Implementing Strategic Initiative Themes: Research Investment Council

The Research Investment Council (RIC) will advise the provost and executive vice chancellor on investments to support the four strategic initiatives (http://www.provost.ku.edu/planning/themes/). The investments will be solicited through a two-level competitive grant program described below. Strategic initiative submissions from February 2011 can help inform the preparation of submissions to the RIC through this grant program, although submissions are not limited to those related to proposals from February 2011. The RIC will meet a minimum of three times a year, with additional meetings as needed at the request of the provost.

Overarching Principles to Guide Investments

1. Capitalize on existing centers and funding mechanisms to avoid duplication and complexity.
2. Utilize periodic review of existing centers in order to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and increased synergy for multidisciplinary collaborations.
3. Add new structures such as research centers to facilitate the university’s competitive position in areas with long-term growth and funding potential.
4. Prioritize central investments based upon a multidisciplinary focus directly tied to a strategic initiative theme, current faculty and research staff strength, university faculty hiring goals, probability of success, and cost-sharing by the requesting units.
5. Establish clear milestones for funded projects.

RIC Membership

The RIC will be chaired by the vice chancellor for research and graduate studies, with the provost and the vice provost for administration and finance serving as ex officio members. Eight committee members will be appointed by the provost to serve staggered, three-year terms. Members will include deans, center directors, and faculty researchers as follows:

3 deans;
2 directors of university research centers;
2 faculty research leaders;
1 faculty or administration representative from KUMC.

Members will be charged with representing the best interests of the university, not their home units, in evaluating investment proposals. The council will seek advice of external subject-matter experts as needed. The vice chancellor for research and graduate studies will vote on recommendations only in the case of a tie vote.

Two-Level Strategic Initiative Grant Program

Level 1: Large grant requests of over $50,000 (typically $100,000 to $300,000) to support major, multidisciplinary proposals to the RIC for university centers, development of research teams related to the strategic themes, or applications to external agencies for multi-investigator program projects/centers.

Funds provided through this program will be available to support such activities as course releases, summer salary, equipment purchase, postdoctoral researchers, external consultants, faculty
hiring, personnel, infrastructure, conferences, speaker series, etc., as appropriate to mount these initiatives. Funds may not be used for pilot studies. Funding may be requested for one year or longer depending upon the time frame for the opportunity and the current strengths and weaknesses of KU. Procedures for review of Level 1 requests may include methods of soliciting and obtaining internal and external reviewer evaluations.

Evaluation criteria include:

1. The proposal’s potential to
   a. Have broad synergies across multiple departments and/or schools;
   b. Create a positive impact on the university that will extend beyond five years;
   c. Raise KU’s stature in the strategic initiative theme;
   d. Contribute to faculty success and research productivity;
   e. Have positive impacts on new or existing degree programs.
2. Demonstrated collaboration of multiple departments/schools related to strategic themes, either current or activated through the proposal.
3. Evidence of the proposal’s sustainability documented in a business plan that includes specific benchmarks and milestones for the duration of the funding period and beyond.
4. Evidence of a range of specific opportunities and diverse funding sources that can sustain the project beyond the funding period.
5. Evidence that the proposal addresses a critical research need that could not be met through existing internal funding mechanisms or research units.

Review Outcomes: Applicants will receive a review summary from the RIC including scores per criterion. Proposals that do not receive funding on the initial submission may be revised and resubmitted one additional time in a subsequent round of Level 1 submissions.

**Level 2:** Small grant requests of $5,000 to $50,000 to support preparation of proposals with application deadlines in the near future (i.e., three months to one year).

Funds provided through this program will be available to support such activities as course releases, summer salary, equipment purchase, external consultants, etc., as appropriate to facilitate preparation of the proposal. Funds may not be used for pilot studies. These investments will require an expedited review process to capitalize on the immediate opportunity for proposal submissions. The RIC will delegate responsibility for reviewing these requests to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) for the sake of efficiency and rapid turnaround. RGS will submit an annual Level 2 investment report to RIC.

Evaluation criteria include:

1. Evidence that the proposal
   a. Builds upon and enhances existing research success/productivity or fundamental curricular programs of high quality (e.g., a Title VI proposal);
   b. Or alternatively develops research network capacity to respond to a new or emerging research area, perhaps preparatory to a Level 1 proposal.
2. Demonstrated collaboration of multiple departments/schools related to strategic themes either current or activated through the proposal.
3. Clarity of the proposal goal and specification of how the funding will achieve that goal.
4. Feasibility of a successful submission for funding within the time frame of the proposal.
Strategic Initiative Grant Program Application: Overview

Separate application forms will be available for Level 1 and Level 2 proposals. Deadlines for submission of Level 1 proposals for the 2012–2013 academic year are: June 15, October 15, and February 15. A rolling submission process will be used for Level 2 proposals to maximize the university’s responsiveness to immediate opportunities. The main components proposed for the application forms are outlined below and are designed to address the evaluation criteria. All applications should be submitted to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

Level 1 Application Components

1. Cover Page: Proposal Title, Lead Investigators, Sponsoring Units (Schools/College, Research Centers, etc.), Abstract, Start/End Dates, Total Funding Request.
2. Proposal Narrative (2–3 pages maximum).
   a. Overview: Describe the strategic initiative opportunity, proposal goals, and proposed activities to accomplish those goals.
   b. University readiness: What are the key strengths already present at KU that will contribute to success? What weaknesses must be addressed? How will the proposed activities address the weaknesses and capitalize on the strengths?
   c. Qualifications of the lead investigators and research team: How will the backgrounds of the lead investigators and research team ensure that the project will achieve its goals?
   d. Benefits to the university: What impact will the proposal have on faculty research output and visibility, new or existing degree programs, KU’s stature and visibility? How will it advance one or more of the strategic initiative themes? What will be the lasting effects (beyond the next five years)?
3. Business Plan (2 pages maximum). Provide a timeline of key decisions and actions that must be taken. The business plan should include key metrics or benchmarks of progress toward success for the funding period and beyond. It should also identify one time and continuing costs of the activity, including reallocation of current university resources, net new investments, and an estimate of external resources that will be leveraged by the project in direct and indirect payments.
4. Budget:
   a. Budget justification. The budget justification should address both funds to be leveraged from the units (departments, schools, etc.) and the central funds requested. The nature of the justification will vary across types of support requested. For instance, requests for long-term commitments to support faculty hiring will need to conform to the request procedures outlined for faculty hiring requests in the annual budget and planning process.
   b. A detailed budget by project year that includes contributions from schools/research centers in addition to RIC requests.
5. Appendix:
   a. Two-page bio sketches of the lead investigators and research team.
   b. Letters of support/commitment from the administrative heads (deans, center directors, department chairs, etc.) of the participating units.
   c. A list of five qualified external reviewers.
Level 2 Application Components

1. Cover Page: Proposal Title, Lead Investigators, Sponsoring Units (Schools/College, Research Centers, etc.), Abstract, Start/End Dates, Total Funding Request.
2. Proposal Narrative (2 pages maximum).
   a. Description of opportunity and need. What specific strategic initiative funding opportunity will be pursued? When will the application be submitted? What are the key strengths already present at KU that will contribute to success? What must be done to submit a competitive proposal?
   b. Qualifications of the lead investigators and research team: How will the backgrounds of the lead investigators and research team contribute to the success of the application for external funding?
   c. Benefits to the university: How will securing this external award advance the applicable strategic initiative theme or themes?
3. Brief budget and budget justification (1 page maximum). Identify expenses for which funding is requested and briefly explain their importance to preparing a successful proposal.
4. Appendix:
   a. Two-page bio sketches of the lead investigators and research team.
   b. Letters of support/commitment from the administrative heads (deans, center directors, department chairs, etc.) of the participating units.