MEMORANDUM

To: Viterbi School of Engineering Faculty

From: Maja Matarić
Vice Dean for Research

Date: February 17, 2016

Subject: Viterbi Internal Center Incubator (VICI) Call for Proposals, due date: 9am PST on 3/21/2016

Viterbi School faculty,

In collaboration with the Viterbi Research Committee, the Viterbi School started an internal center funding program, now called Viterbi Internal Centers Incubator (VICI), using funds from the Viterbi Research Innovation (RIF) Fund. An all-Viterbi call for proposals solicited applications in spring 2015, the Viterbi Research Committee reviewed the submissions, and four internal centers were awarded: Nexus (networking), AWARE (water), CPPT (peptides and proteins), and RASC (robotics). For more information, see http://viterbi.usc.edu/research/info/vsoeinitiatives/vici.htm.

VICI is continuing to expand, and is now soliciting proposals for internal centers. It is unlikely that another round of as many as four proposals will be funded, and new proposals are expected to be complementary and non-redundant with the already funded internal (and external) Viterbi centers. VICI aims to empower innovative Viterbi research:

• To increase Viterbi research recognition both externally and internally

• To facilitate Viterbi thought leadership that requires recognition as a prerequisite

• To be more competitive with respect to funding cycles.

Sustained success of research centers is dependent on external support. To enhance Viterbi competitiveness for such support, VICI aims to facilitate cohesion and development of areas of strength, increasing national and international recognition, sustaining momentum built upon submission of a major proposal, and enabling focus and growth in strategic thematic research areas.
that may be orthogonal to department structures.

Teams of Viterbi faculty (with optional collaborators outside of Viterbi, but with a strong Viterbi lead and majority) are invited to propose internal centers in areas of strategic relevance to the Viterbi School, namely areas of national importance, complementarity with existing centers, and leveraging our key strengths. As in last year’s competition, teams are expected to propose a timely and strategic vision, and a plan for establishing national recognition and a path to self-sustainability. Selected centers will receive funds (awards will vary based on the justified proposed budget and will not exceed $85,000) and in-kind Viterbi support toward necessary infrastructure, physical space, shared center-level staff support, faculty hires, post-doctoral scholar hires, as well as support for seminars, workshops, visitors, and publicity. Awarded centers will be expected to submit USC Zumberge Large proposals (typically due in July), to leverage the Viterbi support toward USC support. (Last year, AWARE received a Zumberge award based on this model.) The thematic research entities will be selected strategically on a competitive basis. Selection criteria include past efforts of the proposing team in creating externally-funded major research centers, faculty commitment (including through committed teaching buyout or discretionary fund investment in the proposed center), and likelihood of competitiveness for major national center of excellence.

Proposal Requirements

Research vision and executive summary: 1 page (max)
Detailed plan for center activities for up to 3 years: 3 pages (max)
Detailed budget over the 3-year plan (2 pages including justification)
Specific outcomes of the center by the end of the 3-year period (metrics must include not only research but funding as well, toward sustainability)

Submission Deadline

Proposal materials are due to Marjorie Brownbill (Brownbil@usc.edu) as a single PDF file, by 9am on Monday, March 21st (Monday after USC’s Spring Break). (In order to provide sufficient time for reviewing and award decisions before the end of the spring semester, extensions on the deadline will not be possible, so please plan accordingly.)

Selection Process

Proposals will be reviewed by the Viterbi Research Committee and supported at the discretion of the Dean.

Metrics for selecting the initiatives will include the following:
• Strong vision
• Strong team
• Strong case (being/becoming the top 3 in the world)
• Leveraging USC and Viterbi existing strengths and infrastructure
• Past history of team leadership in proposing external center-scale efforts
• Past history of team leadership in seeking large Zumberge funds for center-scale efforts
• Leveraging resources and features that are unique to Southern California
• Potential for sustained operation (e.g., through attraction of concrete external support)
• Potential for attracting top talent (faculty, post-docs, and students)
• Contribution to educational mission at all levels
• Contribution to innovation and entrepreneurship
• Track-record of prior attempts by the team towards creating such entity (e.g., submission to and/or selection by major center calls such as those by NSF, DOD, DOE, NIH, and industry)
• Tangible faculty commitment through teaching buyout or discretionary support toward the center that could be matched by the School

A select subset (about 4) finalist teams will be invited to give a center “pitch” to the Research Committee, and the relevant members of the Dean’s team.

Awarded centers will be reviewed annually, based on a presentation to the Research Committee and an annual report. Resources will be allocated as appropriate based on productivity, longevity, success, and impact.