

@UIowaNeuro Notes

August 2021

In her first week on campus, new University of Iowa President Barbara Wilson came to tour the INI and hear about the great work we are doing. Later in July, she told the Board of Regents that research support is a key priority because we need to build a culture of “team science” in order to compete for “the big grants.”

If President Wilson ever needs examples of the connection between university support for research and successfully competing for center grants, she can hold up our work in the INI. The [Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Specialized Research Center](#) (Kevin Campbell), [SUDEP Research Program](#) (George Richerson), the [Huntington's Disease Center of Excellence](#) (Peg Nopoulos), and the new [Hawkeye Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center](#) (Lane Strathearn, Ted Abel) are all “team science” projects that have garnered significant external support.

It takes years of groundwork and university investment to make these centers possible. I can tell you that our discussions about an IDDRC began more than five years ago! We knew then that we had some of the pieces in place to compete successfully, and we started to identify additional resources and support needed. We always had the people: the IDDRC draws on existing collaborations between basic and clinical scientists who hold 73 federally-funded grants at \$28 million per year. In a multi-step, multi-year process, we acquired preliminary data from the 7T MRI in the Iowa Institute for Biomedical Imaging, 10x genomics single cell sequencing with the Iowa Institute for Human Genetics, and light sheet microscope in the Neural Circuits and Behavior Core in the INI. The Institute for Clinical and Translational Science is also a key partner. Without these university-supported resources, our application would not have been possible.

Projects like this require a bit of a mindset shift on our part, to go beyond the specific aims of an R01. We have to be willing to commit to push to achieve a goal for the community that is beyond what we would personally benefit from in our individual labs. We are so fortunate to have teams of unselfish scientists here at Iowa who take this on without hesitation.

It also takes a commitment from the university to adapt its review and reward process. With multiple PIs from different departments and even different colleges, these types of projects can be a bit of a square peg in a round hole when it comes to awarding credit.

The benefits go well beyond financial. Through these centers, we are connected with collaborators advancing this work at other universities. There are 54 [Huntington's Disease Centers of Excellence](#) in 35 states around the country. The [Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Research Network](#) includes six current and four formerly funded centers. Iowa's SUDEP center is part of a 15-institution [Center for SUDEP Research](#). Likewise, we are now in a [network with 14 other IDDRCs](#). We benefit from the knowledge, expertise and ingenuity of our colleagues across the country and around the world through the discussions and working groups that are formed among the centers.

I challenge us all to continue to dream big—think of where you want to end up and let's talk about the building blocks needed to get there.

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