Research Continuity Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ document was created by the Office of the Vice President for Research. The document is intended to provide guidance and resources for the Colorado State University Research Community to assist in impacts and ensuring research continuity during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Questions listed were submitted to the Research Continuity email account VPR_ResearchContinuity@Mail.Colostate.edu and answered at a virtual Research Continuity Open Forum on April 22, 2020.

Questions about the Return to Work Plan

1. What’s the plan to get research programs restarted? The Research Continuity Working Group has been launched and will finalize the details of a plan to return to work in a phased approach over the summer. Considerations include safety of personnel and testing of personnel. The planning will be guided by six principles to keep everyone safe, while increasing research activity in a phased approach as safety becomes easier to maintain.

   - Principle #1: Follow the local, state, and national public health authority directives to shelter-at-home and implement social distancing.
   - Principle #2: Protect the physical and emotional health and safety of the research workforce. Protect the health and safety of our human and animal research subjects.
   - Principle #3: Protect the careers of early stage researchers.
   - Principle #4: Undergraduates are students first; researchers second (protect ability to graduate).
   - Principle #5: Implement a fair and transparent process for granting access.
   - Principle #6: Ensure as rapid a research restart as the public health conditions permit.

2. Now that Governor Polis has relaxed the Stay at Home order to “Safer-at-home,” how does that affect research activity at CSU? The “Safer-at-home” plan of the Governor does not change the status of CSU. Please work with your College Research Associate Dean for research or other activities designated as “critical”.

3. For the research which requires only a single person working in a single lab with equipment (no human subjects or human contact), is it possible to allow such research activity to be lifted soon? The Research Continuity Working Group will take this into consideration.

Office of the Vice President for Research at Colorado State University
4. The answer to the question on reclassification of research programs to essential from non-critical in the town hall -‘that if research is at risk of being lost if can be reclassified’ - left a major and troublesome gray area in my opinion. Which of the following arguments, if any, would you consider compelling to reclassify non-Covid research to essential:

1. I need data for my thesis
2. I need data for an upcoming grant I want to write
3. I have a contract with a company that I want to continue
4. I can’t lose productivity in my lab and remain competitive in my field

Basically, any research lab at CSU can make at least three of the four of the above arguments. How can we keep things shut down and our people safe given the inherent passion of our researchers and the love they have for their work? This concept of non-COVID research being critical based on the guidelines given, results in subjective decisions. This subjectivity is not being addressed. Consult with your RAD on classification of research as “critical”.

5. What person(s) or group(s) will decide who can come back to their labs and when? The current system is fine for the limited research happening now but will be cumbersome if/when we scale up. The Research Continuity Working Group will align its guidelines and directives in accordance with the national, state and local responses. The Research Continuity Working Group membership is comprised of representatives from all constituencies across campus.

6. Are there any guidelines for human-subject in-person experiments that require specialized equipment? Projects that involve human subjects are considered on a case-by-case basis. Please consult with your College Research Associate Dean for specific guidance. The Research Continuity Working Group will consider some generalized guidance for research involving human and animal subjects.

7. Will guidelines specific to clinical research with humans be provided regarding ways to protect study participants and study investigators/staff/students against transmission of COVID-19 for when critical and/or non-critical clinical research activities do resume? Clinical research with human subjects are currently considered on a case-by-case basis. Please consult with your College Research Associate Dean for specific guidance. The Research Continuity Working Group will consider some generalized guidance clinical studies.
8. Can a research program be re-classified as essential if they were previously deemed non-essential? If the research now meets the definition of “critical” that was previously provided, it is possible for activities to be re-classified and you should consult with your Research Associate Dean.

9. If we move to 24-hour shifts in research labs to spread folks out, will there be similar measures taken in supporting infrastructure? For example, if we have a significant number of researchers on campus at all hours of the night, will entities like EHS also be available? Staff in the CIF/analytical research core? Chemistry stockroom? The Research Continuity Working Group will take this into consideration, and will work closely with the various operational support units on campus to assure the physical facilities meet CSU safety standards in potential scenarios when a transition to shift work may be needed.

10. Any return to campus research would require additional PPE, disinfectants, hand sanitizer, and consumables like cryogens. Do we have the capacity to scale up in obtaining those items? If so, what is a fair way to distribute those items? We are evaluating the ability to acquire these items. At this point we do not have the ability to meet all needs across campus.

11. It would be reasonable to presume that research will be resumed in stages. What is the planning process for determining how this should proceed, and who will be involved in that process? The Research Continuity Working Group will identify how to stage resuming activity. It will need to be coordinated with the other operational units on campus.

12. Will facilities that are not located at the main CSU campus be treated differently in terms of accessibility as we reopen the campus to research? In particular, will facilities with lower personnel density be able to resume operations more quickly? This will be considered by the Research Continuity Working Group.

13. When will the plan be finalized then implemented? Are there plans to provide a timeline for when we can expect to hear decisions made/receive communications? I think it may help to assuage fears and concerns if this process was more transparent. Not available at this time. The Research Continuity Working Group has been appointed and will be developing guidelines for returning to work.

14. Are researchers allowed back on campus to utilize hard copy data in situ? Access is currently for critical research. If this is needed, please consult with your RAD.

15. We have collaborations with external researchers with experiments scheduled for summer and fall. Is it likely that groups of one or two external researchers—e.g. researchers from
Los Alamos Nat. Laboratory—will be allowed to come to run experiments starting sometime in June? *There is no good information at this time. The Research Continuity Working Group will take this into consideration.*

16. Will OVPR be accepting nominations for the task force? *This has been determined by the CSU President in consultation with the OVPR. Student representatives are included.*

**Questions about the Core Research Facilities**

1. Please clarify the policy for access to University Core Facilities, such as Central Instrument Facility in support of on-going essential research. *The RADs and Core Directors have been coordinating these activities to assure personnel safety. During a transition period, Core staff will be providing the service rather than research personnel to minimize personnel on site.*

**Questions about Funding**

1. Will the OVPR provide financial opportunities to investigators funded through government (non-NIH) or industry awards to help ease the burden of lost research funds, when those agencies or companies are not providing additional funds? *The OVPR will assist in these activities when possible. We are currently working with funding agencies to help address these budget short falls. We anticipate supplements from funding agencies to help support lost research during the pandemic.*

2. Several of our research obligations are not COVID-19 related, but the deliverables are considered unchanged by the sponsor/industrial sponsor. Ultimately, the current operating policies are putting PIs in a position between University and the paying sponsor and may jeopardize program renewals. *Contact OSP to work with the sponsor to try to mitigate these issues. Solution may include elevation of the research to the critical list.*

3. Are there any intramural funding opportunities to support COVID-19 vaccine work in the short-term so we can generate key preliminary results? *The OVPR will consider these on a case-by-case basis and is willing to consider those opportunities.*

4. Will this crisis result in changes to the indirect cost return distribution? *Unlikely.*

5. Would there be money available from central administration to reimburse the money that I have spent due to COVID-19 to keep research going? *Unclear at this time.*

**Questions about Graduate Students and Student Workers**
1. Because we need to continue to pay students (GRA) during the time when research cannot make progress, we will run out of budget to do proposed research work with a long lab closure. Is there any possibility to get financial support from University for paying students during this closure? We are working to address this issue. However, at this time it is not clear where these funds will come from.

2. What are the prospects for designating "critical research status" for students who need a short amount of lab time to complete their graduate work, or for postdocs to prepare for the job market? Consult with the RAD to make the determination of critical research. The Graduate School has also had discussions on the requirements for graduate students which could be modified during the pandemic.

3. Will we have normal research activity—including undergraduates—in the summer? The Research Continuity Working Group will be considering this in their return to work. But it is unlikely to occur before June 1.

4. May 16 is an important date for graduate students, as it is the start of their summer appointments. Are any special planning considerations being given for partial resumption of research activity by that date? The Research Continuity Working Group will be considering this in their return to work. But it is unlikely to occur before June 1.

5. What is the plan for student hourlies following May 15th? Following May 15th, there is no obligation to continue to pay students.

6. Are there any non-student hourly restriction over the summer? There are no additional limitations at this time.

7. Will the OVPR issue any guidance for graduate students? They are an essential component of many research projects and many are funded by research grants, but obviously their health and well-being is a priority. The Research Continuity Working Group will discuss creating a guidance plan for graduate students.

Questions About Field Work

1. Summer is a busy time for many faculty, graduate students, and post-doctorates to collect field data that is time-sensitive and can’t be collected any other time of the year. Is field work for data collection considered essential and what special precautions need to be considered? Consult with the RAD to make the determination of critical research. Personnel should continue to follow CDC Guidelines to minimize exposure (physical distancing, face masks, etc.). Research activities that are deemed exceptionally low risk because they are performed in remote locations and thus are consistent with social distancing guidelines may
be conducted while essential-in-place orders are active if approved by department heads and deans. All mandated public health safety restrictions must be observed, and university travel approvals are required.

2. While researchers can do their best to follow proper public health procedures while in the field and collecting samples, travelling to field sites becomes a real issue, since two and sometimes three or more people need to be in a field vehicle to reach the site(s). Having each person take a separate vehicle becomes cost-prohibitive as well as a challenge for finding enough field-appropriate vehicles. What kind of guidance can you provide for safely dealing with the transportation component of field work in remote locations? Personnel should continue to follow CDC Guidelines to minimize exposure (physical distancing, face masks, etc.)

3. Is there any guidance on summer (undergraduate) researchers being allowed on campus at some point this summer? PIs are trying to figure out what projects can be done this summer, and logistics like housing will need to be determined soon. They are also concerned about stretching research budgets, where supporting grad students may take priority over summer/temporary researchers. These activities are still under consideration and will be considered by the Research Continuity Working Group.

Questions related to the Institutional Review Board

1. Will IRB accept amendments for shifting face-to-face protocols to virtual ones during this time when these activities are suspended? Guidance is available on the RICRO website on what can and cannot be done and when amendments are required.

2. How quickly will IRB be able to move to review these amendments, if allowed? Guidance is available on the RICRO website.

3. Does the University plan to offer suggested guidelines for how to design IRB amendments? Guidance is available on the RICRO website.

4. Will the impact of COVID-19 restrictions be considered as an automatic extension of time to complete IRB research in progress? Guidance is available on the RICRO website.