BDP Call for Cluster Proposals

https://research.jhu.edu/bloomberg-distinguished-professorships/cluster-proposals/

The Bloomberg Distinguished Professorships (BDP) program has been integral to promoting significant scientific discoveries and fostering an interdisciplinary spirit among faculty across Johns Hopkins University. In the next phase of the BDP program, BDPs will be hired in clusters that unite multiple scholars and researchers around research areas of promise and impact.

**Purpose:**

This university-wide collaboration will continue to deepen the BDP program’s cross-disciplinary ethos and bring forth the most compelling, impactful, and executable ideas rooted deeply in our areas of disciplinary strength. It will also provide a renewed opportunity to attract and support scholars with diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. We are proud of the program’s diverse composition, and expect to see this trend continue into the next phase.

Each BDP cluster will focus on expanding a strategic area of interdisciplinary research where Johns Hopkins is well-positioned to make meaningful discoveries, such as neuroscience, the business of health, artificial intelligence, and racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities.

**Commitment:**

As you consider possible clusters, we encourage you to consult with colleagues and leadership across the university. All clusters will be strengthened by co-investment from participating schools and aligned with the strategic plans of the divisions. Clusters will include new junior faculty lines, equipment, research funding, and space, among other personnel and programmatic supports, pending the needs of the fields supported. Each cluster will have access to collaborative seed funding to inspire high-risk, high-reward projects in partnership with early career faculty. Additionally, equipment matching funds will provide for new shared facilities, with a focus on purchasing cutting-edge instruments.

Consider best practices for cluster hiring when crafting your cluster research area ([available here](#)). Your input in this process is invaluable. Proposals are strongly encouraged from every corner of the institution.
Timeline:

December 17, 2020: University-wide call for cluster proposals

January 28, 2021: Letter of Intent due
  - These are not binding but inform reviewer recruitment. Leadership may request that similar cluster ideas consolidate proposals. **A LOI must be received in order to submit a full proposal.**

January/February: Consolidation of similar clusters; Cluster leads meet with deans, chairs and DBOs on cluster commitments (start-up, faculty lines, equipment, space)

Two options for your full submission to accommodate teams on different timelines:

**February 22, 2021: Proposals due, Round 1**
  - Round 1 - Review & selection

  ~ OR ~

**March 22, 2021: Proposals due, Round 2**
  - Round 2 - Review & selection

**Late Spring:** Public announcement of selected clusters and celebration of BDP 50/BDP 100 Potential 2nd Cluster Selection in 2022

Cluster Evaluation Criteria:

**Prerequisites:**

- Equivalent involvement of two or more divisions
- Aligns with priorities of divisional leadership (support from the deans/directors)

**Evaluation (scored 1-5):**

- Growth in this field brings significant value to the institution
- Importance of this recruitment area to its broader field
- Search chair has history of successful recruitments
- Area of interest to the donor: recruitment area seeks to solve a pressing world problem
- Area of potential leadership that leverages existing institutional strengths in areas such as neuroscience, artificial intelligence, science policy, business of health, racial justice, climate change, and global health equity
  - Expands upon burgeoning research areas at JHU organized by interdivisional institutes or created through recent recruitments
  - Existence of or commitment to the facilities and/or equipment needed for the cluster’s success
Letter of Intent (LOI) – 1/28/2021:

I. Cluster title

II. Cluster leads: Two faculty who will organize the cluster searches with assistance from the BDP team

III. Three sentence synopsis of the recruitment area

IV. Five colleagues from two or more schools/divisions interested in supporting the recruitments

V. Statement of Support from Deans (Schools) and/or Directors (APL/Berman) Involved (attachment)
   - A short statement that the cluster idea has been discussed with them and they support pursuing it further.

VI. Vision for the cluster (attachment; 1 page, 11+ font, 1 inch margins):
   - What big questions will this cluster enable us to address? Describe the broader field and the pressing problems this research area seeks to solve.
   - In what way is Johns Hopkins uniquely positioned to solve these problems?
   - How will these recruitments align with current areas of institutional strength?
   - How does this cluster align with the strategic plans of the involved divisions?

Submit your BDP Cluster Letter of Intent by January 28:
https://airtable.com/shrcpRt77HcIGtZmy

Proposal – 2/22/2021 or 3/22/2021

There are two options for your full submission deadline to accommodate teams on different timelines. We aim to notify all cluster leads within one week of the LOI deadline regarding the viability to move to a full proposal.

I. Cluster title

II. Cluster leads: Two faculty who will organize the cluster searches with assistance from the BDP team

III. 10 colleagues from at least two schools/divisions supporting the cluster recruitment, need three chairs/directors among the group
IV. At least two letters of support from Deans (Schools) and/or Directors (APL/Berman) involved in the cluster providing commitments for start-up, space and equipment, potential junior faculty lines, and the size of PhD unit

V. Updated vision for the cluster (2 pages, see LOI for prompts)

VI. Justification for 3-6 BDP recruitments (2 pages)

- Why do these recruitments need to be interdisciplinary scholars to solve the problems described?
- What areas of expertise need to be brought together to seek novel solutions? What are the current barriers to doing so?
- What resources currently exist at the institution that will support these new lines of research and what else would be needed to ensure their success?

VII. 10-12 potential BDP names (must have had a screening conversation). Potential BDP list must be reflective of the diversity and inclusion policy of the institution. Internal nominations may be included. For each candidate:

- Research synopsis (1 paragraph)
- Alignment with the cluster (1 paragraph)
- Potential appointments at Johns Hopkins
- Start-up, space, equipment and personnel considerations
- Angle for recruitment: Any existing relationships at Hopkins? What is the draw to Hopkins?

All attachments should be 11+ font with 1 inch margins.

Proposal submission portal will open 2/8/2021. Proposals received after 2/22/2021 will be rolled into the 3/22/2021 review.

Review:

Distinguished faculty will be recruited to provide guidance on the selection. The composition will be dependent on the proposals anticipated from the letters of intent (LOI). We expect an approximate 2:1 ratio of external to internal reviewers with approximately 3-5 reviewers per proposal. Reviewers will provide recommendations to the President, Provost, deans and directors for a final selection of approximately five (5) clusters.
BDP 100: Call for Clusters – Best Practices

Cluster hiring became a mechanism for investment in “grand challenge” areas of research during the 1990s. Over the last few decades, there have been several studies conducted on cluster hires to assess their efficacy in fostering interdisciplinary and impactful research. Of note, sociologist Steven Brint surveyed 199 cluster hires at 20 research universities in the United States. He also reviewed the literature on cluster hiring and interdisciplinary research centers, providing insights in his 2019 book, *Two Cheers for Higher Education*. This drew largely on studies by sociologist Daniel McFarland. Below are some of the top lessons learned and best practices by fellow research universities:

- Most productive clusters were built around one or two existing highly productive scholars who were capable of mobilizing the energy and talents of the group around leading-edge research questions.

- Strong interdisciplinary research is reliant on strong disciplines. Strong departments want to collaborate with strong departments, and strong faculty want to collaborate with strong faculty. It helps to build on existing disciplinary strengths and established interdisciplinary work, rather than starting something from scratch.

- Existing collaborations can improve success. Interdisciplinary clusters that included researchers who had published together or cited each other’s work extensively prior to cluster formation had a higher probability of success.

- Interdisciplinary initiatives in natural science and engineering fields had a better record of success than those in social science related fields where the team science approach is less familiar and not yet a dominant feature of academic production.

- The research focus of the cluster needs to be clearly stated and understood. Centers that lacked a well-defined problem definition became a nexus of loosely connected individuals searching for intersections, as opposed to cohesive groups tackling well-defined problems.

- Engage broader faculty groups throughout the planning and hiring process. Without faculty buy-in as well as time to review effectiveness, cluster hiring will not work, or at least won’t work as well as it could.

- Hires were more effective when co-funded by research institutes and departments, and governed by written agreements on shared time commitments.

- Seed grant money for projects within the cluster and goals focused on boosting competitiveness for federal research dollars led to stronger research and collaboration outcomes.

**Further Reading:**


