



## MEMORANDIUM

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To: USM Research Community  
From: Gordon Cannon, VPR  
Date: March 18, 2020  
Subject: USM Research COVID-19 Guidance

Dear Colleagues,

I am sure you all are staying up to date regarding University communications relating to COVID-19. As of Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, USM is reporting an Orange response status, which has resulted in the University converting institutional functions to remote formats wherever possible and limiting operations and access at all locations. I would like to address research activities specifically as it relates to our current response status.

### General Comments

Under the circumstances, academic instruction is being moved to alternative methods of delivery. In contrast to instruction, the majority of research and scholarly activity at the University is performed by small groups of students, faculty, and staff. We understand that research and scholarly activity differs across disciplines and even projects within disciplines. We encourage you and your students and staff to develop a plan to work remotely. Supervisors should begin the process of communicating specific work arrangements with individual employees according to the University's work assignment guidelines. The goal is to notify employees of all alternative work arrangements by the end of the day on Wednesday, March 18, but individual unit factors may influence this timeline. If any member of your team develops any of the symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (fever of 100.4 F or greater along with cough or shortness of breath), they should immediately contact their physician and follow the CDC guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Below is guidance on specific topics typically of concern to our research community.

### Travel

USM has prohibited **all University-sponsored international and domestic travel (regardless of mode of transportation)** to reduce the potential spread of infection. Travel between USM sites is exempt from this suspension. We encourage finding alternate means of conducting business. We realize the impacts may include cancelled trips, the window of time that research can be done, and for some researchers, the contractual obligation to complete projects involving domestic travel. To mitigate the above, an exception may be granted by a dean, vice president or the provost. However, the traveler must understand that given the rapidly changing situation, they may be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return, and there may be air or governmental restrictions on return that are beyond USM's ability to control.

If you have travel expenses related to your sponsored project, you should still follow all university policies and procedures for cancelled travel. **Refunds** must be credited to the sponsored project if that project provided the source of funds. **Cancellation costs** may be charged to the sponsored project with full documentation. If the sponsor later disallows the cost, which is possible, the cost will have to be moved to another source of funds. If you receive **credit for future travel** rather than a refund, the cost for travel must be moved to another source of funding. If you later use the credit on travel for the same or a different sponsored project, the cost may be transferred to the project with full documentation. Direct questions to your ORA accountant.

Faculty, staff, and students should consider their own health status and other reports before making plans for personal domestic travel, recognizing that the status of COVID-19 infection in the United States continues to change. The possibility of a 14-day self-isolation requirement also exists for domestic travel, given the rapidly changing circumstances. **We request anyone who is planning personal travel to register with the University.**

Faculty/Staff: <https://forms.usm.edu/provost/view.php?id=169392>

Students: <https://forms.usm.edu/provost/view.php?id=169740>

### **On-campus events and meetings**

According to USM guidance, all university-sponsored events (including research events) are canceled until further notice. Smaller meetings should be kept to an absolute minimum, and we suggest converting these meetings to video conferences or calls where possible.

### **Guidance from Sponsors**

The Office of Research Administration is monitoring information coming from sponsors. Many are providing flexibility with deadlines, deliverables, and reports. I encourage you to be in touch with your ORA Contracts and Grants Coordinator or Administrator and with your agency program officer to discuss any possible delays. Again, we encourage you to maintain progress as best as possible but understand schedules may need to be adjusted.

### **Graduate Research Assistants**

We encourage GAs to continue their planned activities to keep projects and thesis work on track. Due to the University's orange response status, we encourage supervisors to formulate a plan with their graduate students to continue their research remotely. There are several options for working and collaborating remotely through free video conferencing software as well as team software platforms, provided through the University's Microsoft Office 365 license. Consistent with guidance from some federal agencies, PIs should continue to pay stipends and salaries for their research assistants regardless of working conditions. Please consult your supervisor and HR (<https://www.usm.edu/employment-human-resources/covid-19-employment-faqs.php>) for more information.

### **Field Work**

For research projects requiring field work or similar off-campus activity, we advise trying to postpone that work until travel advisories are lifted. If that is not possible, please refer to the travel guidance on the University's official COVID-19 response website.

### **Concerns and Questions**

If you have specific concerns or questions, or if you are concerned COVID-19 will have a significant impact on your sponsored program, please first contact your supervisor and your ORA administrator. If further guidance is required, feel free to address questions to:

*General policy questions or concerns*

Gordon Cannon, VPR ([Gordon.Cannon@usm.edu](mailto:Gordon.Cannon@usm.edu))

*Federal agency, proposal, and awards questions*

Marcia Landen, Associate VPR ([Marcia.Landen@usm.edu](mailto:Marcia.Landen@usm.edu))

*Animal or human research questions*

Sam Bruton, Director for Research Integrity ([Samuel.Bruton@usm.edu](mailto:Samuel.Bruton@usm.edu))

As you are aware, this is a rapidly developing situation and we are closely examining the impact it will have on our current research endeavors. Our priority is focused on the safety of our students, faculty, and staff. We will issue additional communications as necessary.