What do I need to do to get approval for off-campus human participant research (organisations) under the MQ COVIDSafe Plan for Research?

What is considered off-campus human participant research (organisations)?

- Research in off campus, university or non university facilities or sites involving face to face interactions with human participants who are members of organisations with COVIDSafe Plans (e.g., educational settings). This research may also involve a team, collaborators or research students (e.g., students or teachers in schools, aged care workers, staff in businesses, community groups).
- Research participants defined in a legal/regulatory/ethical sense, must give consent in order to participate, must be covered by University or Faculty based human participant ethics approval, and must be recruited, tested, and their data captured, stored and shared in ways consistent with the ethics application and relevant guidelines. Researchers must have written approval to access these individuals via their relevant organisation and must take into account the COVIDSafe Plan of the organisation.
- Any off campus human participant research with private individuals (who are not members of an organisation with a COVIDSafe Plan), with at risk participants or clinical participants, or by MQ staff and students based interstate or overseas is captured and governed by other COVIDSafe Plans. Contact your **Department Manager** for further information.

What do I need to know before planning?

- Contact your **Department Manager** to discuss your plans well in advance.
- All applications are to be submitted at least 2 weeks before within-NSW work, and up to 4 weeks before interstate work is to take place. Applications without due notice will be delayed.
- Submission of documents does not mean approval.
- You must await notification of approval before making any arrangements to travel or conduct research.
- **If approvals are not in place, you cannot undertake the research.**
- Absence on Duty (AoD) applications still need to be approved alongside COVIDSafe applications.

What is the process I need to follow?

1) Consider the status of ethics approvals for your research (see below) and take action where necessary.
2) Access the word version of the Off-Campus Travel Sample Form from the Intranet ([https://staff.mq.edu.au/intranet/science-and-engineering/teaching-and-research-covid-safe-guidance](https://staff.mq.edu.au/intranet/science-and-engineering/teaching-and-research-covid-safe-guidance)). This application includes a Detailed COVIDSafe travel plan, COVIDSafe emergency response plan and trip-leader signoff.
3) There is an upload documents section at the end of the online form for attachments containing:
   - A written invitation (e.g., email) from the organisation inviting the researcher/s to recommence or conduct research on their premises or with members of their organisation. Where multiple sites are involved, approval should be sought from a governing body or from initial sites for research to commence with additional approvals collected as the project continues. Written evidence must be kept of approval to conduct research at each site. However, a COVIDSafe plan following generalisable principles for a number of sites is appropriate if approved by the Faculty;
   - A copy of any COVIDSafe planning of the organisation;
   - A statement from the researcher and any accompanying team members of how they will adhere to the requirements of the organisation’s plan and the requirements of this Macquarie University COVIDSafe plan. If either Macquarie or the organisation differ in details of COVIDSafe planning, the researcher should chose the highest level of risk mitigation
4) Fill this out and then pass it on to the **Department Manager**. They will review this document and discuss with you ways to improve it if needed.
5) Make sure your vaccination status is up to date with your Department/School.
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6) Once the **Department Manager** gives you the go ahead, submit the official online Faculty form on the intranet ([https://staff.mq.edu.au/intranet/science-and-engineering/teaching-and-research-covid-safe-guidance](https://staff.mq.edu.au/intranet/science-and-engineering/teaching-and-research-covid-safe-guidance)) by copying and pasting information from your approved word file.

7) This goes to the **Deputy Dean Research and Innovation**, and once approved you will receive an email from them confirming your approval status. Department Manager and HOD will also be on this email.

8) Attach the form with the answers you are submitting to your AoD application.

9) At this point AODs can be submitted and approved.

10) Only when the COVIDSafe and AoD approvals are place can work be considered approved.

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**What Stage are we in and what approvals are needed?**

- Please check the FSE intranet front page for Stage dates.
- **Stage 1** permits human participant research (organisations) **within** LGA/regions (e.g., within Sydney LGA if located in Sydney LGA; within regional area if located in regional area). There may be a staging and prioritisation of applications based on essential need. Only fully vaccinated staff and students can request approval under this stage. Approval is also contingent on the organisation having a COVIDSafe Plan and the “house rules” of that organisation.
- **Stage 2** permits human participant research (organisations) **within or across** LGA/regions (e.g., from Greater Sydney to regional areas). Only fully vaccinated staff and students can request approval under this stage. Approval is also contingent on the organisation having a COVIDSafe Plan and the “house rules” of that organisation.
- **Stage 3** permits human participant research (organisations) within NSW, and may permit interstate and international travel subject to border and travel restrictions. Approval is also contingent on the organisation having a COVIDSafe Plan and the “house rules” of that organisation.
- Approval required by the **Deputy Dean Research and Innovation/Executive Dean**, or depending on the trip, approval from the **Vice-Chancellor** may be needed.
- The 2020 MQ COVIDSafe plan for human participant research (organisations) is provided below for your reference, and to aid in your planning and applications.

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**Ethics approvals**

- Off campus human participant research is governed under Macquarie’s Human Research Ethics. COVIDSafe approvals under this plan are separate and in addition to appropriate ethics approval for projects. Ethics approval will continue to be managed by Human Research Ethics at University and Faculty levels. COVIDSafe recommencement of research will be managed within Faculties.
- If a project previously approved by Human Research Ethics was paused and the researcher now wishes to recommence as originally proposed, nothing more needs to be done via Ethics. The researcher needs to apply for COVIDSafe recommencement consistent with this plan following Faculty-based processes.
- If a project previously approved by Ethics was amended in some way with Ethics approval (e.g., to collect data remotely rather than face to face) and the researcher now wishes to revert to the original methods either whole or in part, he or she needs to submit a brief amendment notifying Ethics of this intention via the process described here: [https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies](https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies). The researcher also needs to apply for COVIDSafe recommencement following Faculty-based processes.
- If a project previously approved by Ethics was amended in some way with Ethics approval (e.g., to collect data remotely rather than face to face) and the researcher wishes to continue with this amended method (and not revert), then nothing more needs to be done via Ethics or for COVIDSafe planning.
- If a researcher wishes to commence a new project under COVIDSafe principles, he or she needs to apply for Ethics approval as usual and submit a COVIDSafe plan following Faculty-based processes.
- Older adults aged over 70, older adults with chronic health conditions aged over 65, residents in aged care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in rural and remote areas, and people who are immune suppressed are considered.
MQ COVIDSafe Plan for human participant research (organisations)

-Capacity

- This plan covers all off campus human participant research that involves individuals of an organisation that has its own COVIDSafe Plan. This includes leaders, teachers and students in schools; administrators, educators and children in early childhood centres; staff in business organisations; staff or volunteers in community organisations etc. Members of the partner organisations should be covered by their COVIDSafe Plan while Macquarie researchers are covered by our COVIDSafe Plan. Researchers should aim to coordinate MQ’s COVIDSafe Plan with their partner organisation’s planning.
- Research with organisations is considered distinct from off campus human participant research with private citizens (e.g., individuals, families, other volunteers in the community who participate in research in their own homes or other locations but not under the auspices of an organisation), which is captured and governed under “Off Campus Human Participant Research – Private Individuals” below.
- The current version of this plan covers only off campus human participant research with organisations conducted within NSW. The location of off campus human participant research is subject to Government and Macquarie University policies and restrictions on within state and interstate travel. This plan will be updated when and if interstate and international travel are approved.
- This plan DOES NOT supersede the need for any normal approvals for such research (e.g., Absence on Duty (AOD) Forms, adherence to travel and finance policies where appropriate). Rather, it is in addition to these approvals.
- The following should be submitted with any request to recommence or commence research:
  1. A written invitation (e.g., email) from the organisation inviting the researcher/s to recommence or conduct research on their premises or with members of their organisation. Where multiple sites are involved, approval should be sought from a governing body or from initial sites for research to recommence with additional approvals collected as the project continues. Written evidence must be kept of approval to conduct research at each site. However, a COVIDSafe plan following generalisable principles for a number of sites is appropriate if approved by the Faculty;
  2. A copy of any COVIDSafe planning of the organisation;
  3. A statement from the researcher and any accompanying team members of how they will adhere to the requirements of the organisation’s plan and the requirements of this Macquarie University COVIDSafe plan. If either Macquarie or the organisation differ in details of COVIDSafe planning, the researcher should chose the highest level of risk mitigation;
- Travel is limited to the organisations you will visit.
- The number of researchers should be minimised to essential researchers only with consideration as to how interactions may be completed with physical distancing or staggered over different periods of time as well as to requests from the organisation to minimise contact across sites or cohorts (e.g., in schools and year groups)
- Off campus human participant research in organisations should not be undertaken with non-Macquarie personnel (e.g., volunteers, collaborators), unless essential.
- Travel by car is recommended if safe and practical to do so. Public transport and air travel are to be avoided.
- In the case of all travel other than short trips to local organisations, a detailed COVIDSafe travel plan must be provided that outlines stopping locations and how social distancing will be maintained. This includes passengers and journey stops (e.g., fuel stops, meal breaks, toilet breaks). For trips longer than 2 hours one-way, all drivers are to take a break after 2 hours as per ‘normal’ practice. This plan should be submitted with the request to recommence or commence research, as noted above.
- Research in off campus organisations should be abandoned if any researcher experiences symptoms of COVID-19. Researcher and any team to be tested for COVID-19.
- Any COVIDSafe emergency response plans established by the organisation at which research will be undertaken should be consulted in advance and observed in the case of incident. Where available, these
should be submitted with the request to recommence or commence research. Researchers must also document the following: The distance to the nearest medical facility that could support them or a team member with COVID symptoms. The mode of transportation of the person to the nearest medical facility. How will they respond if Government guidelines and restrictions change or an area is placed in lockdown? If there are no nearby medical facilities, what other emergency evacuation plans will be activated? For research involving multiple sites, one plan is sufficient that covers COVIDSafe contingencies across the sites.

- **Access**
  - COVIDSafe research in off campus organisations to be approved by Executive Deans. This is in addition to AOD and MQ travel approvals as per normal procedure.
  - Avoid travel to communities and zones deemed high risk due to high numbers / clusters of COVID-19 cases refer to zone maps on NSW Health website. Where practical, avoid travel between high and low risk zones.
  - Minimise the number of days in the organisation to that which is essential and necessary to complete the research.
  - Comply with organisational limits on the number of visitors at any one time, and any other COVID Safety Plans in place at the organisation.
  - **On the day/s of face to face data collection, check that the organisation is open for access (e.g., a NSW school) and check any relevant local information (e.g., local government areas on high alert).**
  - Reduce interactions with organisational staff and other users to that which is necessary, where possible pre-arranging access via electronic means and practice physical distancing while onsite.
  - Where possible, meals to be bought from home to reduce contact with the public and public spaces.
  - If an overnight trip is approved, limit the use of large turnover accommodation such as motels. Separate rooms for all team members (e.g., avoid communal hostels, bunkhouses, bathrooms, kitchens).
  - All COVID-19 restrictions guidelines and approvals carried on person at all times.
  - All researchers should be recommended (but not required) to download and use the Australian Government's COVIDSafe App to assist with contact tracing if required.

- **Participants**
  - Off campus human participant research may involve a range of methods including but not limited to individual sessions (single experimenter-single participant), very small group sessions (e.g., 1 or 2 experimenters-1-3 participants) or larger groups. These methods should be managed consistent with current Federal and State guidelines for size of indoor gatherings.
  - Researchers also should consider the minimum number of people involved, the minimum length of physical contact required, and aspects of the research that can be completed remotely before or after the session (e.g., on-line surveys).

- **Health and Hygiene**
  - Activities should comply with physical distancing wherever possible and with physical distancing regulations enforced by organisations. During face to face research sessions, extra precautions should be considered such as wearing of masks, especially as directed by the organisation.
  - Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products should be made available before and after the off-camp research, and carried and used regularly while on it.
  - Rigorous personal hygiene practices must be implemented multiple times a day and before and after sessions with participants.
  - Do not share work equipment (e.g., recorders, computers, stationery). If equipment is used during the research with participants, implement and follow appropriate cleaning between sessions.
  - Participants in all studies will receive COVIDSafe guidance and a pre-visit phone call or email for COVID-19 risk screening no more than one day before participating in the research.

- **Training**
  - To ensure that researcher and participant safety remains the highest priority during off campus research sessions, Departments and Faculties should ensure via modified or new induction or training that all researchers understand: screening, testing, isolation and quarantine requirements and associated processes relevant to off campus human participant research; understand coughing/sneezing etiquette and other respiratory precautions; understand correct hand washing technique and when hand hygiene
must be practised; agree not to conduct research sessions if they are displaying any flu like symptoms; notify if they or participants are in a vulnerable risk group; and understand how to implement health and hygiene protocols as above. This training may include, for instance, Australian Government provided, free COVID-19 Infection Control Training (https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training#who-this-training-is-for).

-Supervision
- Departments and Faculties should ensure adequate, expert supervision of research students in the field either via direct on site supervision or regular Zoom, phone and/or email contact to ensure that COVIDSafe protocols are followed (e.g., a supervisor, another experienced postgraduate, an experienced collaborator).

-Responsibility
- Approval of all off campus human participant research sits with relevant Executive Deans (and Associate Deans Research) with any advice/queries to the DVCR's Office, Risk & Assurance and/or the COVID-19 Taskforce.
- Researchers requesting to recommence or commence off campus human participant research should:
  1. Seek an invitation from the organisation (indicating that Macquarie University currently approves off campus human participant research with organisations subject to specific approval of a COVIDSafe plan for the project);
  2. Apply for recommencement or commencement to the relevant Associate Dean Research;
  3. Once approved, on the day/s of testing, confirm access to the organisations and health of participants.