# Guide for Assessing Benefit and Urgency for Behavioural and Social Sciences Research

During Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Province’s COVID-19 pandemic response Restart Plan[[1]](#footnote-1), UBC is permitting the resumption of in-person research on a limited basis. The intention is to limit in-person research to studies that are beneficial to the participants and/or urgent for the research or the researcher. Departments or unit heads are being asked to advise the BREB about which research in their department should proceed at this time. The Department may opt to delegate responsibility for reviewing research projects to an internal committee or to one person. Review should consider the research methods, the nature of the research, and the researcher’s circumstances. It should also consider the impact of having research participants attending on-campus facilities, if this is a requirement of the research.

This optional user guide may assist departments and/or Faculties in determining which in-person research studies being conducted on and off-campus should be given permission to start or resume activity. With respect to equity considerations, departments and/or Faculties are also encouraged to consult prioritization criteria in Faculty research resumption plans.

**Departmental Considerations**

**In-person research on-campus and off-campus**: Permission should be granted to in-person research only if it cannot be conducted online. As examples: research where the results would be affected by connecting online rather than in-person, where the loss of face-to-face interaction would diminish the quality of the data, or where curtailment of the research would mean the loss of valuable services to participants (support groups, therapy-based research, or programs that meet basic needs for food, childcare, and shelter).

**Benefit of the research:** Consider whether it is of benefit to (a) individual participants, (b) participants sharing common characteristics, or (c) a community or society at large. Examples of benefits could include increased useful knowledge to participants, enhancements to community services and programs, implementation of/or changes to policies leading to positive societal change, such as safer workplace practices or direct program delivery to a particular participant population.

**Urgency of the research:** Consider whether the research needs to be done now, due to special circumstances. For example, is the researcher a student who needs to complete the research to graduate? Is the research dependent on the school year? Is it dependent on real-time pandemic experiences or scheduled events outside the researcher’s control? Does the researcher risk loss of funding?

**Benefit and Urgency Matrix**

This matrix is designed to help users apply the above considerations of Benefit and Urgency.

**A** = Departments should forward research for BREB review.

**B** = Departments may forward research for BREB review, if they consider it a priority.

**C** = Department should consider delaying the submission of this research for BREB review unless the COVID-19-related risks to research participants have been satisfactorily mitigated and the researcher is able to comply with all federal and provincial advisories (e.g. travel restrictions).

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|  | **Urgent Due to the topic of the research and / or circumstances of researcher** | | |
| **Potential Benefit to participants** | Not urgent, could be done later (no one is disadvantaged by waiting to conduct the research) | Somewhat urgent, delay could cause some issues (researcher has a deadline to use grant funds, staff need to be utilized, loss of funding etc.) | Very urgent, delay could mean research could not be done (student could not graduate, staff lay-offs, or research is COVID-19 related) |
| Limited or None (benefit primarily to researcher) | **C** | **C** | **B** |
| Some potential benefit (policy impact or societal benefit) | **C** | **B** | **A** |
| Significant potential benefit or direct participant benefit (delivers service or beneficial program) | **B** | **A** | **A** |

Each department has a unique research portfolio, and it is up to the department to consider the research that they forward to the BREB for review. Departmental decision-making is, in part, based on the overall amount and type of research in the department. Therefore, a department may decide to forward research that fits into category C because it can be done safely and the number of researchers and participants involved would not jeopardize public health. This decision is up to the department. Refer to BC’s Restart Plan for recommendations for social interactions and travel during Phase 2 and 3. Social distancing and small group sizes (2-6) is recommended for all individuals outside of a person’s bubble.

Please ensure that if the research involves Indigenous communities, you consider the points referenced in the Safe Research Guidelines. Contact the Indigenous Research Support Initiative (IRSI) if you require more guidance on understanding how COVID-19 impacts, modifies, or pauses research with(in) indigenous communities (<https://irsi.ubc.ca/>).

Please note that even if research is forwarded for review at the department level, the BREB may determine that the risk for participants outweighs the benefits of the research, and decide (as it normally would) that the research should not proceed in its current state.

**Overview of BREB Review Process**

1. **Researcher completes either the COVID-19 Form or the Supplementary Research Form:** All researchers will need to have their department heads or unit leads sign either a) [COVID-19 Form](https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/COVID-19%20Form.docx) (if COVID-19 related) or b) [Supplementary Research Form](https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/Supplementary%20Research%20Form.docx) to indicate that the department has agreed the research should proceed.
2. **Researcher Completes a Safe Research Plan:** [Guidance](https://ethics.research.ubc.ca/sites/ore.ubc.ca/files/documents/Safe%20Research%20Guidelines.docx) has been created to help researchers develop their plan.
3. **Researcher submits either the COVID-19 Form or the Supplementary Research Form and a Safe Research Plan to Department Head or Unit Lead:** These forms are designed to assist the department in determining what research should proceed. Although the Department Head is not required to sign off on the Safe Research Plan, researchers are asked to include it in their submissions to the department as additional background.
4. **Submit to BREB:** Once the research has departmental approval, the researcher can complete the RISe online research ethics application. The Safe Research Plan and either the COVID-19 Form or the Supplementary Research Form with departmental signature must be attached to Box 9.7 of the RISe BREB ethics application before being submitted to the BREB**. Note the Department Head or Unit Lead will be asked to sign off on the full application, through RISe, as they normally would.**

1. BC’s Restart Plan, May 29, 2020: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/bc-restart-plan> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)