It is all about people driven by curiosity

8th Call for new Centers of Excellence

Professor Thomas Sinkjaer, Director
The DNRF Activities

The DNRF’s primary means to strengthen Danish research:

Centers of Excellence (CoE)

Other DNRF activities:

International Recruitment Program
Niels Bohr Professorships
PhD and Post Doc

International collaboration Program
NSFC, CNRS, NSF and others
CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
Overview 8th application round

Call for outline proposals

Outline proposal deadline
November 25

2013 JUNE

Assessment and selection

Application deadline
April 28

Composition of review panels
Success rate
13-20%

Reviews and comments

Interview with applicant

2015 JANUARY

Contract negotiation

Success rate
30-40%

△ Board decision
January 2014

△ Board decision
September 2014
Life Cycle of a Center of Excellence

**Call**
Letters of Interest

**Prequalification**
Submission of full applications

**Center start**
Selected, peer-reviewed applications. Large, flexible grants (6-4 years). Max. 2 grant periods.

**Midterm evaluation**
After 5 years, the board decides which centers will continue.

**Final evaluation**
After 9 years

**Potential embedment at host institution**

**1ST PERIOD**

**2ND PERIOD**

**Annual follow-up meetings**
What is a Center of Excellence?

- Research activities are ambitious, original, and internationally recognized
- Groups of researchers who jointly pursue a set of intriguing, overarching and ambitious research questions
- A strong and coherent research environment forming a physical community
- Clear center identity
- Headed by a researcher with high international standing
- Attractive research training sites
- Strengthen internationalization
- Spillover to education/host institution
Center of Excellence

No fixed formula

- The size of centers varies from 15 to +60 persons

- The size of grants varies from 36 to 64 million DKK incl. 44 % overhead for a 6-year period (cf. 7th Call)

- The centers are based at research institutions and other Danish and/or international institutions can be included

- Most centers are interdisciplinary
Research environment

"Good research is best performed and best thrives in an environment with dialogue and critical discussion. That’s why the center design is so valuable”

DAN ZAHAVI
Center for Subjectivity Research
Centers Distributed Among Scientific Fields

The DNRF has so far funded 88 centers. At the moment 43 centers are active.
Cross disciplinarity

"Given the growing specialization and fragmentation in research and teaching, we face an increasing risk of overlooking important relations and possibilities if we don’t keep abreast of the cognitive and methodological breakthroughs seen in other disciplines. Research groups and knowledge institutions must be reorganized to meet this challenge on an ongoing basis”.

LEIF ØSTERGAARD
Center for Functionally Integrative Neuroscience
SELECTION AND ASSESSMENT OF NEW CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
Criteria

- The idea
- The center leader
- The team
- The structure/organization
The idea

The research:

- must have high scientific quality
- must be ambitious, visionary
- must be original and novel
- can include an applied research dimension
- can have a strong emphasis on the theoretical dimension
- potentially ground-breaking research/top-class research within all research fields

We want to support bottom driven "dream projects"
The center leader

• an excellent and outstanding researcher with high international standing

• a visionary leader capable of fostering a creative and dynamic research environment

• someone who can build the right team and inspire others to deliver their best performance
Female researchers are very welcome to apply!
The "dream team"

The average distribution of Full time Equivalent for the different staff groups in a CoE in 2010

- Faculty
- Postdocs
- Ph.D. students
- Visiting researchers
- Research assistants
- Technicians
- Admin.
- Others
## International hubs

### Total number and number of people from abroad in CoEs for 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Number of people from abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-docs</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D. students</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting scientists</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Center members from abroad (percentage of total number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Post-docs</th>
<th>Ph.D.</th>
<th>Visiting scientists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outline proposals - 5 pages only

an *argument* (1,500 characters)
• How will the proposed endeavor redefine the research in its respective field(s)?
• What kind of new insights and results may it produce?
• Why should this particular proposed team pursue this research?

A short *description* (1,500 characters)
• To be used to identify peer reviewers

Presentation of the *research idea* including its dimension of novelty and potential for groundbreaking results and an argument for its scientific or investigative relevance and a *strategy* for how the idea and research challenges are met (10,000 characters)

• How will the center be organized?
• Which competences/capacities will be involved?
• How will a creative and dynamic research environment be established?
• Which methodologies and approaches will be employed?
Outline proposals

- CV for proposed center leader
- CV for core members
- Description of institutional affiliation
- References to relevant litterature
- Keywords
- International collaboration and recruitment (if relevant)
- Budget
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Full proposals – 15 pages – peer review

The outline proposal is developed into full proposal – 15 pages

**In-depth peer review**

For each application, 3 written peer reviews are collected. The peers are internationally recognized within their fields of research.

The peers are chosen following counseling from national and international research grant-awarding organizations (Danish research councils, ESF and NSF). One of the peers is proposed by the applicant.

The applicant is heard on the composition of the panel and again on the reviews, with an option to comment on them.
Transparent Process

**Transparent and open process ensures that:**
- the peers have the right scientific profile
- conflict of interests are exposed
- the evaluation is high quality and legitimate

**But...**
- it is time consuming
- the wording of the peer reviewers’ opinions are not as direct as in anonymous reviews.
Basic Principles in Peer Review of DNRF

- **Fairness**
  - ‘Equal treatment’ of all proposals
  - No overlap in peer reviewers

- **Quality**
  - ‘True peers’ (Three peers of which one proposed by applicant)
  - Well argued reviews (not reduced to numbers, ranking/grading)

- **Transparency**
  - ‘Double open’
  - Extensive consultation procedure
Interview

- 25 minutes
- Center leader gives a presentation (~10 min)
- Discussion –
  - How will the research center change the scientific field, and what kind of impact can be expected?
  - What are the great challenges and the corresponding high risk/high gain areas in the field?
  - Why is the proposed team the right one to address these challenges?
  - How will the proposed center leader make sure that the center will constitute a creative and inspiring scientific environment, in particular for its post-docs and Ph.D. students?
  - How will the center relate to similar efforts, nationally and internationally? In particular: Which groups are the main collaborators and/or competitors?
  - ...
  - ...
Contract negotiation - inauguration

The DNRF and the center leader negotiate with the host institution on co-financing and on plans for embedding the center after the end of the DNRF grant.

- New centers from January 1st 2015
Tips

- The DNRF board is your target group at first

- Explain how the project will redefine science and why exactly your outline proposal/application should get funded

- Be ambitious, daring and original

- Be concrete – envision daily life in the center

- Ask advice from present and former center leaders

- Do not hesitate to contact the DNRF secretariat for advice
DNRF Board, four international members

Liselotte Højgaard, Chair

Bo Honore, USA

Birte Svensson

Kirsten Hastrup

Eivind Hiis Hauge, Norway

Svend Erik Larsen

Birgitte Possing

Gunnar Öquist, Sweden

Pirjo Nuutila, Finland
If you let the best people grapple with the problems they are passionate about, we set the stage for real scientific breakthroughs.