During the past year, many fruitful discussions have taken place regarding transforming OU’s research engagement, competitiveness, and culture as part of Aspire 2020. As a consequence, we find ourselves with a new vantage point in thinking about what constitutes transformative and strategic direction for OU’s research, scholarship, and creativity enterprise. In the context of University Strategic Organizations (USOs), which are a fundamental component of the University’s research fabric, now is the time to provide a higher level of support for a more select group of truly strategic organizations to drive change in the University’s scholarly culture in an accountable and transformational manner.

Accordingly, the Office of the Vice President for Research (Norman Campus) announces a competition for USO designation and funding. This new competition supersedes all previous USO designations, and both current USOs as well as new applicants are eligible. USOs designated under the new competition will be provided yearly base funding of between $150K and $200K for up to five years, depending upon the availability of funding and pending satisfactory annual reviews.

Those considering applying for USO designation should carefully review the USO policy, which may be found at the web link below.

http://vpr-norman.ou.edu/centers-institutes/policy-university-strategic-organizations-usos

Any non-academic unit or informally organized research or creative activity enterprise is eligible to apply for USO designation. Organizations created by statute (e.g., State or National surveys) are by their very nature considered strategic to the University. Because their funding and governance follows the policies and laws associated with their creation, such organizations are not eligible for USO base funding. For other applicants, any sustained E&G and/or VPR budget support will be considered in determining the level of USO support awarded.

In thinking about pursuing USO status, proposers should pay special attention to the following questions:

- How does the proposed USO represent a strategic strength or direction for OU?
- How is the proposed USO transformational above and beyond existing activities at OU or elsewhere?
- What are specific five-year goals and aspirations for the proposed USO? (Examples include externally funded center of excellence grants, multi investigator projects, measures of national and international prominence, etc.)
- What is the business plan for the USO – in other words, how will the USO investment leverage other support, both externally and internally?
- How will the proposed USO grow and be sustainable beyond the faculty involved in its initial application/current leadership structure?
The selection process has multiple components and the following timeline:

- Mandatory workshop for applicants: Attendance is required and these will be announced in early January, 2011.
- Brief letter of intent: Due Feb 22, 2011 (Required letter format will be discussed at the mandatory workshop.)
- Invitation to submit full proposals: Announced by March 4, 2011
- Full proposals due: April 15, 2011, at which time oral presentations will be scheduled
- Oral presentations: Between April 15 and May 6, 2011
- USOs formally announced: By May 16, 2011

Applications selected to proceed to the full proposal stage will undergo both internal and external merit review. Additionally, because USOs represent a fundamental component of the University’s scholarship enterprise and are “flagship” organizations, each full proposal must be developed in close collaboration with the Center for Research Program Development and Enrichment.

For additional information and questions, please contact Dr. Kelvin Droegemeier, Vice President for Research, at 325-3086 or kkd@ou.edu, or Dr. Alicia Knoedler, Assistant Vice President for Research, at 325-3714 or aknoedler@ou.edu.