



# Shared Service Centers Prioritize Customer Service and Enhance Administrative Efficiency for Researchers at KU

## BACKGROUND

Shared service centers provide increased levels of service by consolidating processes that are widely dispersed across a university. They reorganize some of the transaction-based activities that occur in local units and departments to improve service levels and efficiency. Staff in shared service centers receive tools and opportunities to grow professionally, such as training, a clear career path and support from supervisors with experience in their area of expertise.

As an integral component of the Changing for Excellence (CFE) initiative, Shared Service Centers (SSCs) for all units and departments at KU will be implemented beginning in February 2013. However, some may not realize that shared services have been operational at KU since 1988. Since this time, the Higuchi Biosciences Center (HBC) has used a shared service model to deliver outstanding service and support to Principal Investigators (PIs) in units and departments throughout campus.

## WHY SHARED SERVICE CENTERS?

When it comes to successfully administering research, experience and scale are important factors. Individual departments or academic units often lack the economies of scale which are achieved within dedicated research administration centers. Centers, such as HBC, draw upon training, industry resources, and internal and external relationships to improve research administration.

Consolidating the management of grants into shared service centers allows commonly performed research administration transactions to be performed more efficiently than local units acting on their own. Regional shared service centers, such as HBC, also maintain close connections and expertise related to the units they serve. Some additional benefits of regionally shared services include:

- Reduced administrative burden on PIs since staff in the center are highly experienced and trained
- Increased compliance with complex and changing regulations
- Streamlined proposal processing
- Cost savings, through more effective grant administration

## RESEARCH SHARED SERVICES AT A GLANCE

The Higuchi Biosciences Center has served the research mission at KU since 1988, providing pre- and post-award support.

**# of Investigators Supported (including proposals): 84**

**Total Research Expenditures (FY 2011): \$27 Million**

**# of Employees: 21**

**Areas of Expertise:** Proposal preparation, budget monitoring, procurement, personnel appointments, and other support functions

**Key Figures:** Transaction processing for FY2011 included:

- 8,004 Orders
- 11,000 Vendor Invoices
- 2,895 Internal Invoices
- 300 Travel Reimbursements
- 350 Large-Format Posters
- 136 Award Proposals

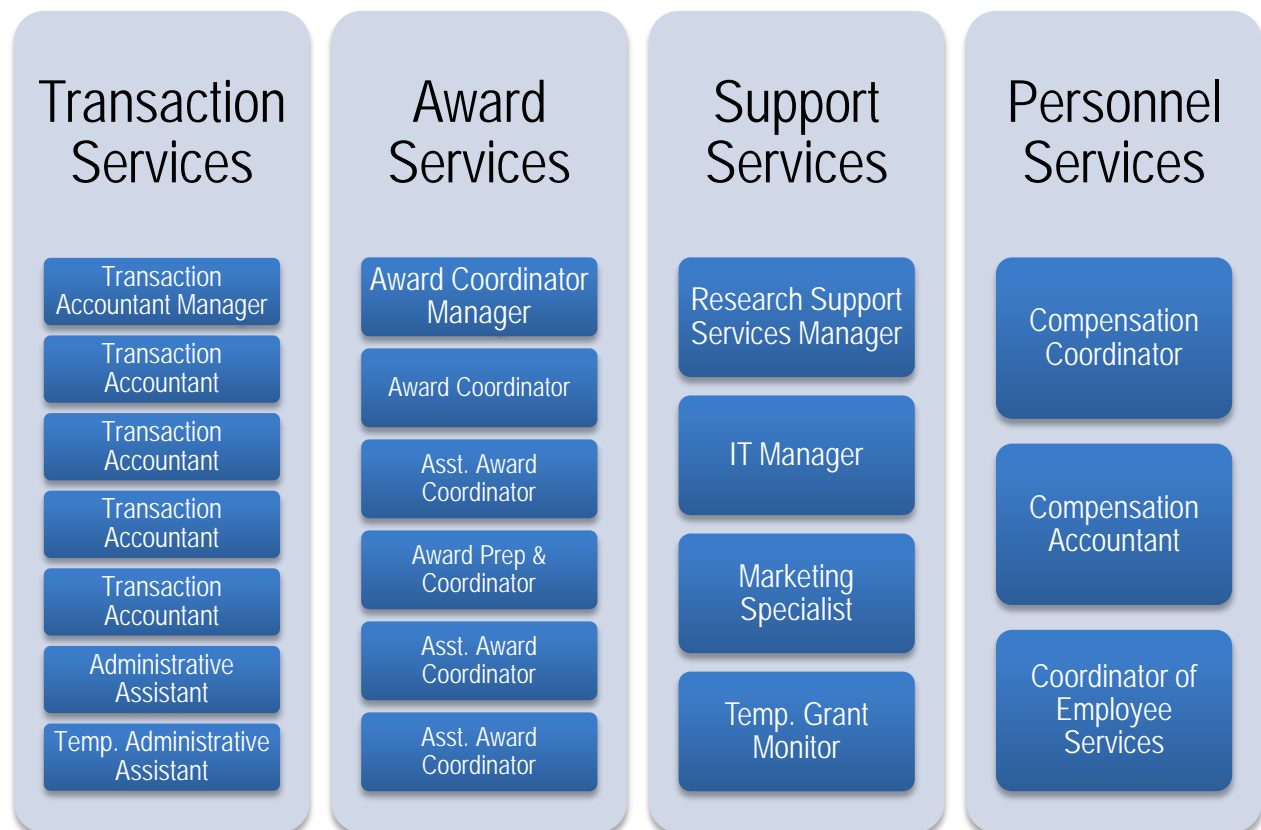


## KU SHARED SERVICES | CASE STUDY

### STRUCTURE

HBC is a high performing shared service center: its employees are dedicated to customer service and continuous improvement in order to provide excellent support to the KU research community. Services within HBC are organized in the following way. All of these employees report to Susan Sloop, the Associate Director of Finance & Operations.

Figure 1: HBC Organizational Chart



Other important attributes of HBC's organizational structure include:

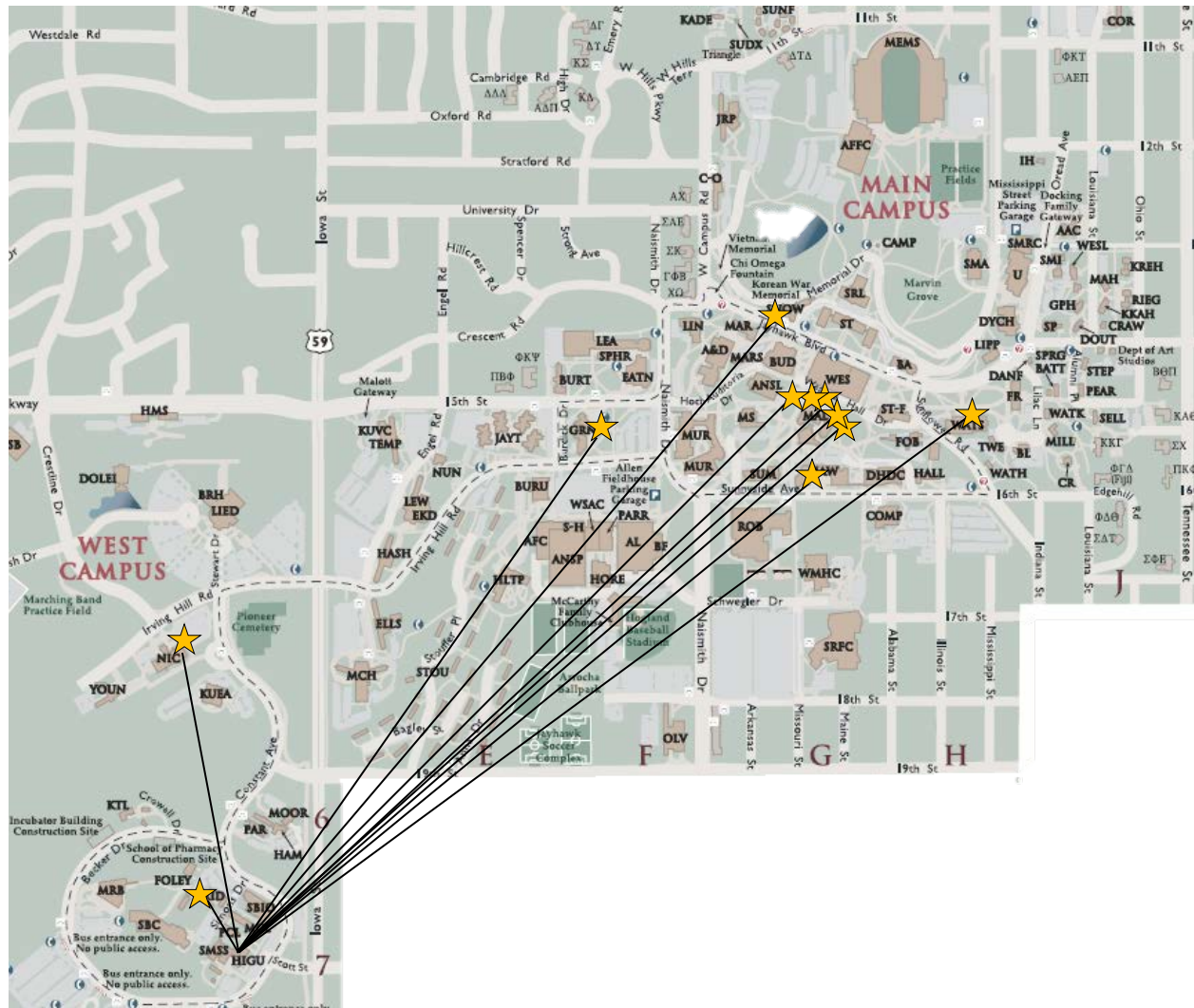
- A culture of customer service to provide timely, efficient and accurate service to the departments and units served
- An accountability structure, including regularly assessed metrics and customer satisfaction surveys
- An environment of professionalism, with staff having a deep understanding of the business practices underlying the tasks they perform—leading to reduced errors and processing times
- Periodic assessment of key performance indicators



## KU SHARED SERVICES | CASE STUDY

HBC employees occupy the same physical space on west campus, but their service and customer relationships reach well beyond their own walls. Several units across campus receive research support from HBC, as seen in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2: HBC's Service Relationship Diagram



### RESULTS

Feedback from PIs has been convincingly positive. The following comments were made during a recent customer satisfaction survey:

- *Excellent performance and a great help in proposal submission/grant management.*
- *HBC provides great help to KU investigators during proposal preparation and after the project has been funded. I have to commend [their] professionalism.*



## KU SHARED SERVICES | CASE STUDY

- HBC has provided superb service at every level (proposal planning, preparation, submission, and post-award services which include personnel, sole-sourcing equipment, etc.).

During interviews with staff members in HBC, including the Director and Associate Director of Finance & Operations, the details of key activities which improved operations became clear.

- **Improved data reliability:** HBC prides itself on the use of sophisticated systems which provide accurate and up-to-date grant information.
- **Improved compliance:** With 91% of the grants administered funded by the National Institutes for Health (NIH), HBC personnel are experts in managing complex compliance requirements.
- **Simpler administration:** Participating PIs pay a nominal fee to have HBC perform common pre-award and post-award functions, allowing them to spend less time on administration and more time on research.

Even as HBC has sought to increase the number of researchers it serves, it has aligned itself closely with PIs and focused on providing quality services. Successful shared service centers such as HBC develop a culture of customer service, professionalism and continuous improvement. Additional attributes include:

- **Improved supervision:** The functional managers and coordinators oversee the day-to-day work of employees in the center and report to the Associate Director of Finance and Operations who supports their work and provides training.
- **Pooled expertise:** HBC colleagues are satisfied with the professional interactions they have at work. Not only do co-workers cover for them during sick time or vacation, but they also serve as resources when new challenges arise.
- **Best practices:** HBC focuses on the development of standard operating procedures and the use of technology to serve customers better and more efficiently.
- **Continuous process improvement:** Ongoing customer feedback assessments allow HBC to constantly improve and innovate.

### TAKING HBC AND KU TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Shared services work best in an environment of continuous process improvement and networked expertise. To foster this environment, a network of SSCs will be established at KU. These centers will emulate several of the features already in place at the Higuchi Biosciences Center, improve the quality of service and streamline KU's administrative operations in order to better fulfill its educational and research missions.

Throughout the implementation, regular meetings of functional staff from across the SSCs will facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practice. Committees comprised of leadership across all staff levels and covering the entire university are carefully planning the design, communication and implementation of SSCs. Following the implementation of the initial SSC in February 2013, a full campus model will be implemented.

Shared service centers will revitalize the way administrative services are performed at KU. Learning from the success of HBC, KU will implement a robust, campus-wide model to better serve staff and faculty.