Guidelines for NAU Researchers-Phase 1 Operations

April 14, 2020

- **New**: Guidelines regarding human subject research
- **New**: Guidelines for field work
- **Revised and Updated**: Determination of Critical Research and Support Functions promulgated on April 6, 2020

The importance of research to the mission of Northern Arizona University is critical, and cannot be understated. NAU provides this guidance to encourage and support our researchers; all activities related to NAU’s research enterprise remain ongoing, whether performed on the NAU Mountain campus, at other statewide campuses or facilities, or in the field. This includes both ongoing and new research, as well as essential support functions necessary to the research enterprise. These guidelines are also in alignment with NIH guidance, FDA guidance, most NAU peer institutions, and protections for human subjects under existing federal law.

The health and safety of our faculty, staff, students, and campus community is of paramount importance. Therefore, all personnel who continue conducting research must also adhere to US Centers for Disease Control guidelines regarding social distancing, and research activities (including those that would normally occur in-person) that can be performed remotely or via telework should be modified whenever possible and performed in that manner. For information and resources regarding COVID-19, please see: [https://nau.edu/coronavirus/](https://nau.edu/coronavirus/).

Critical Research includes:

- Work that is directly related to preventing, containing, or treating COVID-19 or could benefit the pandemic response effort, including diagnosis, treatment, interventions, or other directly-related activities (including social-behavioral research);
- Work that is directly related to national security;
- Work that if discontinued would pose a safety hazard;
- Laboratory or field work that if discontinued would result in significant data or sample loss;
- Longitudinal or seasonal work that if discontinued would result in significant data or sample loss;
- Work that, if suspended or interrupted, could result in endangerment to human subjects or pose unreasonable risk to human subjects;
- Work that, if suspended or interrupted, could result in endangerment to animal subjects or pose unreasonable risks to animal subjects;
- Work that, if suspended or interrupted, could result in loss of instrumentation, infrastructure, and/or an unsafe/unsecured laboratory environment or other significant loss, including financial;
- Work related to meeting the requirements of a dissertation or thesis for a final defense in spring 2020; and
• IRB-approved human subjects research that has a significant likelihood of direct and meaningful benefit for individual participants. Direct and meaningful benefit means that participation in the study has a good probability of directly having a meaningful positive impact on the serious medical or serious psychological condition of individual subjects for one or more of the study groups (which may include a placebo or standard care control), and that this outweighs the risk of COVID-19 exposure associated with the in-person interactions;
  o Examples include: cure of a serious disease; significant reduction of serious disease burden; treatment or stabilization of a serious medical or psychological condition that is having a significant negative impact on the participants (e.g., treatment of substance abuse); diagnosis of a serious condition that is treatable and that would otherwise not be known to the participant; pharmacologic or nonpharmacologic self-management for diabetes or cancer symptoms

**Essential Support Functions include:**

• Computational facilities;
• Research administration, regulatory, and support functions that are required by law;
• Work that maintains critical animal populations;
• Work that maintains critical plant populations, cell lines, and other living organisms;
• Work that maintains critical samples, materials, and reagents;
• Work that maintains critical equipment in facilities and labs, whether operational or in stand-by mode; and
• Work necessary to ramp-down noncritical research.

**Important General Considerations and Guidance for all NAU Researchers:**

• Please prioritize and limit experiments in accordance with this guidance, in order to ensure that NAU’s research safely continues.
• Especially since many funding agencies have been emphasizing flexibility during this unprecedented time, we are optimistic about sponsored projects continuing, even after a move to telework. Researchers should focus on activities that can be done remotely while still contributing to the goals of the project.
• Faculty, staff, and students retain access to university research spaces and research support services remain available. All research personnel should also ensure they can access their work and information remotely and should hold meetings remotely. Additionally, there must be no expectation that any personnel come to campus or to their usual workplace to conduct any research activities that can be adapted to telework.
• All researchers should engage in contingency planning now for the possibility that it may become necessary to ramp down all but the most essential research activities as the COVID-19 crisis continues. Any researcher who in the future determines it might be necessary to halt laboratory operations should consult the guidance provided on April 6, 2020, for the ramp down of non-critical research activities following by NAU the NAU Office of Research Compliance and Office of Environmental Health and Safety. Whenever
practical, researchers should freeze or capture samples at specific stages of long-term experiments in the event the researcher cannot access such samples in-person.

- In the event personnel cannot come to work, research group leads should discuss how to complete research activities with reduced staff. Each university research laboratory is best positioned to create its own contingency plan, which should include a communication strategy to streamline decision-making and reduce disruption to your research. Additionally, all researchers should prepare for possible future limited access to research spaces, even though there are currently no restrictions in place. Essential personnel should be designated, including positions responsible for: building or property safety and security; animals, specimens, or equipment; information security; critical infrastructure; and essential business duties.

- The Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) is fully functioning and continues to support submission of proposals and administration of ongoing sponsored projects. OSP staff are available by phone, email, and teleconferencing (e.g., through Skype, Zoom, MS Teams).

**Guidelines for Human Subject Research:**

For ongoing IRB-approved human subjects research, researchers should consider:

- Whether any in-person safety monitoring procedures can be eliminated or performed in an alternative manner (please note that extra standard care procedures, such as MRI examinations or blood samples, performed solely for research purposes cannot otherwise occur via in-person interaction);
- Whether any other study procedures can occur remotely; and
- If the study participants are also receiving clinical care in conjunction with the research, whether any clinical care can occur remotely, and/or whether interactions with clinical care providers would occur even if the participant were not participating in the research.

**Guidelines for Field Work:**

Travel to field sites and accomplishment of field-based research tasks requires special accommodations and preparation to ensure adequate safety with respect to COVID-19. All activities, including travel to and from field sites and work performed on-site, should obey US Centers for Disease Control Guidelines on social distancing and other safe practices at all times. For any field work to be approved, researchers must submit a request to their unit head and college Dean which includes:

- Description of travel plans and participants, including:
  - Travel destination and inclusive dates of travel;
  - Mode of travel (university vehicle, personal vehicle, etc.);
  - Description of lodgings and accommodations if overnight stay is required;
  - List of NAU participants, including names and status as student, staff or faculty; and
• Acknowledgement of Risk forms signed by students participating in field work.
• Description of safety plan for field activities, including:
  o Participants have the option to opt out if they have any health concerns related to carrying out field work, including (but not limited to): any illness in the 14 days prior to field work; serving as the caretaker for someone who is ill; self-identification as someone in a high-risk category for COVID-19; and concern over recent exposure to COVID-19, recent travel or attendance at large group events.
  o A hygiene, sanitation and safety plan that addresses:
    ▪ Detailed travel plans that ensure compliance with social distancing requirements, especially if travel involves multiple participants traveling by vehicle;
    ▪ Description of a sanitation kit and supplies that will accompany participants and will be used on vehicles, instruments, equipment, etc. that is shared during field work;
    ▪ If overnight stay is required, a description of how CDC-recommended guidelines will be followed in shared lodgings, at mealtimes, etc.;
    ▪ Description of the emergency communications equipment that will be carried to the field site, especially if the site falls outside of reliable cellular reception;
    ▪ Identification of the nearest health provider to the field site; and
    ▪ Communication/action plan for any participants who feel ill during field deployment, or within 14 days after.

Please note that reimbursement for any field work-related travel will not be provided, if the travel in question was not approved in accordance with this guidance.

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