

**SCIENCE MISSION DIRECTORATE POLICY**

**Augmentations and Funded Extension Requests in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**SMD Policy Document SPD-36**

**July 8, 2020**

**Responsible SMD Official: Deputy Associate Administrator for Research (DAAR)**

**VERSION HISTORY**

**Original SPD-36**

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: Approved for public release.

## **I Purpose**

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the economic disruptions that will follow, the early career members of our community are vulnerable to having their careers permanently disrupted. The NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD) recognizes that the future of our research enterprise depends on the contributions of new researchers with their new ideas entering and being retained in the national workforce. The objective of this policy is to provide extraordinary support to early career researchers during this extraordinary time to avoid the damage of the pandemic and the response to it falling disproportionately on a subset of early career researchers.

## **II Background**

1. As a part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, US government policy [1-5] has been to encourage grantees to continue paying graduate students, post-docs, and soft-money research staff during the shelter-in-place period — even if no research can be accomplished — and to allow restart costs to be charged to grants. When the shelter-in-place restrictions of the US's response to the COVID-19 pandemic are loosened or eliminated, existing grantees may request augmentations or funded extensions to their existing awards to complete their funded research. Hard decisions will be necessary to balance SMD's commitment to existing awardees against SMD's support for future awardees within NASA's planned budgets for FY2021 and FY2022.

## **III Applicability**

1. This policy applies to all research funded by SMD awards that have not yet reached the end of their current period of performance (including any previously-approved extensions).
2. In this document, "early career researchers" refers to graduate students, postdocs, and non-tenured and soft-money researchers within 10 years of their PhD.
3. In this policy document, all mandatory actions (i.e., requirements) are denoted by statements containing the term "shall." The terms "may" or "can" denote discretionary privilege or permission; "should" denotes a good practice and is recommended, but not required; "will" denotes expected outcome; and "are/is" denotes descriptive material.
4. In this policy document, all document citations are assumed to be the latest version unless otherwise noted.

## **IV Authority**

1. National Aeronautics and Space Act, 51 U.S.C. 20101 et seq.

## **V References**

1. Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum M-20-17, *Administrative Relief for Recipients and Applicants of Federal Financial Assistance Directly Impacted by the Novel Coronavirus*

(COVID19) due to Loss of Operations, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-17.pdf>.

2. *NASA Implementation of OMB Memorandum M-20-17*, available at <https://www.nssc.nasa.gov/grants>.
3. *SMD FAQ on Grants and Research during the COVID19 Epidemic*, available at <https://science.nasa.gov/files/science-pink/s3fs-public/atoms/files/SMDCOVIDFAQ.pdf>
4. Office of Management and Budget, Memorandum M-20-26, *Extension of Administrative Relief for Recipients and Applicants of Federal Financial Assistance Directly Impacted by the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) due to Loss of Operations*, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/M-20-26.pdf>.
5. *NASA Implementation of OMB Memorandum M-20-26*, available at [https://prod.nais.nasa.gov/pub/pub\\_library/srba/index.html](https://prod.nais.nasa.gov/pub/pub_library/srba/index.html).
6. Science Policy Document (SPD) 8, *Requirements for Selection Decision Document for NASA Research Announcements including ROSES*
7. Science Policy Document, *Supplemental Selection for Proposals*

## **VI Responsibility**

1. The SMD Deputy Associate Administrator for Research (DAAR) as delegated by the Associate Administrator for SMD shall ensure SMD compliance with this policy document.

## **VII SMD's Priorities for Assessing post-COVID-19 Augmentation or Funded Extension Requests**

1. Augmentations or funded extensions to existing awards to support the research of graduate students and post-docs are the highest priority. Full funding for salaries and benefits, as well as tuition for graduate students, should be approved for the planned time to complete their appointments. Costs associated with laboratory restart (*e.g.*, replacing expired reagents, re-starting cell cultures, or inspections of key capital equipment), or delays to field work that could not be completed as planned due to COVID-19-related policies, should be approved only if they directly support graduate students and post-docs.
2. Augmentations or funded extensions to existing awards to support the research of non-tenured and soft-money early career researchers (within 10 years of their terminal degree) shall be given second priority, behind requests that fall into item 1, above. Such augmentations or funded extensions should be consistent with the time lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Augmentation or funded extension requests to existing awards to support the completion of proposed research absent support for graduate students, post-docs and early-career soft-money researchers shall be given the lowest priority and should only be considered in the context of a descoped version of the originally-proposed research objectives. Since grants are level-of-effort activities, there is no requirement that all of the original research objectives be achieved before the end of the period of performance. If a descoped version of the original research is acceptable (based on the original scientific merit and relevance evaluations), then only augmentations or funded extensions for restarting the non-descoped parts of the research program should be considered. These costs may include salary and benefits as well as laboratory restart costs. Nevertheless, these types of augmentation or funded extension requests will have the lowest priority and will only be considered once items 1 and 2, above, have been satisfied.

4. Where possible, within a research portfolio, existing awards should be considered for augmentations or funded extension requests under items 1, 2, and 3, above, before new selections are made.
5. Decision-making regarding augmentations should be communicated clearly and transparently to the community.

### **VIII Required content of a post-COVID-19 Augmentation or Funded Extension Request**

Post-COVID-19 augmentation or funded extension requests must not exceed 5 pages, must be compliant with the formatting constraints of ROSES-2020 and must contain only the following sections in the following order:

- a. Concise statement of original goals of funded project and original timeline.
- b. Detailed description of proposed descopes, if any.
- c. Statement of and justification for new timeline
- d. An explanation of whether and how the augmentation or funded extension would support the research of graduate students and post-docs (Section VII(1), above), non-tenured and soft-money early career researchers (Section VII(2), above), or complete the original grant without augmenting its original research objectives (Section VII(3), above).
- e. Budget for augmentation or funded extension. A budget template is provided in Appendix A.
- f. Detailed budget narrative explaining the reason for each cost and connecting it directly to the institutional, local or national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **IX Process Notes**

Existing grantees may submit post-COVID-19 augmentation or funded extension requests starting on October 1, 2020. Requests received by November 15, 2020 will be processed as a group. A second group of requests submitted between November 16, 2020 and December 31, 2020 will be processed together as well. Augmentation or funded extension requests received after December 31, 2020 will be considered on a delayed schedule and will be subject to heightened scrutiny.

Post-COVID-19 augmentation or funded extension requests must be submitted to the “SMD Post-COVID Recovery” solicitation *via* NSPIRES.

Augmentation or funded extension requests greater than \$150,000 will require NASA to obtain several external evaluations. Such requests will necessarily take extra time to process and researchers should be alert to this fact.

### **X Other Considerations**

Absent the appropriation by Congress of funding for the recovery of research from the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for post-COVID-19 augmentations and funded extensions will come from the same budgets as new awards from ROSES-2020 and ROSES-2021 solicitations. This may require accommodations within the research program, *i.e.*, new selections from ROSES-2020 and ROSES-2021

may have their starting dates delayed and/or the number of selections from ROSES-2020 and ROSES-2021 solicitations may be reduced.

*Not all augmentation or funded extension requests may be accepted since funding for all Research and Analysis programs is not being increased to account for the response to the pandemic.*

## **XI MEASUREMENT/VERIFICATION**

Compliance with this document is verified by documenting selected augmentation and funded extension requests in Selection Decision Documents.

## **SIGNATURE BLOCK**

**Approved by:**

Original document digitally signed  
by Thomas Zurbuchen on 07/08/2020

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**Thomas H. Zurbuchen, Ph.D.**  
**Associate Administrator,**  
**Science Mission Directorate**

## Appendix A: Budget Template for Augmentation Requests Arising from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Requested period of performance: MM/DD/YYYY – MM/DD/YYYY

Budget Category	Comments	Cost (\$)
<b>Direct Labor</b>		
<i>Graduate Students</i>		
	Name, Estimated Degree Date	X,XXX
	Name, Estimated Degree Date	X,XXX
<i>Post-doctoral Scientists</i>		
	Name, Appointment End Date	X,XXX
<i>Non-tenured or Soft-money Early Career Researchers</i>		
	Name, Role	X,XXX
<i>Soft-money Staff</i>		
	Name, Role	X,XXX
<i>Other Researchers</i>		
	Name, Role	X,XXX
<b>Total Direct Labor Costs</b>		<b>X,XXX</b>
<b>Direct Costs, Equipment (associated with lab restart)</b>		
	Description	X,XXX
<b>Direct Costs, Participant/Trainee Support</b>		
	<i>Tuition, Fees, Health Insurance</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Stipends</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Travel</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Subsistence</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Other</i>	X,XXX
<b>Other Direct Costs</b>		
	<i>Materials &amp; Supplies (associated with lab restart or delayed field work)</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Subawards/Consortium/Contractual Costs</i>	X,XXX
	<i>Other (specify)</i>	X,XXX
<b>Total, Direct Costs</b>		<b>X,XXX</b>
	<i>Indirect Costs</i>	X,XXX
<b>Total, Direct and Indirect Costs</b>		<b>X,XXX</b>