

Ohio University Guidance for Restart of Field Research

May 25, 2020

Background. With reductions underway by the State of Ohio in public health restrictions linked to COVID-19, Ohio University is taking steps for a phased opening of research and creative activities that have been on hiatus during the pandemic. Planning is being led by a committee chaired by Vice President for Research & Creative Activity Joseph Shields and College of Fine Arts Dean Matthew Shaftel, in coordination with larger university efforts to selectively resume activity while remaining sensitive to safety considerations.

At the current time planning is being initiated for resumption of **Field Research** at the conclusion of the Stay-at-Home order. In the present context Field Research is defined as research normally conducted outdoors, and this guidance is restricted to domestic sites that can be accessed by driving. Field Research is being given early priority because of the time sensitivity of activities that are seasonally dependent, and because of the reduced potential for COVID-19 exposure that is possible in many outdoor settings.

Guiding Principles. Resumption of research and creative activity will be responsive to the following principles:

- 1) Follow applicable rules, orders and guidelines (“Rules”) of local, state, and national governmental and public health authorities. Such Rules include guidance for off-campus destination sites, and all directives to shelter-at-home, implement social distancing, etc.
- 2) Protect the health and safety of the OHIO research and creative community and any others we may come in contact with. This includes emotional as well as physical safety.
- 3) Protect the careers of OHIO researchers and creatives (especially early career, post-doctoral, grant-sponsored researchers, etc.).
- 4) Protect the research and creative activities of our OHIO graduate students. Participation of undergraduates in Field Research should be limited to instances where their role is essential to the success of the project or to completion of academic program requirements.
- 5) Provide a fair and transparent process for both start-up (and potential subsequent shutdown) of research and creative activity that permits exceptions as necessary and with decision oversight at the college level.
- 6) All PIs and lead creatives should understand and consider the risk of restarting their research/creative activity, recognizing that work could be shut down with little notice under one or more of the above principles.

Approval Process. Researchers who want to engage in Field Research at the conclusion of the current Stay-at-Home order are required to submit a **Research Operation Plan** on the accompanying form to be reviewed for approval by their department chair/school director, relevant Associate Dean in their college, and the Vice President for Research & Creative Activity.

Safety Plan. A central part of the Research Operation Plan is a Safety Plan that incorporates the following elements, tailored to the specific activities and requirements of the research activity.

Collaborative Research.

1. If non-OHIO personnel or research partners are actively engaged in the research, and are subject to more stringent guidelines, OHIO personnel should follow the more stringent direction unless expressly permitted by the partner agencies.

Travel.

2. If traveling long distances, stops should only be made for fuel and restrooms. Research participants must sanitize hands after these activities.
3. If possible, research participants should travel in separate vehicles to the work site; no more than two people may occupy a vehicle to, from, and at the work site. Masks (i.e., cloth face coverings or proper PPE) are to be worn in vehicles when there are two people. If possible, travel with windows open. High touch areas (i.e., vehicle keys, door handles, touch screens, and steering wheel) must be disinfected before and after each field day.
4. If boats are to be used, each boat will have a maximum number of total personnel allowed on the vessel at any time. Outboard vessels that are 21 feet or less will be limited to crews of two. Vessels over 21 feet but less than 27 feet will be limited to a crew of three.
5. Remote work that requires lodging and/or long-term stays.
 - a. Remote fieldwork changes the risks of exposure to COVID-19 in positive and negative ways. Traveling to a remote work site often brings individuals from multiple locations to the same location enhancing risk when people arrive, but limits external exposure after arrival.
 - b. Individuals planning to participate in remote work, should self-quarantine as much as possible before traveling to the remote site.
 - c. Field crews should establish protocols to socially isolate individuals, pairs, and groups in a hierarchical fashion. For example, if individuals have to share sleeping quarters, other daily activities should be arranged to maintain the same groupings via scheduled eating times, riding in vehicles, etc.
 - d. Purchasing of food, supplies and contact with society outside the field crew should be limited to as few individual interactions as possible.
 - e. If a member of the field crew presents flu-like symptoms the following steps are required:
 - i. The individual must cease field work and self-quarantine. Contingency funds for a separate hotel room or other measures must be considered by the PI before research begins.
 - ii. Apply for COVID testing as soon as possible.
 - iii. The remainder of the crew may continue their work but must make extra efforts to isolate the crew from external sources.
 - iv. The individual can return to work if they test negative or are fever free for at least 14 days.

General Safety.

6. Before conducting research each day, all OHIO participants in the research project must measure their body temperatures.
7. No one may participate in any fieldwork if they are feeling ill, have a temperature of >100 degrees F, or if any members of their household are experiencing flu-like symptoms.
8. During field tasks, it is recommended that masks be worn at all times, but required when conducting tasks that require interacting with any other individual at less than 6 feet.
9. The level and timing of disinfecting between uses of equipment should be determined by the crew lead. For some it may make sense to clean after each use, but for other crews it may be understood that the risk of exposure is a daily risk and not an individual encounter risk.
10. Upon completion of the research all equipment must be disinfected.
11. All crew members should bring ample water/liquids and food for themselves in clearly labeled bottles and containers. No sharing of drinks or food will be allowed.
12. Pickup of equipment and drop-off of specimens may require brief access to a laboratory setting. Under the current process, no lab access is allowed beyond equipment pickup/dropoff and dropoff/depositing of specimens for preservation and future access.
13. Researchers working with live vertebrate animals should check for agency guidance on potential risks for COVID-19 transmission and adopt safety procedures as appropriate.

Implementation.

1. The PI/Lead Creative should complete and submit the Field Research Restart Form to their Department Chair or School Director, who will review and upon approval submit to the appropriate Associate Dean for review. Upon approval, the Associate Dean will route to the Vice President for Research & Creative Activity for review and sign-off. Approval by the VPRCA constitutes authorization to proceed with the requested activity.
2. The approved Research Operation Plan must be reviewed and signed by all participants in the research prior to their participation, and provided to the relevant Department Chair/School Director and Associate Dean to be kept on file for reference.
3. The PI must have written permission for the fieldwork to proceed from those that control access to the site.
4. Faculty, students, technicians and other staff should NOT be compelled to engage in travel or field or lab activities that they are not comfortable with because of potential health risk due to COVID-19.