

CHAPTER 54-65
CENTERS OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

54-65-01. Definitions.

In this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Center" means a center of research excellence that has been designated under this chapter.
2. "Commission" means the centers of excellence commission as defined under chapter 15-69.
3. "Department" means the department of commerce.
4. "Industry cluster" means one of the following industries:
 - a. Advanced manufacturing;
 - b. Energy;
 - c. Information and technology;
 - d. Value-added agriculture; or
 - e. An industry, including the aerospace industry, specifically identified by the department of commerce as an industry that will contribute to the gross state product.
5. "Infrastructure" means new building construction or major building renovation. The term does not include a purchase of equipment or remodel of an existing building.
6. "Research university" means an institution under the control of the state board of higher education which has a full-time student enrollment in excess of nine thousand students.

54-65-02. Centers of research excellence - Application - Eligibility.

1. The department shall establish a centers of research excellence program. The commission shall make funding award determinations under this program. A center must be a research university or a nonprofit university-related or college-related foundation of a research university which is working in partnership with the private sector.
2. The department shall provide center application forms, accept applications, review applications for completeness and compliance with commission policy, forward complete applications to the commission in accordance with guidelines established by the commission, and assist with preaward reviews and postaward monitoring as may be requested by the commission.
3. The commission shall meet as necessary to review all complete applications; consider the potential need for independent, expert review of complete applications; approve or disapprove complete applications; make funding award recommendations for commission-approved proposed centers; direct the department to distribute funds to the centers; monitor centers for compliance with award requirements; review changes in assertions made in center applications; and conduct postaward monitoring of centers.
4. In considering whether to approve or disapprove a center application, the commission shall determine whether the applicant has conducted the due diligence necessary to put together a viable proposal, the commission shall determine whether the applicant has provided information in the application which clearly outlines how the matching fund requirement will be met, and the commission shall consider whether the center will:
 - a. Use university research to promote private sector job growth and expansion of knowledge-based industries or use university research to promote the development of new products, high-tech companies, or skilled jobs in this state;
 - b. Create high-value private sector employment opportunities in this state;
 - c. Provide for public-private sector involvement and partnerships;
 - d. Leverage other funding, including cash from the private sector;
 - e. Promote the commercialization of new products and services in industry clusters; and

- f. Establish and meet a deadline for acquiring and expending all public and private funds specified in the application.
5. In considering whether to approve an application, the commission may provide for an independent, expert review of the application to determine whether the proposed center is viable and whether the proposed center is likely to have the desired economic impact. As necessary, the commission may contract for additional technical review of applications. The commission may not approve an application unless the commission determines the proposed center has a high likelihood of viability and success in positively impacting economic development in the state.
6. The board rules adopted under subsection 9 of section 15-10-17, relating to ownership of intellectual property, inventions, and discoveries, must address activities and issues unique to centers.

54-65-03. Use of funds - Terms of funds - Distribution of funds - Postaward monitoring.

1. A center shall use center grant funds to enhance capacity and leverage state, federal, and private sources of funding. A center awarded center funds under this chapter may not use the funds for infrastructure, to supplant funding for current operations or academic instructions, or to pay indirect costs.
2. For no fewer than six years and no more than ten years following center designation, the commission shall monitor the center's activities in order to determine whether the center is having the desired economic impact.
3. As a condition for receipt of funds under this chapter, a center shall agree to provide the board, foundation, and budget section of the legislative management with annual audits on all funds distributed to the center under this chapter. The annual audits must be provided until the completion of the commission's postaward monitoring of the center. As a condition for receipt of funds under this chapter, a center shall agree to provide the commission with the information necessary to monitor the postaward activities of the center. Instead of requiring annual audits under this subsection, the commission may require that the center be audited on all funds distributed to the center under this chapter after the second full fiscal year of the postaward monitoring and after all funds distributed to the center under this chapter have been expended and that for all other years during the postaward monitoring the center contract with an independent accountant for an agreed-upon procedures engagement. A center may use funds distributed to the center under this chapter to pay for audits required under this subsection or for an agreed-upon procedures engagement. At a minimum, an agreed-upon procedures engagement under this subsection must include:
 - a. Verification of the accuracy of jobs data regarding jobs claimed created by the center, distinguishing between the creation of private sector jobs and jobs within the institution of higher education;
 - b. Verification of compliance with the centers of excellence program matching fund requirements;
 - c. Verification awarded center funds were used for authorized uses;
 - d. Verification the center complied with the center's application timeline and any authorized revisions;
 - e. Verification the center complied with the center's scope of activities as provided under the center's application and any authorized revisions;
 - f. Review of a sample of center expenditures to verify the expenses were approved, supported with documentation, and made in accordance with the scope identified in the center's application;
 - g. Verification of a sample of labor charged to the center; and
 - h. Comparison of the center's application budget to the center's actual expenditures, including documentation explaining any material differences.
4. Before the commission directs the department to distribute center funds awarded under this chapter, the center shall provide the commission with detailed documentation of private sector participation and the availability of two dollars of

matching funds for each dollar of state funds to be distributed. Of the two dollars of matching funds, at least one dollar must be cash, of which at least fifty cents must be from the private sector. The matching funds may include funds facilitated through the collaboration of the private sector participants with other funding entities. The noncash matching funds may include in-kind assets with itemized value. Private sector participation may be established through equity investments or through contracts for services with private sector entities. In making funding recommendations and designation determinations, the commission shall give major consideration to the portion of the matching funds provided in cash by the private sector.

5. The commission shall direct the department to distribute the center funds awarded under this chapter in disbursements consistent with the center's budget and timeframe outlined in the approved award. The commission may not direct distribution of center funds under this chapter if there are no private sector partners participating or if the statutorily required matching funds are not available.
6. If, before center funds are distributed by the department, a center undergoes a change in the terms of or assertions made in its application, the commission may direct that the department withhold all or a portion of any undistributed funds pending commission review of the changes.
7. The commission may use funds appropriated for the centers of research excellence program to pay for the commission's administrative expenses.

54-65-04. Base realignment grants.

As part of the centers of research excellence program, the department of commerce shall establish and administer a base realignment grant program to provide grants to a research university or a nonprofit university-related foundation to enhance economic development and employment opportunities associated with the Grand Forks air force base resulting from action by the federal defense base closure and realignment commission and infrastructure and economic development projects or programs to accommodate growth in proximity to or at the Grand Forks air force base. Under this program, the commission shall make grant award determinations. The department shall work with the commission in establishing guidelines to qualify for a grant under this section.

54-65-05. Centers of research excellence fund - Continuing appropriation.

The centers of research excellence fund is a special fund in the state treasury. All moneys in the centers of research excellence fund are appropriated to the department of commerce on a continuing basis for the purpose of implementing and administering this chapter. Interest earned on moneys in the fund must be credited to the fund.

54-65-06. Research North Dakota grants.

The department shall establish and administer a research North Dakota grant program to provide grants to a research university for research, development, and commercialization activities related to a private sector partner. The centers of excellence commission, established under chapter 15-69, shall make grant award determinations under this section. The department shall work with the centers of excellence commission in establishing guidelines to qualify for a grant under this section, including the requirement that an application must be accompanied by a partnership agreement between the private sector partner and a research university. The agreement must include details regarding the scope of the work, the budget, the location of the work to be completed, the intellectual property ownership rights, and the intellectual property income distribution. The commission may approve changes to the scope of the work or the budget only to the extent that the changes are agreed upon by the private sector partner and the research university. Before the commission directs the department to distribute funds awarded under this section, the research university shall provide the commission with detailed documentation of private sector participation and the availability of one dollar of matching funds for each dollar of state funds to be distributed. Matching funds must be in the form of cash and may not include in-kind assets.

54-65-07. Research North Dakota venture grants.

The department shall establish and administer a research North Dakota venture grant program to provide grants to a research university for pursuing further commercialization of technology developed by the research university or developed jointly by the research university and a startup or spinoff business operating in North Dakota. The department shall collaborate with the centers of excellence commission in establishing guidelines to qualify for a grant under this section.

54-65-08. Research North Dakota fund - Continuing appropriation.

The research North Dakota fund is a special fund in the state treasury. All moneys in the research North Dakota fund are appropriated to the department of commerce on a continuing basis for the purpose of implementing and administering the research North Dakota grant program and the research North Dakota venture grant program. Interest earned on moneys in the fund must be credited to the fund.