Georgia Tech Research Continuity Guidance

There are many possible events that could disrupt research operations at Georgia Tech. These events could include travel restrictions imposed on both employees and visitors, a temporary closure of a campus building, or a temporary closure of campus. In addition, the ability to procure supplies and receive shipments in a timely manner could be impeded.

Objectives & Guiding Principles

The objectives of this plan are to:

• Provide guidance and structure to ensure the continuity of research at Georgia Tech to the fullest extent possible.
• Outline critical questions and actions that researchers and research support staff should address in their unit-level continuity plans.
• Set direction and expectations for researchers regarding adjacent and critical dependent functions

The guiding principles of the plan are:

• At all times, the health and safety of research personnel is the priority.
• Preserve the research function and activity to the extent possible within the current circumstances.
• Offer alternative research functioning that aligns with compliance obligations to our sponsors and Institute policies.
• Utilize as many existing and familiar technological, human and process resources as possible; that is, minimize having to create or do something new and untested.
• Action plans should be verified and practiced.

Scope

This document is intended to provide broad guidance to the campus community on how to prepare for and deal with these potential impacts on the research mission of Georgia Tech. Every employee on campus is employed within a unit that has a designated continuity plan manager that has developed plans for your specific unit.

Critical Actions for Research Personnel and PIs

The absence of personnel, a disruption in supplies, or a closure of campus can adversely impact several critical research programs and resources. Some resources may require days of advanced planning to safely shut down or cease operations, others may require critical resources to remain safe and in operation (i.e. “online”), some may require personnel to be designated
emergency personnel to maintain critical infrastructure. It is possible that a campus building may not be accessible on short notice. Every research lab and unit should:

Identify what is Critical:

- Make a list of critical infrastructure and critical procedures. Critical infrastructure is anything that cannot be simply powered down and walked away from, or whose continued operation is necessary to maintain another critical resource. Identify research procedures that can be curtailed or delayed and with how much advance notice.
- Ensure that critical equipment is appropriately monitored remotely or develop an alternative plan for equipment that is not remotely monitored (e.g. -80 freezers, cell culture incubators, nitrogen dewars). Environmental Health and Safety has developed guidance for laboratory shutdowns that is posted on their website at [http://ehs.gatech.edu](http://ehs.gatech.edu).
- Provide a list of essential personnel to your local continuity plan manager who are critical for the maintenance of research infrastructure and necessary in-person continuation of research obligations. Those engaged in research with access controls (e.g. classified, CUI) or on topics of specific interest to US government sponsors may also be deemed essential personnel. The local unit should approve this list with institute-provided guidance and include in their continuity plan.

Prepare Your Researchers and Staff:

- Obtain up-to-date contact information for all lab personnel.
- Cross-train research personnel to substitute for others by ensuring up-to-date laboratory procedures, document critical instructions for lab protocols, and encourage peer familiarity with each others’ work.
- Be prepared for some of your laboratory personnel to fall ill and be absent.
- Develop and rehearse a plan for lab communication (email, Microsoft Teams, etc.) and remote access and meeting (e.g. BlueJeans, DropBox, OneDrive, Teams).

Prepare Your Lab Space, Equipment & Tools:

- Maintain a sufficient inventory of necessary supplies that consider a supply chain disruption, and a plan in case those supplies are not available or cannot be received.
- Consider researcher workspaces that do not maintain social distancing and adopt campus guidance for congregating groups of people.
- Save samples and results frequently. Whether computer or experimental data or resources, ensure that results are retained even more regularly than usual and that all data is available and appropriately backed up.
- Enact extra cleaning procedures for shared labs and core facilities in “high-touch” environments.

Plan Ahead:

- Prioritize research in anticipation of possible lack of access to facilities or resources. Consider experimental designs and schedules over the next few months and the impact
of a disruption and develop a contingency plan suitable for your research group’s operations. Be prepared for core facilities to possibly be inaccessible due to campus closure, building closure, or lack of reagents or infrastructure.

- Verify the functionality and integrity of your data backup plans.
- Be prepared for delayed in repairs or servicing of research infrastructure.
- Utilize equipment loan agreements for not just laptops, but other equipment that could be safely operated and used remotely.
- While the university provides VPN access, work with your local IT staff to ensure that remote access to laboratory-specific workstations is feasible.
- Plan for the scenario of remote proposal submission and working with sponsored programs and research compliance.
- Check current travel advisories and restrictions by Georgia Tech and the University System of Georgia.

Resources Related to Adjacent and Dependent Functions

*Working with Sponsored Programs, Industry Engagement, Grants/Contracts Accounting and Research Compliance.* These organizations have developed plans for working remotely and support their ongoing operations (proposal submission, annual reporting invoicing sponsors, etc.). OSP will post guidance from funding sponsors. We expect delays in meeting deliverables and posting new awards. Please work with your Contracting Officer in OSP to manage your sponsor relationship. Federal agencies are beginning to provide guidance for both current award recipients and those submitting proposals, including NIH and NSF.

*Procurement.* Online tools and workflows for making purchases will remain available, and both local units as well as Procurement and Business Services have developed plans for working remotely if needed. Service Now will continue to be monitored by Procurement and Business Services for all questions related to the procure to pay processes and normal response times should be maintained. Contract Officers may be working remotely but will provide any additional support that is needed. Goods will continue to be delivered by vendors and shipping carriers in the same manner as usual (barring any disruption from shipping carriers). Any changes to vendor delivery patterns will be communicated to campus. Units with loading docks should consider designating essential personnel to ensure receipt of deliveries.

*Office of the Executive Vice-President for Research* personnel will work remotely if necessary and maintain normal operations.

*Library.* The library is essential for the continuity of research. We expect library electronic resources to remain available. In the case of a limited closure, we encourage the Library to continue to provide virtual support services if it is not possible for in-person archival and library resource access.
Research Security. Some research activities (CUI, Classified, HIPPA protected) are confined to physical locations. Access to such systems may require that individuals are designated essential personnel.

Research Facilities Outside the Atlanta Campus. Off campus research facilities will follow local guidance and coordinate with Georgia Tech leadership. Facilities in metro Atlanta may require independent decisions and should consult with Georgia Tech leadership. All should follow their local continuity plan and refer to this document for guidance where appropriate.

Environmental Health and Safety services will be critical for the continuation of research and will respond to health and safety needs.

Conducting Animal Research and Working with Living Organisms. The Physiological Research Lab has a continuity plan for animal welfare and maintenance and will provide guidance to all personnel on IACUC protocols. Faculty and students may be deemed essential for access to local laboratory resources such as locally housed invertebrate animals and cell cultures and should work with their local continuity plan manager.

Conducting Human Subject Research. The Institutional Review Board staff will provide guidance to all personnel on approved IRB protocols. Visits of research subjects to campus may be curtailed.

IT Resources will be maintained. Off campus access will be facilitated using existing campus VPN infrastructure. High-performance computing resources will remain online. IT support staff will be accessible remotely.