipline boundaries to new collaborations**
- **High quality relationships** with collaborating and partner organisations. **Manage expectations**…
- **Research Program integration** – Avoid researchers retreating back to nodes after budget allocation
Culture eats Strategy for breakfast…. 

• Management team – mentor research leaders, lead from the front and provide support
  – Node and other leaders may need support initially to manage a large centre program

• Performance planning and monitoring – promote excellence. KPIs, research priorities, staff development
Your new Centre....

• Managing your FTE commitment; as rising research stars – everyone will want you to be involved in something (appointments, memberships, other projects). Be strategic in what you accept

• Stars of the future – invest in recruiting and training your postdocs and postgrads. Move them:
  – across nodes,
  – organisations and
  – disciplines with relative ease.
  – Inspire them with visiting leading experts
Your new Centre…

• Recruit the **very best professional and administrative staff** possible. And utilise the **Research Office and Tech Transfer staff** from your university

• **Bolt-on projects.** Only if they enhance your research objectives

• **BUT…** Be opportunistic – new partners, new technologies, international developments, emerging political and government priorities
Your new Centre....

- **Public engagement** - training investigators and ECRs/students for new levels of publishing and media.
  - A communication focus and strategy is needed.
“For impact to occur, there needs to be some form of engagement with a user community.”

Achieving impact in research. Ed Pam Denicolo 2014
Milestones vs KPIs

Events or milestones fail to give us good performance feedback because they only tell us whether or not we implemented the initiatives we chose to improve performance.

They don’t tell us if those initiatives worked and actually did improve performance.

Stacey Barr
Performance Measure Specialist
Common Bugbears

- Not understanding that outreach is very important
- Not understanding strategic planning and the role of Boards/Committees and partners within KPIs
- Not enough emphasis on mentoring and professional development of students, staff and end users
- Not understanding that capacity building means people (not the profile of the centre’s research internationally)
- KPIs need more emphasis on national and international benchmarking
Postaward Management

ARC needs to know and/or approve:

• Change of named staff - Centre Director Chief and Partner Investigators, Chief Operating Officer or equivalent.
• Changes to organisations and/or their contributions
• Major changes to Research Program.
• Significant changes to the Budget – decrease, increase, refocus, changes to major purchasing or infrastructure access problems
• Budget carryover of funds – the ARC will allow carry forward of funding from one year to the next with justification (ie late start, recruitment delays, equipment or field work issues)
Postaward Management

Things to be careful about…

• Conflict of interest – this is a serious responsibility
  – What is it? The recent policy change…
• Avoiding Commonwealth funding overlap trap
• Centres can actively leverage other funding – grants, consultancies, contracts
• Commercialisation and IP matters – seek resources to manage this, mentoring your staff and students too
• Open Access and Open Data policies
Postaward Management

- **Outreach** – you have obtained large sums of public funding
  - **Outreach KPIs** are very important – engagement with end users and the public
  - **Capacity building** – mentoring your researchers and students
  - **Your tools** – events, a really great website, speaking publicly (through media or forums), publications including your annual/progress report
  - Media and publications – Protocols on acknowledgment of ARC
Mid Term Reviews

• **Preparation** – Plan for it in Year 1 and the ARC will give you guidance in advance about requirements when the time comes

• Reviews require **written submissions** and ARC representatives coming for a **site visit**

• An ARC **report will be produced with recommendations**

• Incorporate **the recommendations** into your future research planning

• **Some things to know**
  – The review is about the Centre as an entity not just the excellent research projects
  – The review is a serious checkpoint but is also designed to help your planning for the three years ahead.
Future Planning

• Contingency plan and cash – set aside funding for new opportunities or ideas that emerge
• Other funding sources – we expect you to leverage other research dollars
• self reflection tools – KPIs annual reports, workshops, reviews, and competitive processes for internal funding allocations.
• rephasing your research activities as the Centre matures - translation/commercialisation if applicable
• After seven years – a wind down plan – don’t do this at the last minute. A Centre rebid – must be on your mind after year 3.