# Guiding Principles for Restarting Field Research

This document outlines principles and guidelines for University of Arizona researchers planning to restart fieldwork or other off-campus research. Its primary goal is to help protect the health and safety of personnel, participants, and communities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Scope of Field Research Requiring Restart Plans and Approvals

For purposes of research restart, RII understands field research to include all research-related activities that take place off-campus, in settings that involve human co-location or interaction, or that require travel. This could include, but is not limited to, environmental and agricultural research at field stations, social science research in community settings, humanities research in off-campus archives, and creative productions in off-campus arts or related venues.

Such research is in scope regardless of whether the researchers themselves are among those who will be co-located, interacting, or traveling as a result of the research (e.g., if a researcher remotely directs a study where participants are interacting in a community setting, or where art is being installed in a public area). Research that can be conducted fully remotely, with no risk of research-related COVID-19 exposure to researchers, participants, or communities, is exempt from requiring approval to restart.

## Requirements for Restarting Field Research

This document augments, but does not supersede, the Guiding Principles and Best Practices included in the [RII Research Restart Plan](https://research.arizona.edu/covid19/research-restart). Restart and/or ramp-up of all research requires an approved RII [Research Re-Start Checklist](https://research.arizona.edu/covid19/research-restart). Your college and department may require additional information for checklist approval. Check with your Associate Dean for Research, Department Head, or Director for guidance.

An approved RII checklist is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient for, re-starting field research. If your research involves any of the following, further COVID-19 related guidance and approvals may apply:

* Human subjects research (see [RII Guidance on Resuming Human Studies](https://research.arizona.edu/covid19/research-restart#collapse-252))
* Activities with Native Nations (guidance in process)
* Out-of-state travel (guidance in process)
* Activities requiring [Assumption of Risk and Release Agreements](https://risk.arizona.edu/assumption-risk-and-release-agreements)
* Activities requiring authorizations/permits from external entities (guidance in process)

## General Considerations when Restarting Field Research

Researchers are expected to develop written plans aligned with their responses to the checklist and related approvals. The present document provides additional guidance on developing such plans for common scenarios in field research.

Field research must meet the core requirements of the RII Research Restart Checklist. Field researchers also have additional responsibilities specific to their contexts. As per the RII Checklist, these include:

* Assessed local conditions related to infection, hospitalization, and community spread, and adapted protocols accordingly;
* Acknowledged and complied with up-to-date guidance from any and all relevant and site-specific state, local, and/or tribal authorities regarding access, travel restrictions, use of public spaces, and/or the use of face coverings or other personal protective equipment (PPE);
* Collaborated with appropriate partners or contacts to align research protocols with partner needs, potential hazards, risks, and/or required restrictions prior to entering the facility or research setting;
* Conducted, when feasible and safe to do so, onsite assessment of hazards and risks associated with research or meeting locations, including their preparedness for COVID-19;
* Confirmed location and contact information of emergency services for all off-campus sites;
* Planned for risks and requirements of travel.

Much field research entails the potential for researchers, participants, and communities to be exposed to COVID-19. Researchers must take precautions to protect people from elevated risk of exposure beyond what they would encounter in daily life. Researchers must not exacerbate existing inequities for vulnerable individuals and communities facing unique challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. See the [AMA COVID-19 health equity resources site](https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/health-equity/covid-19-health-equity-resources?gclid=CjwKCAjwltH3BRB6EiwAhj0IUGSjBLwIIum6exe5yJMXnsZOxrPQ3Rr8l_KFGnFmQfCS1XrLkRAEJxoCeRQQAvD_BwE) for further information and guidance.

Such precautions are required whether or not those potentially affected by the work are defined as “human subjects.” For work with human participants not meeting [IRB definitions of “research” or “human subjects”](https://rgw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/what_is_human_research_-_v2019-07_0.pdf) (e.g., journalism, oral histories or interviews, legal research, program evaluation), researchers should develop protocols based on the closest analogous risk level from the IRB’s guidance on [Resuming Human Studies](https://arizona.box.com/s/0izcf7v5dosiaw8c8xmqalwk9mjr3wfw).

As field research varies widely, not all of the following guidance may be applicable to a given project. Where safety recommendations below refer to “research personnel,” they should be adapted as appropriate to include all participants, not only UA employees (i.e., staff, students, collaborators from other institutions, enrolled participants, etc.). Safety protocols should be tailored to meet the spirit of the RII Research Restart plan. Seeking additional guidance from Research Laboratory and Safety Services (RLSS) and Risk Management Services (RMS), as well as from experts on your field setting, may also be advisable.

## Personnel Management

Create a written plan for interacting with individuals while in the field that will:

* Include contingencies if one or more team members become ill or are no longer willing to risk conducting the research.
* Minimize the number of research personnel involved. Conduct approved field research with the fewest staff needed to complete the activity while ensuring safety. Teams should develop a plan to check in regularly with the project supervisor and maintain frequent communication with each other.
* Develop a means of identifying who is present at the field research space at any given time, preferably through an online sign-in tool to minimize touching items, and/or by employing other mechanisms for controlling the number of concurrently co-located people.
* Conduct daily wellness checks before entering field sites. See the Human Subjects Office’s [Participant Wellness Screen](https://arizona.box.com/s/a5l3s9q9t12bogiswbnhxn2rrgcyg9uq) handout for a model that could be adapted for field settings.
* Maintain social distancing. Depending on the research area/experiment, safety guidelines for your specific field research project may require more than one person to be present at a location at one time. Individuals present should maintain at least a 6-foot separation. If such distancing is not feasible, use face coverings, PPE, and other safety protocols (consult with RLSS for advice about your setting).
* When feasible, arrange the transfer of items from one person to another by leaving them in a designated area, as opposed to handing them over in person. The timing of these transfers should be closely coordinated to reduce risk of contagion, as well as to eliminate the potential for lost or unattended items.
* Use precautions when entering a restroom, shared use facility, or other common areas. Call out to assess occupancy or create an “occupied” door sign.

## PPE/Hygiene in Field Settings

Research personnel must:

* Be provided with cloth face coverings and instructions on their use, cleaning, and maintenance.
* Always wear cloth face coverings unless research procedures dictate heightened PPE requirements (e.g., eye protection when there is potential for splatter). When not wearing safety PPE, reapply provided face covering. Proper hand hygiene before and after using any face covering is critical.
* Consider footwear and clothing as possible transmission sources. Overclothes or coveralls to protect personal clothing and shoes only worn in the field are recommended when feasible and appropriate.
* Wash hands with soap upon entering and before leaving the field location (this could happen at the transport vehicle), and wash them after touching shared accessory devices like phones, tablets, and cameras. When using a phone, consider using the hands-free speaker phone mode.
* Develop a sanitation routine which includes decontamination with an EPA-registered disinfectant before and after each use of items such as: high-touch surfaces like door handles, lock keypads, tables, chairs, keyboards/mice, desks for shared computers, telephones, printers, scanners, cameras, microscopes, equipment cases, transport vehicles, etc. There should also be enhanced cleaning/disinfection protocols for any shared bathrooms, kitchen facilities, dishes, or other shared equipment.
* Minimize shared items (e.g., pens, notebooks, frequently used reagent bottles, etc.).
* If it can be done safely, use paper towels or wipes when handling common field items, field equipment, door handles, faucets.
* Bring extra hand soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes.
* Have a portable kit with instructions and supplies (e.g., thermometer) needed for personnel or participant wellness screening.

## Emergency Preparedness

* **Emergency contacts:** Emergency contacts are people at or near the fieldwork site who can reach you if necessary and who are familiar with your schedule. The emergency contact should also be informed of any medical conditions or allergies of the fieldworkers. Provide emergency contacts with information about who to contact if any of the fieldworkers do not return or report in within a predetermined length of time.
* **Emergency procedures:** Emergency procedures are plans developed in advance regarding how to properly respond to adverse situations. The fieldwork leader is responsible for organizing emergency procedures, including communication, evacuation plans, and ensuring that all members of the group are aware of the arrangements. Carry a written plan with you.
* If a member of the field crew presents flu-like symptoms, the following steps are required:
* The individual must cease field work and self-quarantine. The PI should plan for separate accommodation or other measures needed for quarantine.
* The individual can return to field work if they test negative and are fever free for at least 14 days.
* Other personnel may continue their work but must make extra efforts to monitor wellness and maintain distance.
* **Communication:** Establish methods to ensure communication is maintained within the group, and that contact with local emergency services is possible if necessary. Ongoing effective communication allows fieldworkers to be forewarned of dangers and enables rapid requests for help in an emergency. Communication mechanisms can include the following:
* Verify your communication device (e.g., cell phone, radio) functions at the work site.
* Establish a predetermined frequency of contact or “roll call” with all fieldworkers.
* Establish a method to log daily activities, in case contact tracing becomes necessary.
* Always carry photo identification and insurance information in case of an accident or injury.

## Travel arrangements

* Field research activities, including travel, must be suspended in localities that have declared a shelter-in-place order in response to COVID-19 community spread.
* The number of trips to and from field sites should be minimized, as each entry and exit entails an additional risk of researchers becoming vectors for contagion across communities.
* If traveling out of the State of Arizona or to Native Nations, research travel approval must be granted by the SVPR (for domestic travel) or ITSOC (for international travel). Approval will require a detailed travel-related COVID-19 mitigation plan (guidance forthcoming).
* For all travel (including local/in-state):
* Investigate local ordinances and restrictions and plan for compliance prior to departure.
* For travel to field sites by car, one person per vehicle is recommended. Avoid public transportation.
* For overnight stays, one person per room (lodging/accommodation/campsite) is highly recommended.
* Periodically assess conditions related to community spread, infections, and hospitalizations, and adjust plans based on changing circumstances.