

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Framework for Approving On-Campus Research Spaces, Fieldwork and Face-to-Face Interactions with Research Participants during COVID-19

St. John's Campus

Updated Feb. 18, 2021

Background

Research is a core priority for Memorial and is a vital component of the critical mission of our university. As such, it is critical to ensure that research activities proceed as normally as possible while we are living with COVID-19 in our communities.

In Spring 2020, a pan-university working group, known as the COVID-19 Research Working Group (CRWG), was formed to develop and oversee the implementation of a Framework that defined a process for phasing in of on-campus research activity, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants. The Framework developed by the CRWG outlines the goals, principles, activity types and levels, and criteria for such phasing in, and the process for receiving and reviewing requests from Deans and School Heads on behalf of Memorial's research community. The general parameters of the Framework were broadly consistent with activities permitted under the NL COVID-19 Alert Level System that was announced for the province on April 30, 2020.

Based on almost a year of operating under various Framework levels, the Framework was reviewed by the CRWG in February 2021. As a result of the review, the various Memorial campuses will implement their own processes for approvals of research activities for the duration of the pandemic. For the St. John's campus, the CRWG will remain active with the simplified Framework described in this document.

Information for researchers affiliated with the Grenfell Campus is [here](#); information for researchers affiliated with the Marine Institute Campus is [here](#); and information for researchers affiliated with the Labrador Institute is available [here](#).

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and until there is widespread uptake of a vaccine, research based from the St. John's campus that can be carried out remotely should continue to be done remotely. Researchers are asked to only request to carry out on-campus research activity, fieldwork, or face-to-face interactions with research participants when remote activities are not possible.

Goals

The various levels of access to on-campus research spaces, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants help ensure research continues with appropriate attention to the health and safety of Memorial's students, staff, faculty, research participants and collaborators, as well as the broader communities in which Memorial exists.

Scope

The processes described in this Framework apply for all research which involves a Faculty or School on the St. John's campus. Other St. John's campus researchers must confirm with the Vice-President (Research) whether their proposed research activities are subject to the processed in this Framework.

Principles

1. Adhere to all relevant public health directives from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and follow the advice of the Minister of Health and Community Services and Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador with respect to actions to limit the spread of COVID-19.
2. Protect the physical, mental and emotional health and safety of our students, staff, faculty, research participants and collaborators.
 - Students must not feel compelled to work on campus or in the field.
 - Researchers, students and other employees who feel uncomfortable about their work situation, for whatever reason, need to know that they can confidentially report their concerns to the Vice-President (Research) and that they do not have to participate in any activity where they are not comfortable.
 - Only approved on-campus research activities, fieldwork or face-to-face interactions with research participants can proceed while the provisions of this Framework are in effect.
 - Principal Investigators (PIs) must identify which students, faculty, staff and collaborators are essential personnel for ongoing research activities. PIs retain responsibility for all individuals engaged in their research projects, and for ensuring that the members of their research teams are aware of, and abiding by, the activity-specific Health and Safety Plans that are associated with the approved Framework requests.
 - Health and safety associated with research activities must be rigorously maintained. Adequate access to and use of PPE and other health and safety supplies is the responsibility of the PI or the graduate student's or post-doctoral fellow's supervisor in cases where requests are made on behalf of graduate students or post-doctoral fellows.
 - Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), Facilities Management (FM) and Campus Enforcement and Patrol (CEP) must be in agreement that proposed research activities can be allowed to proceed.
 - Key research support units, including Technical Services, Animal Care Services, CREAT Network, Memorial University Libraries and other units across campus, may not be able to provide normal services as a result of COVID-19 impacts and this may limit the nature or timing of research activities approved under this Framework. These units will also have their own plans and procedures that will limit access and specify COVID-19 measures (e.g. physical distancing, cleaning of shared materials and equipment, quarantining of materials that cannot be cleaned) that will be in place and which may limit availability of resources. Researchers who require access to these support units must coordinate the involvement of these units in advance of making requests and will have to comply with the measures that are put in place by those units.
3. Protect the careers of postdoctoral fellows and early career researchers.
 - COVID-19 presents challenges to researchers at all seniority levels, but it will have the greatest impact on postdoctoral fellows and early career researchers.
4. Maintain a priority focus on students – both graduate and undergraduate – and their progress through their academic programs.
 - Limitations on research activity have enormous effects on graduate students, which, to the greatest extent possible, need to be mitigated.

- While it is important to remember that undergraduates are students first and researchers second, many begin to build their research skills through internships and through other undergraduate research experiences, so this should be considered as circumstances permit their re-engagement.
5. Recognize and support researchers from equity-deserving groups in accordance with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles.
 - Memorial commits to take active measures to prevent systemic barriers that result in individuals from equity-deserving groups receiving unequal access to, or being excluded from participating in, employment, services, or programs in the research ecosystem. Equity-seeking groups include, but are not limited to, women, racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and persons from LGBTQ2+ communities.
 - These measures are especially important in a crisis situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as unconscious biases are more likely to influence decision-making that must be done rapidly and in stressful circumstances.
 - There is also evidence that points to a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on individuals from equity-seeking groups, for example, individuals with disabilities being unable to access necessary health care, women disproportionately shouldering childcare and homeschooling responsibilities, etc.
 - Accordingly, decision making in relation to this framework must include some representation from individuals from equity-deserving groups, and must require unconscious bias training, such as that provided by the Tri-Agency (see: [online training module](#)).
 6. Ensure the process for approving on-campus research activity, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants is informed, fair and transparent.
 7. Indigenous communities across the province may follow a different approach to approving research during COVID-19. This Framework will follow recommendations from the Miawpukek (Conne River) First Nation, Qalipu First Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, Innu Nation, NunatuKavut Community Council, and any other Indigenous governing body or community regarding research implicating Indigenous groups.
 8. Research that is approved under this Framework must not proceed until all required ethics approvals are in place and that appropriate consent processes are also followed. In some cases, consent may shift and researchers must bear in mind that ongoing consent – particularly from Indigenous governments or groups – may be required.
 9. Continually strive to enable as much research activity as possible, while respecting the necessary limits required by the evolving COVID-19 situation in NL and while understanding the potential to re-impose restrictions should the situation require.

Criteria for Approving Research Activity During COVID-19

- (1) Restrictions on research activities should take into account government restrictions or public health advice.
- (2) Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is available for the research team.

- (3) The research activity can comply with all provincial and institutional COVID-19 requirements related to health and safety, subject to a review and approval of an activity-specific Health and Safety Plan by Memorial's EHS unit.
- (4) For RED Level, the criteria shall include:
 - a. critical COVID-19 research;
 - b. essential clinical studies; and
 - c. critical continuity activities related to research and scholarly activities that cannot be paused.
- (5) For YELLOW and GREEN Levels, the expanded criteria shall include:
 - a. research activity involving thesis-based graduate students, initially those close to completing their degrees and postdoctoral fellows close to completing their terms of appointment, who are unable to adapt their research projects or carry out research remotely;
 - b. research activity by disproportionately affected researchers in accordance with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles;
 - c. research activity that cannot be adapted or carried out remotely, which involves external partners or funding bodies that have not indicated flexibility under the COVID-19 circumstances, and which have end dates that are within 12 months of the request being made; and
 - d. time-sensitive and deadline-driven research that cannot be adapted or carried out remotely.

Research Activity Levels

There are three levels (RED, YELLOW, GREEN) of access to on-campus research spaces, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants. External conditions (e.g. public health advice, existence of community spread, vaccination levels) and campus-specific internal conditions (e.g. building access and controls, density limits, cleaning capacity, feasibility for physical distancing, education and screening protocols, limitations on the operations of key research support units) impact the extent to which on-campus research activities, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants can be undertaken.

The Vice-President Research will assess the capacity for the St. John's campus to move between activity levels with consideration to the level at which the province is operating.

Level	Internal and External Conditions	Research Activity Status
<p>RED (High to Very High Risk)</p>	<p><u>External</u></p> <p>The Province of NL is operating with measures from Level 5 of the COVID-19 Alert Level System (https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/alert-system/).</p> <p>Public health directives are stringent.</p> <p>Travel restrictions on incoming and outgoing personnel including requirement for 14-day self-isolation on arrival.</p> <p><u>Internal</u></p> <p>On-campus activities are limited to work by “critical” employees and researchers who have been given approval through the Research Exemption process.</p> <p>Building access is under restricted or controlled access.</p> <p>High compliance with COVID-19 education and screening protocols.</p> <p>Capacity for cleaning is directed toward spaces used for critical activities.</p> <p>Support available through centralized research support units, such as the library, CREAT Network, Technical Services and Animal Care Services, varies depending on demand for services and the capacity of the units to provide support while operating under COVID-19 constraints.</p>	<p>General suspension of on-campus research and scholarly activities in research spaces across Memorial’s campuses, including the CREAT labs. Additionally, all fieldwork and all activities that would involve face-to-face (in-person) interactions are suspended.</p> <p>Permitted activities include critical COVID-19 research; essential clinical studies; or critical continuity activities related to research and scholarly activities that cannot be paused. Students involved in activities with approved access must be closely supervised during their access to research spaces.</p> <p>Memorial Libraries will maintain a list of available services here.</p> <p>Strict expectations for health and safety plans, including minimum personnel, physical distancing, and enhanced cleaning activities, for any approved research exemptions. Plans must be included in requests and must be reviewed, amended and approved by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) prior to the commencement of approved activities.</p> <p>Researchers must comply with all EHS health and safety measures as described here.</p> <p>Researchers must be prepared to modify, scale back or suspend access to on-campus research spaces as external conditions indicate or if the expectations noted above are not being met.</p>

<p>YELLOW (Moderate to High Risk)</p>	<p>External</p> <p>The Province of NL is operating with measures from Levels 3 and 4 of the COVID-19 Alert Level System (https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/alert-system/).</p> <p>Public health directives remain stringent but provide for limited on-campus research activity and low-risk fieldwork.</p> <p>Limited childcare options available for parents.</p> <p>Travel restrictions on incoming and outgoing personnel including requirement for 14-day self-isolation on arrival.</p> <p>Internal</p> <p>On-campus research activities are limited individuals who have been given approval through the CRWG Framework.</p> <p>Building access is under restricted or controlled access.</p> <p>High compliance with COVID-19 education and screening protocols.</p> <p>Capacity for enhanced cleaning is directed toward spaces used for critical activities and an increased level of on-campus research activity.</p> <p>Support available through centralized research support units, such as the library, CREAT Network, Technical Services and Animal Care Services, varies depending on demand for services and the capacity of the units to provide support while operating under COVID-19 constraints.</p>	<p>The restrictions on on-campus research activity are relaxed to allow more time-sensitive and deadline-driven on-campus research to proceed.</p> <p>Low-risk fieldwork (except in Labrador) that respects the NL public health directives and complies with Memorial travel restrictions may be allowed to proceed with restrictions.</p> <p>Indigenous communities across the province may follow a different scheduling for research opening and Memorial University will follow recommendations from the Miawpukek (Conne River) First Nation, Qalipu First Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, Innu Nation, NunatuKavut Community Council, and any other Indigenous governing body or community regarding research implicating Indigenous groups. In the case of Labrador, Memorial will also follow recommendations from Labrador Grenfell Health and the municipalities in Labrador. The Labrador Institute is also available to answer questions about research in Labrador during COVID-19.</p> <p>Priority will be given to thesis-based graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, particularly those close to completing their degree or term of appointment. Research activities by second-year Master’s students and third- and fourth-year Doctoral students will be considered a priority where density considerations are a factor. Graduate students may be approved to work unsupervised subject to appropriate remote supervision.</p> <p>Priority will be given to disproportionately affected</p>
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Level	Internal and External Conditions	Research Activity Status
	<p>Teaching is mostly remote so that the number of people on campus and travelling to and from campus can be largely kept to researchers, other critical faculty and staff, and students in any programs that require on-campus participation.</p>	<p>researchers in accordance with EDI principles.</p> <p>Priority will be given to projects involving external partners or funding bodies, particularly those that have not indicated flexibility under COVID-19 and where contract end dates are within 12 months of the request.</p> <p>Memorial Libraries will maintain a list of available services here.</p> <p>Strict expectations for health and safety plans, including the number of people in shared space, physical distancing requirements, and enhanced cleaning activities, for any approved research exemptions. Plans must be included in requests and must be reviewed, amended and approved by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) prior to the commencement of approved activities.</p> <p>Researchers must comply with all EHS health and safety measures as described here.</p> <p>Researchers must be prepared to modify, scale back or suspend access to on-campus research spaces as external conditions (e.g. number of COVID-19 cases rise) indicate or if the expectations noted above are not being met.</p>

<p>GREEN</p> <p>(Low to Moderate Risk)</p>	<p>External</p> <p>The Province of NL is operating with measures from Levels 1 or 2 of the COVID-19 Alert Level System (https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/alert-system/).</p> <p>Public health directives are relaxed to enable more activity in the community, though precautionary measures remain in effect.</p> <p>Increased childcare options available for parents.</p> <p>Some easing of travel restrictions.</p> <p>Internal</p> <p>On-campus research activities are limited to individuals who have been given approval through the CRWG Framework.</p> <p>University resources are not needed to support NL Health Authorities.</p> <p>High compliance with COVID-19 education and screening protocols.</p> <p>On-campus buildings are open under limited or normal hours.</p> <p>Building-specific Health and Safety Plans have been approved by EHS for overall ramp up of operations within a building in which research activity is to take place. This will include defining measures to control and monitor space use and people flow in corridors, common areas (such as washrooms, lunchrooms, lounges, seminar rooms, classrooms, photocopy rooms, etc.), and shared graduate student offices. In some</p>	<p>The restrictions on on-campus research activity are further relaxed to allow for more on-campus research plus fieldwork (except in Labrador) that respects NL public health directives and complies with Memorial travel restrictions may proceed.</p> <p>Indigenous communities across the province may follow a different scheduling for research opening and Memorial University will follow recommendations from the Miawpukek (Conne River) First Nation, Qalipu First Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, Innu Nation, NunatuKavut Community Council, and any other Indigenous governing body or community regarding research implicating Indigenous groups. In the case of Labrador, Memorial will also follow recommendations from Labrador Grenfell Health and the municipalities in Labrador. The Labrador Institute is also available to answer questions about research in Labrador during COVID-19.</p> <p>Memorial Libraries will maintain a list of available services here.</p> <p>In addition, low-risk face-to-face interaction with participants may be allowed to resume subject to approval and implementation of health and safety plans.</p> <p>Strict expectations for health and safety plans, including minimum personnel, physical distancing, and enhanced cleaning activities, for any approved research exemptions. Plans must be included in requests and must be reviewed, amended and approved by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) prior to the commencement of approved activities.</p>
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Level	Internal and External Conditions	Research Activity Status
	<p>cases, multiple academic and non-academic units will need to coordinate in the development of Health and Safety Plans where buildings are shared.</p> <p>Capacity for enhanced cleaning is directed toward spaces used for critical activities and an increased level of on-campus research activity.</p> <p>Support available through centralized research support units, such as the library, CREAT Network, Technical Services and Animal Care Services, varies depending on demand for services and the capacity of the units to provide support while operating under COVID-19 constraints.</p> <p>More on-campus teaching is underway so building densities need to be carefully managed.</p>	<p>Researchers must comply with all EHS health and safety measures as described here.</p> <p>Researchers must be prepared to modify, scale back or suspend access to on-campus research spaces, fieldwork or face-to-face interactions with research participants as external conditions indicate or if the expectations noted above are not being met.</p>

COVID-19 Research Working Group (CRWG)

The members of the St. John’s campus CRWG include:

- Ray Gosine, Associate Vice-President (Research), Chair
- Sean Cadigan, Associate Vice-President (Academic)
- Aimee Surprenant, Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Vice-President (Academic)
- Ashlee Cunsolo, Interim Dean, School of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Studies at the Labrador Institute
- Jennifer Keyte, Director of Animal Care Services and University Veterinarian
- Barbara Battcock, Associate Director, Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)
- Tana Allen, Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Reza Tabrizchi, Vice Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, Faculty of Medicine
- Octavia Dobre, Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
- Jacqueline Blundell, Associate Dean Research and Graduate, Faculty of Science
- Janet Bangma, Associate University Librarian (Health Science), Memorial University Libraries
- Kelly Vodden, Associate Vice-President (Grenfell Campus), Research and Graduate Studies
- Heather Burke, Director, Centre for Aquaculture and Seafood Development, Marine Institute Campus

Research Activity Request Process

The following process will be followed in considering requests related to on-campus research activity, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants.

- (1) During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vice-President Research will determine which Level is in effect for research under the auspices of units on the St. John's campus.
- (2) Recognizing that different units may have different needs or challenges, Deans will determine when they are able to operate at the Level determined by the Vice-President Research for access to on-campus research spaces, fieldwork and face-to-face interactions with research participants for activities within their units. Deans shall not operate at a less restrictive Level than the Level set by the Vice-President Research.
- (3) Deans will co-ordinate a process within their Faculties and Schools to solicit, review and prioritize requests under this Framework.
- (4) Each research request must be prepared using the appropriate request form ([see LINK HERE for current forms for the St. John's campus](#)), which includes an activity-specific COVID-19 Health and Safety Plan. The activity-specific Health and Safety Plan details the measures to be put in place within research spaces under the control of the principal investigator (PI).
- (5) Following Faculty/School level processing, Deans, or delegates, will forward their recommended requests, including activity-specific Health and Safety Plans, to health.safety@mun.ca for the EHS review/approval with a copy to research.requests@mun.ca.
 - a. For all RED Level requests that involve graduate students or post-doctoral fellows, the Dean of Graduate Studies, or delegate, must be copied on requests that are sent for EHS review. The Deans, or delegates, should coordinate with the Dean of Graduate Studies, or delegate, in the review.
 - b. Where a requested activity involves support from other units (e.g. Technical Services, Animal Care Services, CREAT, Library, Information and Telecommunications Services, Departmental or Faculty resources or staff, etc.), the request shall only be submitted to EHA after the Dean, or delegate, has confirmed that arrangements have been made to access these resources.
 - c. Request recommendations will be subject to the review and approval of activity-specific Health and Safety Plans by Memorial's EHS unit. EHS will communicate the results of their review to the requesting Dean, or delegate, with a copy to research.requests@mun.ca.
 - d. Following the review by EHS, Deans, or delegates, will communicate the decision regarding the request to the PI, with a copy to research.requests@mun.ca, along with any conditions associated with approved research or changes to the activity-specific Health and Safety Plan to the PI. The PI shall ensure that all researchers involved in the research comply with any conditions, with the activity-specific Health and Safety Plans and with general Memorial COVID-19 health and safety requirements detailed [here](#). Failure to do so will result in approvals being revoked.

- (6) Recommended activities must not commence before approval has been communicated as per 6d above and all required ethics or other clearances have been obtained.
- (7) A copy of the approval letter must be maintained by the researchers as they carry out the activities and provided upon request by officials of Memorial University (e.g. Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities Management, Campus Enforcement and Patrol).