



## 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 5-7 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.

### **Commitment:**

As you design your proposed 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 may 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.

**Questions?** Contact Reyn Boyer at [rboyer@jhu.edu](mailto:rboyer@jhu.edu).

**Timeline:**

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

**January 28, 2021: Letters of Intent due**

**April 5, 2021: Invited Proposals due (5PM)**

- Committee review
- Selection of 5-7 clusters by the Deans, Directors, President & Provost

**Late Spring: Public announcement** of selected clusters and celebration of BDP 50/BDP 100

*Potential 2<sup>nd</sup> Cluster Selection in 2022*

**Proposal Requirements – due April 5, 2021:**

**Submission Portal:** [https://apply-jhufac.smapply.io/prog/bdp\\_clusters/](https://apply-jhufac.smapply.io/prog/bdp_clusters/)

(Only proposals from invited teams will be accepted)

**Online Proposal - Form:**

- I. Cluster title & three-sentence synopsis of the recruitment area
- II. Cluster Leads: Two faculty who will organize the cluster searches with assistance from the central BDP team
- III. 10 colleagues from at least two schools/divisions supporting the cluster recruitment (*required*: three department chairs/directors/heads among the group)

**Online Proposal - Attachments:**

- IV. Updated vision for the cluster (2 pages, 11+ font, 1 inch margins):
  - A. What big questions will this cluster enable us to address? Describe the broader field and the pressing problems this research area seeks to solve.
  - B. In what ways is Johns Hopkins uniquely positioned to solve these problems?
  - C. How will these recruitments align with current areas of institutional strength?
  - D. How does this cluster align with the strategic plans of the involved divisions?
- V. Justification for BDP recruitments (2 pages, 11+ font, 1 inch margins)
  - A. Why do these recruitments need to hire interdisciplinary scholars to solve the problems described? What areas of expertise need to be brought together to seek novel solutions?
  - B. Cluster Structure and Resources:
    - i. How many BDPs would you aim to recruit (generally 3-6 slots available per cluster)?
    - ii. What resources currently exist at the institution that will support these new lines of research?
    - iii. What is needed to ensure the cluster's success (junior faculty lines, equipment, support personnel, space, etc.)?
    - iv. What would ensure the recruitment of high caliber BDPs in this research area?

**Emailed directly to [rboyer@jhu.edu](mailto:rboyer@jhu.edu) by 4/5:**

VI. 10-12 potential BDP names (*for internal consideration only; will not be shared with external members of the review committee*). For each candidate:

- Note: Screening conversations were removed
- Research synopsis (1 paragraph)
- Alignment with the cluster (1 paragraph)
- Potential appointments at Johns Hopkins
  - *Interdivisional recruitments are standard for BDPs. Intra-divisional appointments will be considered in exceptional cases.*
- Potential start-up, space, equipment and personnel considerations
- Angle for recruitment: Existing relationships at Hopkins? What is the draw to Hopkins? Would their recruitment be contingent on another recruit (e.g. group of three scholars being recruited together from one university; dual career hire)?

Potential BDP list must be reflective of the diversity and inclusion policy of the institution. One internal nomination may be included in each cluster. ([University Statement](#) / [Roadmap on Diversity & Inclusion](#))

## **Review:**

Distinguished faculty will be recruited to thematic review panels to provide guidance on the selection. We expect an approximate 2:1 ratio of external to internal reviewers. Reviewers will provide recommendations to the President, Provost, deans and directors for a final selection of 5-7 clusters.

Divisional leadership will collaboratively construct financial, administrative, and operational commitments for each of the selected clusters.

Other investment opportunities will be identified for high-ranking proposals that are not selected and we anticipate holding another call for clusters in the next few years.

## **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): Possible score of 30*

- Recruitment area seeks to solve a pressing world problem or is focused on important scientific discovery and scholarship
- Importance of this recruitment area to its broader field
- Area that leverages existing institutional strengths
- Growth in this field complements the strategic plans of the associated divisions
- Clear justification for interdisciplinary BDP positions and understanding of the field's landscape
- Reasonable resources needed for cluster's success

## 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:

Biancani, S., Dahlander, L., McFarland, D. A., & Smith, S. (2018). Superstars in the making? The broad effects of interdisciplinary centers. *Research Policy*, 47(3), 543-557.  
doi:10.1016/j.respol.2018.01.014

Bloom, Q., Curran, M., & Brint, S. (2019). Interdisciplinary Cluster Hiring Initiatives in U.S. Research Universities: More Straw than Bricks? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 91(5), 755-780.  
doi:10.1080/00221546.2019.1688615

Brint, S. (2019). *Two Cheers for Higher Education: Why American Universities Are Stronger Than Ever—and How to Meet the Challenges They Face*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dahlander, L., & McFarland, D. A. (2013). Ties That Last. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 58(1), 69-110. doi:10.1177/0001839212474272

Mäkinen, E. I., Evans, E. D., & McFarland, D. A. (2019). The Patterning of Collaborative Behavior and Knowledge Culminations in Interdisciplinary Research Centers. *Minerva*, 58(1), 71-95. doi:10.1007/s11024-019-09381-6

McMurtrie, B. (2016, March 13). The Promise and Peril of Cluster Hiring. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Rawlings, C. M., McFarland, D. A., Dahlander, L., & Wang, D. (2015). Streams of Thought: Knowledge Flows and Intellectual Cohesion in a Multidisciplinary Era. *Social Forces*, 93(4), 1687-1722. doi:10.1093/sf/sov004