

Administrative Core Infrastructure and Resource Planning Best Practices for Alzheimer's Disease Research Centers (ADRCs)

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Background:

This guidance was developed by the ADRC Administrators Steering Committee based on themes and best practices identified during the 2026 ADRC Administrators Workshop. The workshop highlighted that Administrative Core responsibilities often extend beyond traditional P30 grant administration and may include financial oversight, grants management, compliance coordination, reporting, project management, affiliate study oversight, cross-core coordination, personnel management, institutional communication, EAC activities, renewal planning, and succession planning.

This document is intended to help ADRCs define essential Administrative Core functions and prepare for informed conversations with institutional leaders about the resources needed to support them. Each Center should adapt this framework to its own structure, portfolio, and institutional context.

Director Summary

Administrative Core infrastructure planning helps ADRCs define what it takes to operate a high-performing Center, identify which functions are supported by the P30 or other sources, and prepare for informed discussions with institutional leaders. This planning should be understood as stewardship of the ADRC mission. It helps Centers align administrative resources with Center scope, reduce operational risk, support compliance, and sustain the infrastructure needed for high-quality ADRC research.

The goal is not to prescribe one staffing model. The goal is to help Centers clearly describe the administrative functions needed to support their full portfolio and use that information to leverage institutional resources where P30 support alone does not cover the full operational need.

How This Framework Reflects Workshop Themes

The 2026 ADRC Administrators Workshop identified several recurring themes that informed this framework:

- Administrative Core responsibilities often extend beyond traditional P30 grant administration.
- The P30 budget alone may not reflect the full administrative infrastructure needed to operate a high-performing ADRC.
- Administrative workload increases with Center scope, portfolio size, affiliated studies, reporting expectations, institutional complexity, and cross-core coordination needs.
- Project management, reporting and tracking, affiliate study coordination, finance and grants support, HR and workforce management, compliance coordination, and succession planning were consistently identified as important Administrative Core pressure points.
- Centers benefit from clearly documenting which functions are supported by the P30, institutional resources, other grants, philanthropy, shared services, or absorbed effort.
- Institutional conversations are more effective when Centers can clearly describe the administrative functions, risks, and resources needed to sustain Center performance.

This framework translates those workshop themes into a practical process ADRCs can use to define Administrative Core scope, map support sources, assess gaps, and prepare for institutional resource discussions.

Purpose and Guiding Principles

This framework is designed to help Centers:

- Define essential Administrative Core functions.
- Determine what work should live within or near the Administrative Core.
- Identify what work is shared with other cores, study teams, or institutional offices.
- Document how administrative functions are supported.
- Identify under-resourced or absorbed administrative effort.
- Prepare for institutional conversations about resources needed beyond the P30.

Administrative Core infrastructure planning is grounded in the following principles:

- **Function-driven, not funding-driven:** Centers should first define what administrative work is required, then determine how that work is supported.
- **Center-wide:** Administrative Core infrastructure should support the full Center portfolio, not only the P30 award.
- **Locally adaptable:** There is no single staffing model that fits all ADRCs.

- **Transparent:** Centers benefit from documenting which functions are P30-supported, institutionally supported, grant-supported, philanthropically supported, shared, or absorbed.
- **Strategic:** Institutional conversations should connect administrative infrastructure to Center performance, compliance, sustainability, and scientific productivity.

Administrative Core Infrastructure Planning Framework

ADRCs may use the following framework to define essential Administrative Core functions, assess whether those functions are adequately supported, and prepare for informed conversations with institutional leaders.

1. Define the Administrative Core Scope

Centers should maintain a clear description of the essential functions required to operate the ADRC. This should include functions supported by the P30 as well as functions needed to support the broader Center portfolio.

Common Administrative Core functions may include:

- Financial oversight and budget management
- Grants management and effort coordination
- Compliance and regulatory coordination
- NIH/RPPR and NACC-related reporting
- Data and reporting infrastructure
- Project management and cross-core coordination
- Affiliate study and ancillary project oversight
- Developmental project and resource request tracking
- EAC coordination
- Personnel management, hiring, onboarding, and offboarding
- Director and leadership support
- Institutional communication
- Renewal planning
- SOP development
- Administrative continuity and succession planning

When defining scope, Centers should consider which functions are owned by the Administrative Core, which are shared with other cores or study teams, and which are supported by institutional offices.

2. Map Functions to Staffing and Support Sources

Centers should document how essential administrative functions are currently supported. This is not intended to define formal cost sharing. Rather, the goal is to make the true administrative operating model visible.

For each major function, Centers may identify:

- Current owner
- Backup owner
- Support source
- Approximate effort
- Institutional partner
- Risk if unsupported

Support sources may include P30 Administrative Core funding, other P30 core funding, institutional support, other grant support, philanthropy, shared institutional resources, or absorbed effort without formal allocation.

3. Assess Alignment with Center Scope and Complexity

Centers should assess whether administrative infrastructure is aligned with the full scope of the ADRC portfolio.

Factors to consider include:

- Number of cores, sites, faculty, and staff supported
- Number of active grants, affiliated studies, and developmental projects
- Volume of resource requests
- Data and biospecimen sharing activity
- Recruitment and enrollment activity
- Reporting requirements
- Regulatory and compliance complexity
- Matrixed or split reporting structures
- Renewal or competitive application timelines

This review can help identify functions that are under-resourced, absorbed informally, dependent on a single person, or vulnerable during turnover or extended leave.

4. Prepare for Institutional Resource Discussions

Centers should use their scope, staffing, and gap assessment to prepare for conversations with institutional leaders. These conversations should focus on what it takes to operate a high-performing ADRC and how institutional resources can supplement essential Administrative Core effort not fully supported by the P30.

A concise institutional discussion summary may include:

1. **What the Administrative Core supports**
Major functions required to operate the Center.
2. **How the work is currently supported**
Which functions are supported by the P30, institution, other grants, philanthropy, shared resources, or absorbed effort.
3. **Where administrative demand has increased**
Growth in affiliated studies, reporting, data sharing, biospecimen sharing, resource requests, staffing, grants, or cross-core initiatives.
4. **Where current support is not aligned with Center scope**
Functions that are under-resourced, absorbed informally, or vulnerable to disruption.
5. **What institutional resources could help**
Specific support needed from finance, grants, HR, regulatory, project management, communications, data/reporting, development, or research administration offices.
6. **Why this matters**
How administrative infrastructure supports compliance, funding competitiveness, scientific productivity, faculty support, participant experience, institutional reputation, and long-term sustainability.

Annual Administrative Core Infrastructure Review Checklist

This checklist is designed to be completed annually by ADRC leadership and revisited during major grant cycles, leadership transitions, or significant Center growth.

- Essential Administrative Core functions are clearly defined.
- Major functions have a named owner and backup.
- Center-wide functions are distinguished from core-specific, study-specific, and institutional functions.
- Administrative functions are mapped to staffing roles and support sources.
- P30-supported effort is distinguished from institutional, other grant, philanthropic, shared, or absorbed effort.
- Center scope and complexity have been reviewed.
- Growth in affiliated studies, reporting, data sharing, biospecimen sharing, or resource requests has been assessed.
- Under-resourced or absorbed functions are identified.
- Single points of failure are identified.
- Institutional partners who may support Administrative Core functions are identified.
- A concise institutional discussion summary has been prepared or updated.
- SOPs, key timelines, and institutional contacts are current.
- Findings are reviewed with the ADRC Director and relevant Center leadership.

Summary

Administrative Core infrastructure is essential to operating a high-performing ADRC. While the P30 provides foundational support, the full administrative effort required to operate a large and complex Center portfolio often extends beyond the P30 budget. This best practices framework is intended to help ADRCs define essential Administrative Core functions, document how those functions are supported, and prepare for informed conversations with institutional leaders about the resources needed to sustain Center performance.