

OIST Open Center Handbook

Executive Summary

The Open Centers at OIST serve as dynamic, interdisciplinary hubs that enhance the university's visibility in strategically targeted research clusters. These centers promote open science, facilitate cross-institutional collaboration, enhance visibility, and foster exchanges with academic and industry partners. Open Centers also strengthen OIST's position in national and international grant applications, philanthropic engagement, and talent recruitment at all levels.

Strategic and Operational Guidelines

1. Purpose and Vision

1.1 Rationale for establishing Open Centers

The establishment of Open Centers at OIST is driven by the need to create agile, collaborative platforms that transcend disciplinary boundaries and promote high-impact, cross-cutting research. These centers serve as dynamic hubs of intellectual exchange, designed to foster collaboration among researchers from diverse scientific domains, industry partners, and other academic institutions. By operating under a shared scientific vision rather than fixed disciplinary boundaries, Open Centers address complex, real-world problems that require integrated approaches. They also serve as incubators for novel research directions and methodologies that may not fit easily into traditional departmental structures.

1.2 Alignment with OIST's mission and strategic goals

Open Centers are a natural extension of OIST's mission to promote excellence in science through interdisciplinary research and international collaboration. They support institutional priorities by:

- Enhancing OIST's global visibility in emerging and impactful research areas;
- Facilitating collaboration with external academic, industrial, and public-sector partners;
- Strengthening OIST's competitiveness in national and international funding landscapes;
- Advancing the recruitment and development of research talent at all career stages;
- Promoting open science through shared platforms, data openness, and inclusive participation.

Through these functions, Open Centers act as strategic instruments to keep OIST responsive to both global research trends and societal needs.

1.3. Distinction from traditional departments and research units

Unlike traditional departments or standalone research units, Open Centers:

- Operate across disciplinary boundaries, drawing faculty and researchers from various units to collaborate under a unified research theme;

- Prioritize openness and external engagement, actively fostering partnerships beyond OIST with universities, research institutions, industry, and funding agencies;
- Open Centers are shaped through a mix of leadership priorities and faculty input, ensuring they align with OIST's strategic goals while responding to the ideas and needs of the research community.

This flexible, collaborative model makes Open Centers uniquely positioned to catalyze innovation, respond rapidly to emerging scientific challenges, and enhance OIST's role as a leader in interdisciplinary science.

2. Requirements for Center Initiation

2.1 Interdisciplinary focus

The Center must address a research theme that cannot be effectively pursued within a single discipline or unit. The proposal should demonstrate how the Center will promote meaningful integration across scientific fields, leveraging diverse expertise to address complex challenges or generate new insights. Clear articulation of the transdisciplinary value added—beyond individual or unit capacity—is essential.

2.2 Strategic or societal relevance

The Center's thematic focus should align with OIST's strategic research priorities and/or address pressing societal or global challenges. This relevance may be demonstrated through alignment with national or international policy agendas, funding opportunities, or recognized knowledge gaps such as Japan's moonshot goals, Horizon Europe Missions, etc. The proposal should articulate how the Center's work will contribute to long-term scientific, technological, or societal impact.

2.3 Minimum number of participating PIs or units

To ensure sufficient depth and breadth of collaboration, proposals must include participation from a minimum of 4 full-time OIST faculty members representing at least 3 distinct thematic areas. This threshold helps guarantee that the Center will have the critical mass necessary to sustain meaningful interdisciplinary activity and research output. Participation should be active, not symbolic, with clear roles and commitments outlined.

2.4 External partnerships and collaborations

A strong proposal should include planned or existing collaborations with external academic institutions, industry partners, government agencies, or other stakeholders. These partnerships should enhance the Center's capabilities, broaden its impact, and support its long-term viability. Proposals should detail the nature of these collaborations and explain how they will contribute to the Center's objectives.

3. Organizational Structure

3.1 Internal Structure (*within the Open Center*)

3.1.1 Governance

Each Open Center must establish a clear and functional governance structure that ensures strategic coherence, scientific excellence, and operational accountability. This structure includes the following components:

- **Center Director(s)**
Each Center must be led by at least one full-time OIST faculty member, or co-led by two at most. The Center Director(s) are responsible for the overall leadership and strategic direction of the Center, coordination of research activities, engagement with institutional stakeholders, representation in external collaborations and funding discussions, and budget oversight.
- **Steering Committee**
A Steering Committee should be established to provide scientific oversight and strategic input. It must include 3–5 OIST faculty members. The committee's responsibilities include:
 - Advising on scientific priorities and resource allocation
 - Monitoring and evaluating Center activities
 - Facilitating coordination across disciplines and divisions
 - Supporting accountability and transparency across the Center's lifecycle

The structure is designed to ensure that each Open Center maintains a high level of scientific integrity, collaborative engagement, and responsiveness to both internal and external expectations.

3.1.2 Terms of Leadership Change

For continuity of governance and adaptability within the institution, Open Center Director(s) shall be elected by the Steering Committee for renewable two-year terms, not exceeding three consecutive terms (a total of six years).

3.2 Institutional integration (*within OIST*)

3.2.1 Interaction with Institutional Divisions and Sections

Open Centers operate under the oversight of the Provost Office and play a strategic role within OIST's research ecosystem. They are expected to work closely with OIST's administrative divisions and sections to ensure procedural compliance, strategic alignment, and effective use of institutional resources. Clear communication channels should be maintained to support timely decision-making and promote resource efficiency.

3.2.2 Hiring

While Open Centers may initiate hiring of researchers, technical staff, or administrative staff using external funding secured through the Center, all hiring must follow OIST's established institutional procedures. Research and technical staff supported by external funds are appointed to the relevant research units, whereas administrative staff are appointed under the Office of the Provost.

3.2.3 Procurement

All procurement activities must comply with OIST procurement guidelines. Equipment acquired with external funding shall be registered as shared equipment under the

relevant research unit, or, if agreed in advance, under Core Facilities. Associated maintenance and technical support must be financed from the same external funding source.

3.2.3 Branding and Communications

Open Centers are encouraged to collaborate with the Communication and Public Relations (CPR) section for public engagement, branding, media outreach, and website development. Institutional support ensures that all communications align with OIST's visual identity and strategic messaging while raising the Center's visibility externally.

4. Associates

Open Centers adopt a two-tier membership structure to reflect varying levels of engagement and responsibility. These categories, Core Associates and Collaborating Associates, help clarify expectations while fostering inclusive, flexible participation.

4.1 Core Associates

Core Associates are individuals who are deeply and consistently involved in the Center's research and strategic activities. Their contributions are essential to advancing the Center's vision and objectives.

Key characteristics:

- Actively engaged in shaping and contributing to the Center's core research themes
- Lead or co-lead projects, initiatives, or collaborative efforts
- Take an active role in grant acquisition and external fundraising
- Contribute regularly to shared outputs such as publications, proposals, or outreach
- May support planning and coordination efforts, though not necessarily in a formal governance role

4.2 Collaborating Associates

Collaborating Associates participate in the Center's work on a more flexible or project-specific basis. Their involvement enhances the Center's reach and impact but is typically limited in scope or duration.

Key characteristics:

- Engage in selected activities such as joint research, events, or exploratory projects
- Contribute expertise to specific initiatives or deliverables
- Don't have ongoing commitment to broader Center planning or operations

4.3 Associate Entry Procedure

To ensure clarity and transparency in participation, Open Centers follow a structured process for onboarding new associates.

- Collaborating Associates: Individuals interested in joining as Collaborating Associates must complete a registration form. Association becomes active upon confirmation by the Center, communicated via email. This process allows for broad and flexible involvement.

- Core Associates: Core Members are selected based on sustained commitment and relevance to the Center’s mission. Entry is by decision of the Center Director or Steering Committee, either through nomination or direct application.

4.4. Associate Withdrawal

Open Centers should establish clear procedures for both voluntary and involuntary withdrawal of associates, recognizing the distinct roles of Core and Collaborating Associates. In the absence of procedures specified in the Center’s charter, the following default guidelines will apply:

- Voluntary Withdrawal: Core Associates are expected to provide advance notice and coordinate with the Center Director to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities. Collaborating Associates may withdraw at any time with brief notice, particularly if they are not engaged in ongoing activities.
- Involuntary Withdrawal: In exceptional cases, members may be asked to withdraw due to prolonged inactivity, misalignment with the Center’s objectives, or conduct-related concerns. For Core Associates, such decisions should be reviewed and agreed upon by the Center Director and Steering Committee. Collaborating Associates may be removed at the discretion of the Center Director, with appropriate notice.

4.5 Benefits of Association

Association in an Open Center offers a range of tangible and strategic benefits that support research advancement, professional growth, and broader visibility. These benefits vary depending on the level of engagement but generally include the following:

- Enhanced Research Visibility: Gain exposure through Center-hosted events, websites, institutional communications, both within OIST and across academic, industry, and funding communities..
- Professional Networking and Strategic Partnerships: Interact with external collaborators from academia, industry, and government through center's networks, helping to expand collaborative opportunities and career development.

5. Collaboration and External Engagement

One of the core functions of Open Centers is to serve as a platform for building sustained collaborations beyond OIST. These connections enhance the Center’s relevance, broaden its impact, and open new opportunities for research, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

5.1 External Partnerships

Open Centers are expected to build and maintain collaborative relationships with academic institutions, industry partners, and government agencies. These partnerships may involve joint research projects, co-hosted events, technology transfer, or the co-development of solutions to societal challenges. All engagements should be purposeful, aligned with the Center’s mission, and mutually beneficial.

5.2 Formal Agreements

Formal collaborations – particularly those involving long-term commitments or resource sharing – should be documented through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or

other collaboration agreements. These agreements help to clarify the scope of cooperation, responsibilities, intellectual property considerations, data sharing, and, where applicable, funding arrangements. Agreements are coordinated in consultation with relevant OIST administrative sections such as the Office of the Provost, OIST Innovation to ensure compliance with institutional policies.

6. Funding and Resource Allocation

Open Centers are expected to operate with a sustainable and proactive funding model, combining initial limited internal support with a clear strategy for securing external resources.

6.1 Incubation Institutional Support

During their incubation phase (up to 3 years), and subject to availability, Open Centers may receive limited central funding to support operational setup and early strategic coordination. This seed funding is not for direct research, but to enable planning and engagement necessary for long-term external viability. Spending under this Initial Institutional Support is subject to approval by the Provost. Plans for use of these funds, along with requests for administrative support for the following fiscal year, must be submitted in advance before **January 31** to ensure alignment with institutional capacity.

6.2 Post-Incubation Institutional Support

After the incubation phase, institutional support will primarily take the form of strategic incentives, such as preferential access to selected institutional services, visibility through institutional promotion, and communication support.

6.3 Long-term External Funding Expectations

As a general principle, Open Centers are expected to develop a self-sustaining external funding strategy, which may include securing competitive grants, establishing strategic partnerships, and exploring additional sources of support such as philanthropic contributions or industry collaboration. The Center Director(s), with support from administrative staff, is responsible for managing the Center's budget in a manner consistent with the guidelines and expectations of external funding agencies, while also ensuring full compliance with OIST's financial policies.

6.4 Use of Facilities and Services

To support transdisciplinary collaboration, Open Centers are encouraged to make use of shared OIST resources, including laboratory space, core research facilities, and institutional services provided by CPR, OIST Innovation, and the Office of the Dean of Research. Access to shared resources must be arranged in consultation with the relevant administrative sections, ensuring alignment with broader institutional priorities and capacity planning.

7. Establishment and Approval Process

The creation of an Open Center at OIST involves a two-stage process to ensure alignment with institutional strategy and long-term sustainability.

7.1 STAGE 1: Initial Proposal and Incubation Phase

- **Timeline:** Proposals are accepted on a rolling basis.
- **Submission Requirements:** Proposals must be submitted by one or two full-time OIST faculty member.
Please refer to Appendix 1 for the proposal template.
- **Approval:** Proposals require approval by both the President and the Provost.
- **Outcome:** If approved, the initiative is granted Incubation Center status. This provides access to institutional support to further develop the concept and prepare for full proposal submission. The Incubation Phase is expected to last approximately 6 to 12 months.
- **Objective of the Incubation Phase**
 - Serves as a platform to initiate collaboration, test ideas, and build a core research community
 - Operates with flexible support and limited formal requirements
 - Aims to demonstrate relevance, engagement, and potential impact

7.2 STAGE 2: Full Proposal and Final Approval

- **Timeline:** Full proposals are reviewed by the Executive Team, subject to scheduling availability.
- **Submission Requirements:** Incubation Centers are expected to submit a comprehensive full proposal using the provided template, detailing their vision, structure, activities, and resource needs.
Please refer to Appendix 2 for the proposal template.
- **Outcome:** Based on the review, the Executive Team provides feedback to the President, who makes the final decision on the launch of an Open Center.

8. Reporting and Planning

Open Centers are expected to provide a short yearly report summarizing their activities. These reports are not intended for evaluation, but serve to build a track record of the Center's development and to inform better institutional planning.
Please refer to Appendix 3 for the reporting template.

In addition, Open Centers are required to submit plans for the following fiscal year. These plans should outline anticipated activities, space needs, and administrative support requests. This information will help OIST allocate institutional resources effectively and ensure capacity planning across the organization.

9. Risk and Conflict Management

Effective risk and conflict management is essential to maintain trust, transparency, and productivity within and across Open Centers. This includes mechanisms for resolving internal disagreements, managing the lifecycle of the Center, and addressing potential overlaps with other initiatives.

8.1 Handling of Internal Disputes

Open Centers should establish clear mechanisms for addressing internal

disagreements—whether among leadership, members, or participants. Dispute resolution should prioritize constructive dialogue and consensus-building. If needed, unresolved issues may be escalated to the Center’s Steering Committee or the Provost Office for impartial mediation. Centers are encouraged to formalize this process in their operational guidelines.

8.2 Coordination of Overlapping or Competing Proposals

To promote coherence and avoid duplication, OIST leadership will initiate a coordinated review process to ensure alignment with institutional priorities. When similar initiatives emerge, OIST leadership may recommend that an existing Center consider incorporating the new proposal into its structure or research agenda. Alternatively, it may request that both parties clearly define the boundaries between their initiatives to ensure that their activities are complementary rather than redundant.

8.3 Center Dissolution Procedure

Should a Center reach the end of its strategic relevance or lack sustained engagement and funding, a formal dissolution process may be initiated. This process must be reviewed and approved by the OIST leadership, with input from the Center’s Review Board.

Appendix 1

Initial Application Form

1. Proposed Center Name

2. Team Composition

- **Director(s):** At least one full-time OIST faculty member (maximum of two).
- **Steering Committee (Tentative):** 3–5 OIST faculty members.

3. Background and Rationale: Rationale for proposing the Opent Center at OIST, highlighting its alignment with OIST’s strengths, institutional context, and its response to specific research gaps or emerging opportunities.

4. Executive Summary: A brief overview of the Center’s vision, purpose, and its anticipated contribution to OIST’s mission.

Appendix 2

Open Center Proposal

1. Proposed Center Name

2. Team Composition

- **Director(s):** At least one full-time OIST faculty member (maximum of two).
- **Steering Committee (Tentative):** 3–5 OIST faculty members.
- **Proposed Core Associates:** Indicate who you would like to include as members and how you foresee them contributing to the Center’s objectives.
- **Proposed External Collaborations:** Indicate potential or confirmed partners from academia, industry, or government. No prior confirmation is necessary at the time of application.

3. Background and Rationale: Rationale for proposing the Opent Center at OIST, highlighting its alignment with OIST’s strengths, institutional context, and its response to specific research gaps or emerging opportunities.

4. Executive Summary: A brief overview of the Center’s vision, purpose, and its anticipated contribution to OIST’s mission.

5. Proposed Activities and Implementation Timeline (First Two Years)

Outline the Center’s planned activities and provide expected dates or timeframes for their implementation. These may include:

- Research initiatives and collaborative projects (including pilot studies and co-development planning with external partners)
- Recruitment of personnel and core associates (if applicable)
- Organization of seminars, workshops, conferences, and public-facing events
- Educational and outreach programs, including policy engagement where relevant
- Submission of targeted external grant applications and related timelines

6. Budget Estimate and Resource Needs

- **Draft budget for the first two years:** Outline major cost categories and projected expenditures.
- **Potential external funding sources:** Identify possible grants, partnerships, or agencies you intend to approach.

7. Management and Coordination: Explain how the Center will be run during its early phase, including:

- Defined roles and responsibilities for the Director(s) and Steering Committee
- Detail how progress and strategic decisions will be communicated to OIST leadership

Appendix 3

Open Center Annual Report

(For record-keeping and institutional planning; not for evaluation)

1. Basic Information

- Open Center Name
- Director(s)

2. Summary of Activities

- Key research initiatives and outcomes
- List of collaborative projects (internal and external)
- Events organized (seminars, workshops, conferences, public-facing events)
- Educational and outreach activities, including policy engagement (if applicable)

3. Partnerships and Engagement

- External collaborations established or maintained (academic, industry, government)
- List of pilot projects or co-development activities with external partners

4. Personnel and Associates

- List of Core Associates (names and roles)
- Number of Collaborating Associates (if applicable)
- Personnel recruited with external funding (researchers, technical staff, administrative support, if applicable)

5. Funding and Resources

- External funding secured (grants, industry partnerships, philanthropy)
- Utilization of OIST institutional support (funded activities and expenditures)
- Use of OIST shared facilities and infrastructure by external collaborators

6. Plans for Next Fiscal Year

- Planned research initiatives, collaborations, and events
- Space requirements
- Administrative support needs
- Anticipated external grant applications

7. Additional Notes (Optional)

- Challenges encountered and lessons learned
- Opportunities for future institutional support or alignment