

# **Committee on the Institutional Support for Research and Creative Activities (CISR)**

## **Spring 2025 Preliminary Report**

**Committee Members:** John Aerni-Flessner (*At-Large Member of Steering Committee, Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, Chair*), Dave Ewoldsen (*Communications*), Rebecca Anthony (*Engineering*), Victor Rodriguez-Pereira (*Arts and Letters*), Riyad Shahjahan (*Education*), Michael Williams (*Human Medicine*), Megan Halpern (*Lyman Briggs*), Lissy Goralnik (*Ag and Natural Resources*), Jeff Conroy-Krutz (*Social Sciences*), Shahnaz Masani (*Briggs and Natural Sciences*), Angela Wilson (*Natural Sciences*), Siddarth Chandra (*James Madison*), Kay Connelly (*Office of Research and Innovation*), Marilyn Amey (*Faculty and Academic Staff Development*), and Liz Ivkovich (*University Advancement*)

### **Key Conclusions/Findings:**

- 1) The funding of research/creative activities is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL to the core mission of MSU and its faculty.**
- 2) Supporting research/creative activities at MSU will require thinking around at least four different sources of funds: Central support from the base budget and ORI initiatives, revenue-based initiatives (RBIs), grant support (IDC money), and philanthropy/corporate partnerships. Maximizing the potential of these sources will be crucial to carrying the research enterprise forward in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**
- 3) There are substantive discrepancies between funding available for research and creative activities not just across campus but often within the same college and, sometimes, even within particular units.**
- 4) 38% of departments/schools reported giving some money to support research/creative activities to all faculty annually; 40% of units reported that they directly gave such funds only to some faculty member annually; 22% of units gave no annual money to faculty.**
- 5) A small but significant number of units (10% in our survey) reported asking their faculty to support research and/or professional obligations out of pocket.**

### **Preface:**

The committee was created by a resolution passed by the Faculty Senate at MSU on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2024. The remit was to investigate the ways that departments, schools, colleges, and other offices at MSU internally support and fund research and creative activities for faculty across campus. Faculty is defined as tenure-system, academic specialists, fixed-term faculty, and non-tenure system faculty represented by the Union of Non-Tenure Track Faculty. The committee has a one-year remit, with a final report due by November 2025. The committee consists of 13 faculty from 11 colleges across the university and also includes representatives from the Office of Research and Innovation, University Advancement, and Faculty and Academic Staff Development.

This work, in some ways, has been upended by the flux at the federal level that has made future planning in higher education difficult at the moment. However, it is still valuable to document the different funding models on campus, and to identify areas where valuable research and career development are in need of support mechanisms that may be remedied relatively easily.

### **Work Completed:**

After forming and constituting the committee late in the Fall semester of 2024, the committee drafted two separate surveys to be distributed across campus. The first survey was intended for Research Deans at the colleges on campus that have the position. The second survey was designed for Department Chairs and School Directors. After working on the questions, the committee sent the questions through the new MSU Survey office for approval. We then reached out to 16 research deans and 91 Chairs/Directors, receiving responses from 14 of the 16 research deans and 54 of the 91 Chairs/Directors after a number of follow-up emails from committee members. We have also conducted interviews with key personnel who support faculty research in Extension, Advancement, and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

### **Preliminary Findings:**

There is a general desire from everyone—from the most senior people to the newest department chair—to improve the research environment here. However, we have also found that central support for many of our marquee internal research programs has been largely flat since 2010 when many of them were created. That includes programs run through the Office of Research and Innovation (like the Humanities and Arts Research Program (HARP), the Strategic Partnership Grants Program (SPG), and the Discretionary Funding Initiative (DFI)).

*Research Deans (14 responses):*

As for the survey data, the research deans noted that while there were usually funds available from their college to support faculty research, the focus of these funds differed widely across campus. The committee plans to examine this focus in more detail in Fall '25, breaking out college-level support along disciplinary lines/similar colleges. We will also look at junior versus senior faculty and tenure-system versus non-tenure system distinctions to give a better sense of where more support is needed for faculty success. With the **revisions to the Off Campus Credit Instruction (OCCI) model** for building up departmental/college-level reserves to support research and programmatic needs, many units are trying to find new, sustainable models of funding faculty research and creative activities. This has significantly impacted non-grant-funded units. The **inability of units to keep funds in reserve** from year-to-year also impacts their ability to utilize funds that are not fully recurring for research support. The biggest research needs that the research deans identified were for **travel, journal support, seed grants, and course releases** for faculty engaged in intensive research/creative projects. A common theme that ran through their comments was the growing importance of **philanthropy and the creation of new endowments** that would support research/creative activities in perpetuity. This was especially noted given the internal changes in funding models (like the revisions to the OCCI model) and the precarious nature of external grant funding at the moment. A final need that arose from grant-intensive units, in particular, was a need for more pooled funds that could help fund needed **infrastructure improvements** (whether specific instruments/equipment or general building changes) to keep up with changing research needs.

*Chairs/Directors (54 responses):*

Chairs/Directors noted some slightly different themes. These leaders identified a few notable gaps in funding, including a relatively common problem whereby pre-tenure faculty who were out of start-up funds struggled to access funding to continue to cultivate their professional profile nationally/internationally. These unit leaders found their greatest needs for new/different sources of funding fell into four categories: **conference/professional travel, purchase of research supplies/equipment, personnel support, and research travel**. There were big differences noted at the unit level. One way these broke out was in the distinction between grant-funded disciplines and those for whom grants are not readily available. However, even within these categories there were significant differences in the level of support available, differences that seemed to be based on particular college funding models and on policies toward unit revenue. An important part of the final report will be **cataloging these disparate needs and the ways through which units distribute centralized funds**. In terms of how funds are distributed, in some units **committees provided input into how funding was distributed**, while in other units, **unit leaders made the decisions**. While there are advantages to both, units should consider their processes to assess if what they are doing is working in an **equitable manner**. As with the research deans, most unit leaders noted that their job of supporting

faculty would be made easier by having access to more/any **endowed funds** that could support research/creative projects.

*Broad Themes:*

Of note in all of this, we did ask questions about whether units were supporting their **non-tenure system faculty** (fixed-term, academic specialists, and any other Union of Non-Tenured Faculty (UNTF)-represented faculty) in the same way as their tenure-system faculty. Around 30% of units reported equal funding for tenure and non-tenure system faculty, with a majority of units noting they gave professional development monies to non-tenure system members. This issue will be explored in more detail in the final report, but with many units having an **expectation that non-tenure system faculty have a national profile** to be considered for promotion, the availability of funding needs to be considered. Still, some units reported “limited or insufficient” resources being available to non-tenure system faculty. The final report will go into more detail as to the status of **funding for non-tenure system faculty of all ranks**. The surveys we conducted asked departments/schools if their annual research allocations covered all faculty members. 38% of departments/schools reported giving some money to support research/creative activities to all faculty annually; 40% of units reported that they directly gave such funds only to some faculty member annually; 22% of units gave no annual money to faculty. This divide will be investigated further in the final report, but preliminarily it appears that units not providing annual funding had the expectation faculty would fund research either through **Revenue-Based Initiatives (RBI)** or through grants. Most of the units that gave money to all faculty reported using general operating budget/department funds to provide this research support. Still, it was concerning that **a small but significant number of units (10%) reported asking their faculty members to support either their research or their professional obligations out of pocket.**

Another interesting feature that requires more analysis is that **65% of units reported having access to funds other than annual, recurring** dollars to make available to support research/creative activities. While that means 35% of units do NOT have such funds, these funds could potentially be mined for alternative methods for unit heads to consider when looking to more effectively support research/creative activities. Unit heads reported these funds came from **departmental funds, endowments/gifts, and specialized funds** (such as RBIs or non-recurring budgets). These answers point to the importance of cultivating donors to support **individual units and research/creative-based initiatives** in the current **comprehensive campaign**.

In sum, while the results obtained at this stage are preliminary, they suggest that a final report will be useful to senior administration at MSU in considering research and creative activities

broadly, to the research deans tasked with finding ways to better support research/creative activities, and to the unit heads who aim to support faculty in research and creative activity.

- 1) The funding of research/creative activities is **ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL** to the core mission of MSU and its faculty.
- 2) No single funding model will work for all units because of the disparate needs of faculty.
- 3) Differing needs for faculty do not just cut across campus, but are often found within the same college and often even within particular units.
- 4) Changing times in higher education will require increased creativity and knowledge around different ways to fund research/creative activities.
- 5) **Supporting research/creative activities at MSU will require considering at least four different sources of funds: Central support from the base budget and ORI initiatives, revenue-based initiatives (RBIs), grant support (Indirect Costs), and philanthropy/corporate partnerships. Maximizing the potential of these four categories will be crucial to carrying the research enterprise forward in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

### **Future Plans:**

Next semester, we will more fully analyze the data that we collected this semester. We are planning to provide it to facilitate examination across the institution of what is working and where there are gaps. We also want to analyze specific groups of departments/colleges/schools because funding needs differ so radically across campus. We will also look into other research support available on campus through entities like the Libraries and consider ways to better connect faculty with the resources already available on campus.

Additionally, we will re-evaluate our work in light of developments in both MSU funding and the federal funding situation over the summer. We anticipate that our goals and remits will change, at least subtly, based on the new normal that higher education is facing at the moment, and it is too soon to anticipate what the macro situation will look like by Fall semester.

Further, we plan to produce a final report laying out the various ways that units have funded research and creative endeavors, along with some general recommendations on aspirational goals the institution should pursue to better support faculty research and creative activities. We anticipate the report will be useful for administrators at all levels—from the President to the Provost, Vice-President for Research, Deans, Research Deans, and Chairs/Directors. But we also hope that the report inspires faculty to think creatively about funding, and how we might create new initiatives and/or modify existing programs to better support the needs of faculty at the quarter post of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Thanks:**

The CISR committee would like to thank everyone who has given generously of their time, and we welcome ideas on how to better position MSU to support faculty research and creative activities across campus in all fields.

*Comments and questions on this report or the work of the committee can be directed to the Chair, John Aerni-Flessner at [AerniFL1@msu.edu](mailto:AerniFL1@msu.edu).*

*CC: 2024-25 Faculty Senate Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members*

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