BUSINESS SKILLS FOR CORE FACILITIES

South Central Core Collective
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Part 4: Core Evaluations
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Importance of Core Evaluations

Core Facilities need to support the mission of their institution.

Ensuring that they are financially sound and yet responsive to new trends in research requires input and evaluation from many different levels.

Thus, core evaluation is central to all aspects of core operations

Strategic Management

Core Evaluation

Core Facility Business Planning

Rate Setting & Compliance
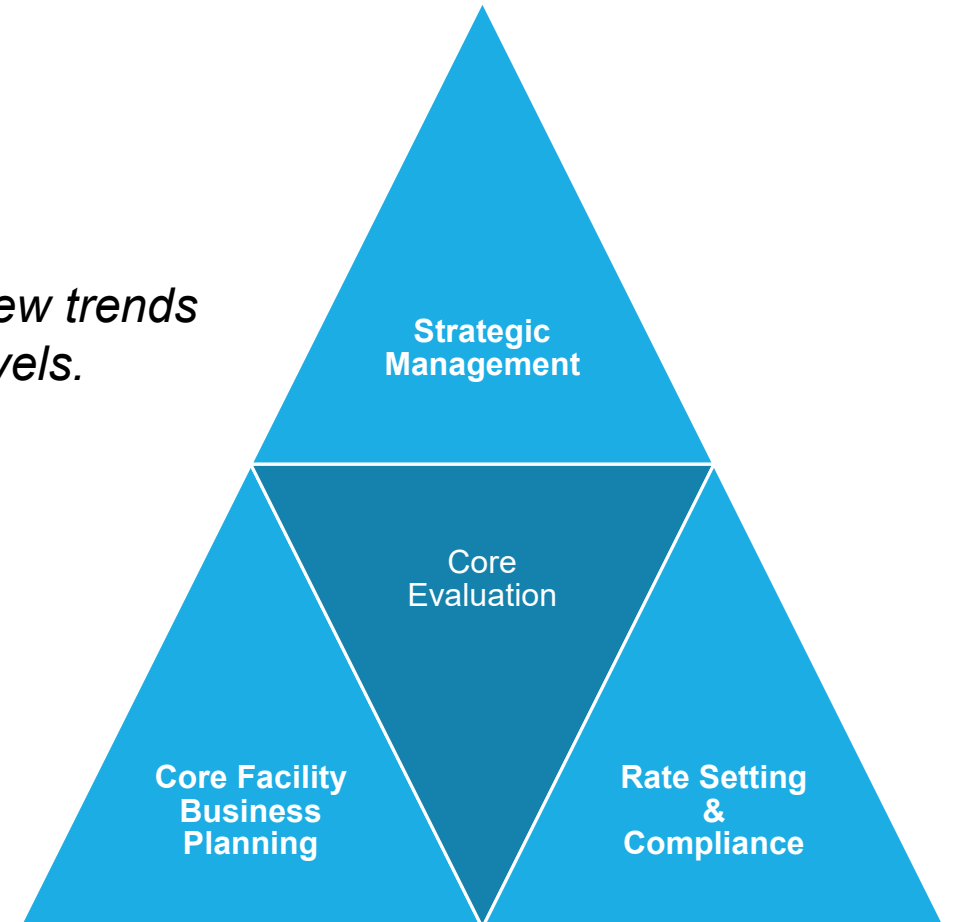
Evaluations Support Strategic Management

- Ensure that guiding principles and decision making processes are in place for life cycle management of cores, both to establish new cores and services, and to sunset cores that are no longer cost effective or meeting faculty needs

- Enable data-driven decision making by key stakeholders

Evaluations Support Business Planning

Ensure that existing and proposed core services receiving support are cost effective and meet faculty needs

- Always have to justify insourcing and institutional support
  - Temporary funding for establishing a new core or creating a new or expanded service within an existing core *(usage and survey data)*
  - Emerging technologies *(publications, conferences, surveys)*
  - Lack of viable outsourcing option *(survey, cost comparisons)*
  - In house counseling and expertise *(usage, survey, presentations)*
  - Economies of scale *(usage, capacity)*
  - Need for local sample processing or analysis *(usage)*
  - Time sensitive samples or results *(usage)*

Evaluations Support Rate Setting

✓ Evaluation criteria should be standardized. **Information must be reliable.**

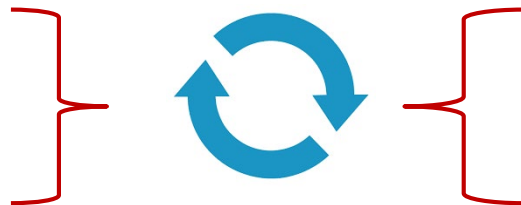The Institution is obligated to be a good stewards of its resources.

Cores cannot save funds for emergencies or for potential future expansion. Cores need a venue for expansion and emergencies.

Assessment is Complicated... *No, it isn't*

Don't Get Overly Complicated. Simplicity and Transparency Fosters Trust.

- Utilization
- Total Value of Research Supported

- Cost to Institution to Run/ Financial Health of Core
- Cost of use to Investigators vs. External Options

Reliability of information provided is critical

- If you allow each Core to devise the systems used to track utilization, and fee for service charges... *Administration is going to be leery of "what you are selling"…*

- ***A solid path to ensuring trust is*** for each Core to utilize the same Core Management System software whose operation and oversight can be managed by a centralized office independent of any Core or set of Cores.

- Data should be independently verifiable

Advantages of a Core Management System

- Reporting on *"who"* is using *"what"* is derived from single trusted source.
  - The optics for the reports can be wide or granular.
    - *University, School, Department/Center, PI, PI's lab member, etc.*
    - *Equipment, services, weekdays, weekends, etc.*

- We know exactly *which* grants and contracts have been used at *which* Cores and for *which* services.

- Billing activity is efficient, regularly scheduled and standardized.
  - The integration between the Core Management System and the University's Financial System provides clear detail on each transaction.
    - *Easy for departments to reconcile*
    - *Easy for auditors to find what they want and "feel good" about the data*
    - *Easy for those who hold your institution's checkbook to confirm…* (Trust but Verify…)

Evaluations for Oversight

The evaluation depends on the stakeholders

Departmental Cores
- Users are (generally) limited to one department or center: Department Faculty and Administrators

Institutional Cores
- Core Specific Advisory Board
- External Core Specific Advisory Boards
- Institution-wide Advisory Boards (Internal members)
- Institution-wide Advisory Boards (External members)
- External Granting Agency review
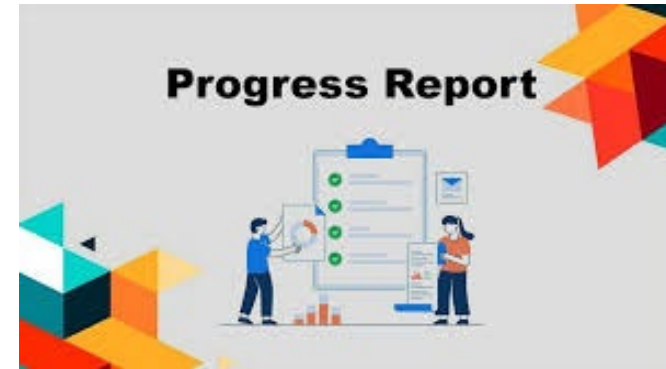
Value of Feedback

There is immense value to get feedback from stakeholders

- Inform Strategic Planning

- Inform Business Planning

- Provide Direction to the Core

- Reviewed by Senior leadership

- Required for Funding Agencies

Types of feedback

- Institutional Surveys

- Informal Feedback (ask!)

- Focus Groups

- Advisory Boards

- Review faculty outsourcing

Metrics

Enable uniform criteria for evaluation of all core facilities

Show faculty need/usage
- Cutting edge services/unique services
- Number of PI users served
- Number of Departments/Programs
- Institutional support per PI
- User satisfaction survey
- Increased utilization (% growth)
- Introduction of new services
- Support of Strategic Projects

Show Return on Investment
- Number/quality of publications
- Number of patents
- Number of LOS written, grants obtained

Show fiscal responsibility
- Comparison to external services
- Cost-effective services as evaluated by peers
- Stay on budget
- Percentage of needed
- Partial support by a grant (P01, P50, CCSG, CPRIT)
- Ability to obtain grant support (CPRIT, S10, NSF MRI, P01)

Sources of Data

Take advantage of existing systems

Automate when possible

Data should be able to be independently verifiable

Analysis of data must be done with input of core directors

- Core Management Software
- Institutional Directory
- Facilities database
- Faculty database
- Publication tracking
- User surveys

Utilization – *The tale of Who and How Much*

Who is your Core important to?
- Is your Core critical to the research 1 or more "research heavy weights"?
  - *Modest user base is size but critical to an area of research?*
- Does your Core have a diverse user base that spans many departments or disciplines?

How Much are the services and/or Instrumentation used?
- What story does your instrument use calendars tell?
- Which services are in demand?
- Which instruments and/or services are little used?
- However, Year to year variability in utilization of cores needs to be taken into consideration in evaluating cores.

Your Core needs to be important to a few **"BIG SOMEBODIES"** or to a **"BIG GROUP of somebodies"**.

Is there a need for additional resources to meet demand?

Is it time to cut a few services and/or evolve services?

Usage Aggregator

DEMO

Scholar.google.com demo
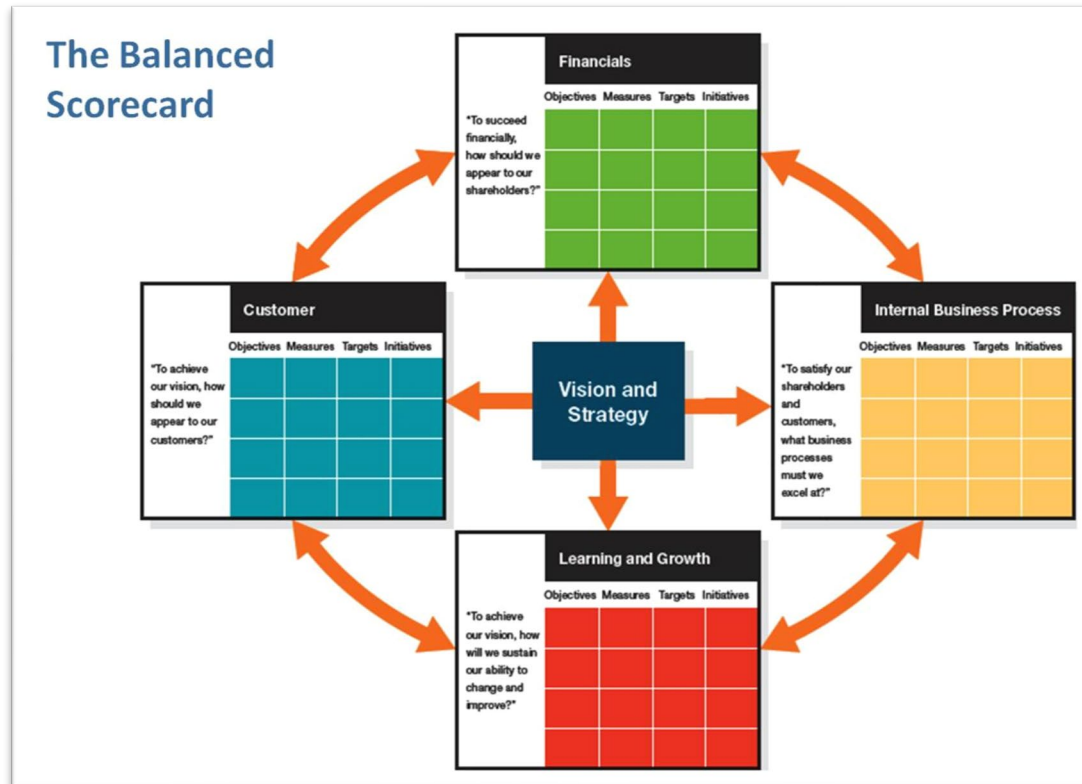
DEMO

Format for Progress Reports

- Contributions to Educational Programs and Service to University and Community

- Total Value of Research Supported

- List of Services to ensure lack of duplication

- Details on instrumentation if applicable

- Utilization
  - Actuals compared to prior year's information
  - Details on "who" is using which services and/or instrumentation

- Publications …

- Financial Health (Bottom line, staffing, etc.)

- Challenges, Opportunities and Related Plans

Scheduled Rate Proposals:
- Utilization forecast is checked against prior year's information
  - Large changes need to be well explained
- Projected revenues and expenses compared to previous actuals
- General health of Core examined, and issues addressed

Balanced Scorecards

The Balanced Scorecard

Financials
Objectives Measures Targets Initiatives
"To succeed financially, how should we appear to our shareholders?"

Customer
Objectives Measures Targets Initiatives
"To achieve our vision, how should we appear to our customers?"

Vision and Strategy

Internal Business Process
Objectives Measures Targets Initiatives
"To satisfy our shareholders and customers, what business processes must we excel at?"

Learning and Growth
Objectives Measures Targets Initiatives
"To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?"

- If you go this route "Balanced" is the key
- Balance is compatible with "Holistic"
- Balance coexists with "Commonsense"

It is when to start to assign "weights" to each area that you can run into problems.

Weighted Score Card

Core	# Pubs	% JIF >5	% Satisfied Survey	Merit Rank	# Faculty Users
Core 1	73	56%	64%	Ex	125
Core 2	35	25%	83%	O	23
Core 3	10	80%	95%	O	5
Core 4	74	45%	80%	Ex	47
Core 5	141	24%	86%	Ex	57
Core 6	14	35%	71%	O	29
Core 7	36	12%	89%	Ex	59
Core 8	15	10%	95%	E	10
Core 9	9	60%	90%	E	3

Category	Definition
% Pubs	Over 100 publications/year
% JIF >5	Over 75% is Exceptional
% JIF >10	Over 40% is Exceptional
% IAB (4/5)	5 IAB meetings in 5 years
% EAB (1/3)	3 IAB meetings in 5 years
% Satisfied Survey	100% satified ore very satisfied customers
Merit Rank	Exceptional
Number of users	Over 100 faculty users
Number of Departments	Over 25 Departments
Peer-review funded Research	Percentage
External Usage	Under 25%
Inst Support/user	Under $2000
% Inst Support	Below 10%
% Grant Support	Under 10%
% Free balance	within 20% 5 years in a row
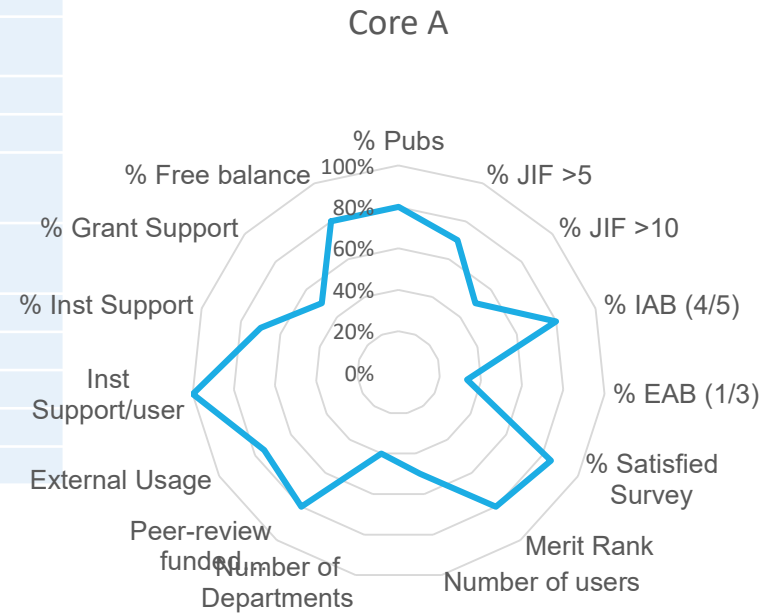
Core A

Issues with Core Comparisons

✓ **Encourages "Gamesmanship"**
✓ **Reduces the discussion of Cores from Critical Infrastructure to something much less**

Strategic management/assessment of research infrastructure (including Cores) requires a greater degree of nuance, collaboration, and understanding of how sponsored research works and is best supported.

Cores help institutions win the LONG GAME… not the SHORT GAME…

Stakeholder Expectations

Users:
- Spend no time on admin tasks and just help them

Faculty:
- Keep on top of new technologies
- Charge as little as you can

Core Administrators:
- Fill out the paperwork so the institution doesn't get into trouble

Granting agencies:
- Know how you spent their money

Senior Leaders:
- Data, data, data

Users:
- You need their help so that you can get funding
- Acknowledgement on publications

Faculty:
- You need their feedback so you can stay cutting-edge

Core Administrators:
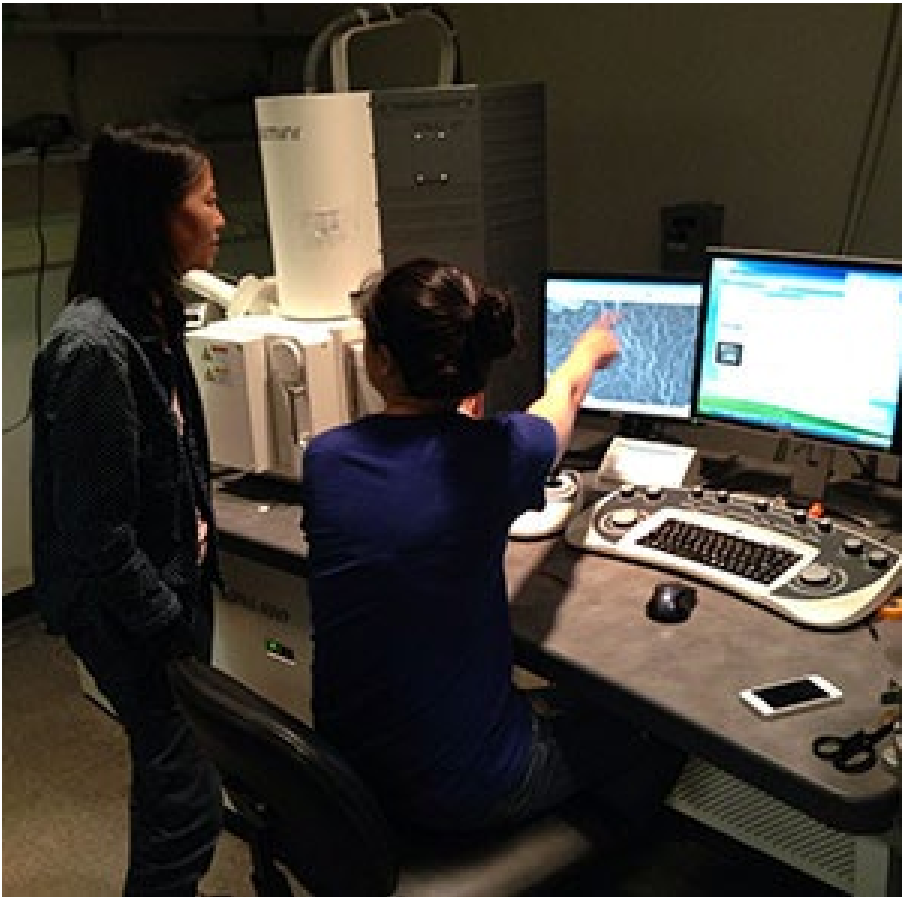- You need to know what systems can help you gather the information

Granting agencies:
- Administrators and PIs should help you by providing information on what metrics they need

Senior Leaders:
- Need to know how much and what format they want

Communication is Key

- We need to be able to make "THE CASE FOR CORES" at every given opportunity.
- Any presentation, advisory board meetings, progress report, or elevator speech
- Faculty need to know what is available to support their research and that recognize that core personnel have the in-depth knowledge and skills to achieve their goals.
- It has a huge impact on a core when their efforts are acknowledged for their collaborative efforts, both in publications and during presentations. When the presentations are to our own faculty, the impact is even greater.

Cores
Done Correctly
Are a Game Changer

Open Discussion