OFF CAMPUS RESEARCH: HUMAN PARTICIPANT (PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS)
APPROVED TO RECOMMENCE WITHIN NSW AND INTERSTATE 2 DECEMBER 2020

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Definition: Research in off campus, university or non university facilities or sites involving face to face interactions with human participants who are private individuals and not members of organisations with COVIDSafe Plans (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). May also involve a team, collaborators or research students.

A reminder of the general principles for research adhered to by this COVIDSafe Plan ("Principles and Protocols for Reducing the Potential Risk of COVID-19 Transmission at Universities", May, 2020):

- Research staff who can attend work safely should do so, in line with each university's recovery plan;
- Appropriate supervision should be in place for all researchers on-site to ensure that both physical distancing and appropriate health and safety measures are undertaken;
- Research students should be adequately supervised on site by a staff member with appropriate expertise;
- Technical support staff and core facilities staff should be on-site as required to continue to support research;
- Inductions will continue, including additional information on physical distancing and other requirements, either in person or in virtual mode if necessary;
- Research team leaders should determine what research work can be undertaken on-site, and who needs to be there to do it. They will take into consideration requirements of the research, expertise of researchers, and appropriate supervision;
- Consideration of a roster of researchers can be developed, where necessary, to ensure that research can be completed with optimal compliance to physical distancing requirements;
- Essential meetings to be held outside in the open air, in large venues that allow physical distancing or via video conferencing or phone;
- Shared research areas should establish suitable cleaning processes to be completed prior to commencing and prior to finishing in the area, provide hand hygiene products and suitable waste disposal bins and maintain regular cleaning and waste disposal programs.

In addition, this COVIDSafe Plan implements the following specific guidelines ("Principles and Protocols for Reducing the Potential Risk of COVID-19 Transmission at Universities", May, 2020). These are adapted from principles for field research and for on campus human participant research and recognise that private individuals fall under Macquarie’s COVIDSafe Plan and responsibility:

- Researchers should consider how they or members of their team can conduct the research safely whether in private spaces (e.g., participants’ homes) or public spaces (e.g., out-of-doors, in coffee shops, restaurants) as well as travelling to these locations (both researchers and participants) safely;
- Activities should adhere to relevant, site-specific Public Health Orders and other Government guidelines such as the number of people in private homes or registration for contact tracing in public locations (https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/latest-updates.aspx);
- Researchers and participants should observe physical distancing requirements at all times;
- Research may involve individuals, pairs or small groups (e.g., up to 5 participants) so long as physical distancing and hygiene requirements can be met. Larger groups may be approved on a case-by-case basis with appropriate risk assessment and risk mitigation;
- Sufficient personal cleaning and hygiene products should be carried by the researcher (e.g., hand sanitiser, disposable masks) and used by the researcher and participants wherever appropriate and requested;
- Emergency response plans for fieldwork should be prepared by researchers and observed in case of incident;
- Researchers or participants who are unwell should not participate in this type of activity;
- Researchers or participants in an at risk group require additional approval. See Research with At Risk Populations.
COVIDSafe Plan for Off Campus Human Participant Research - Organisations

Phase 0, Pre-COVIDSafe Plan

- All face to face human participant research off campus was paused

Goals of this COVIDSafe Plan

- Manage resumption of off campus human participant research under this Plan and associated University and Faculty level Return to Campus Plans
- Provide for safe off campus human participant research with private individuals while meeting physical distancing and WH&S requirements
- Allow decisions re priorities for resumption, training and supervision protocols to be determined by Faculties, Departments and groups according to the principles of this COVIDSafe Plan and other relevant University or Government advice and planning
- Share responsibility such that individual group/Department plans are consistent with Faculty plans and consistent with this University Research Plan and reported on regularly via Research Chairs, ADRs and FRMs, and the DVCR’s Office
- This plan is to be enacted in addition to any normal Macquarie University fieldwork/off campus, travel and Absence on Duty (AOD) approvals and policies

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. 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 vulnerable populations. Thus, field work that involves these people or groups requires additional approval. See Research with At Risk Populations
Phase 1, COVID safe reopening commences with physical distancing & hygiene

Off campus human participant research with private individuals remained on pause due to concerns re community transmission and risk mitigation.

Phase 2, most research reopens with physical distancing & hygiene

Off campus human participant research with private individuals remained on pause due to concerns re community transmission and risk mitigation.

Phase 3, return to capacity for research with physical distancing & hygiene

-Capacity

This plan covers all off campus human participant research with private individuals who are not members of organisations with COVIDSafe Plans (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). Instead, they fall under Macquarie’s COVIDSafe Plan and responsibility.

The current version of this plan covers off campus human participant research with individuals conducted within NSW and in other States of Australia. The location of off campus human participant research is subject to Government and Macquarie University policies and restrictions on within state and interstate travel (https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/border-restrictions). This plan will be updated when international travel is 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 research plan designating the number of participants (with identifying details anonymised), details of type and length of contact (e.g., 2 hour face to face interview), and the locations in which they will participate in the research (e.g., interviewed or tested in their homes, interviewed in a public space);
2. A statement from the researcher and any accompanying team members of how they will adhere to this Macquarie University COVIDSafe plan and mitigate any risks;
3. A COVIDSafe travel plan for travelling to the site/s of off campus research; and
4. An emergency plan in the event of illness.

Travel is limited to participants you will visit. The number of researchers should be minimised to essential researchers only with consideration as to how interactions (especially with groups > 1) may be completed with physical distancing or staggered over different periods of time.

If off campus human participant research with private individuals is conducted in collaboration with non-Macquarie personnel or volunteers (as researchers rather than as participants), then they should be covered by their organisation’s COVIDSafe Plan or detailed in this plan.

Travel by car is recommended if safe and practical to do so. If travelling by public transport or air travel provide plans to assist with health and hygiene (e.g., wearing masks on public transport or planes).

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 with private individuals should be abandoned if any researcher experiences symptoms of COVID-19. Researcher and any team to be tested for COVID-19.

As part of emergency planning, researchers must 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 with private individuals to be approved by Executive Deans. This is in addition to AOD and MQ travel approvals as per normal procedure.


**Prior to or on the day/s of face to face data collection, confirm access to the research location (e.g., local government areas on high alert) and health of participants.**

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 researcher-single participant), very small group sessions (e.g., 1 or 2 researchers-1-3 participants) or larger groups. These methods should be managed consistent with current Federal and State guidelines for size of indoor gatherings ([https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/latest-updates.aspx](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/latest-updates.aspx)).

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).

**Researchers should maintain a formal record of all face to face contact with details of who, where and when participants were involved during the course of the research project and this record should be kept with other project needs in the event that contact tracing is required.**

**Health and Hygiene**

Activities should comply with physical distancing wherever possible and with physical distancing regulations. During face to face research sessions, appropriate precautions should be considered such as wearing of masks.

Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products should be made available before and after the off-campus research, and carried and used regularly.

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 should receive COVIDSafe guidance and a COVID-19 risk-screening (e.g., by phone call or email) before participating. If practical to do so, this should be done the day before but may need to be done just before the session commences. Potential participants should be asked to answer the following questions truthfully and to the best of their knowledge:

1. Have you or anyone you have been in close contact with travelled overseas in the last 14 days?
2. Have you been diagnosed with, or are you currently awaiting tests relating to suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) diagnosis?
3. Have you been in close contact with someone with a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus (COVID-19) within the last 14 days?
4. Do you have, or have you had in the last 14 days a fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, aches and pains, fatigue, change in sense of smell or taste, chills, body aches, diarrhoea, or headache?

In the event of a yes response to any one of these questions, the research session should be cancelled and rescheduled.

- **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. Prepare a research plan with details of participants and COVIDSafe planning (as above);
2. Apply for recommencement or commencement to the relevant Associate Dean Research;
3. Once approved, on the day/s of research participation (e.g., interviews or testing), confirm access to the location and health of participants.