Background

On March 13, 2020 the Quebec provincial government closed universities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and declared a public health emergency on March 14, 2020. While McGill remains closed, on April 26, 2020 McGill received official word that “des activités universitaires de recherche, et conformément à la liste des services et des activités jugées essentiels, je vous confirme que les universités s’ont en mesure de reprendre ces activités,” meaning that McGill could begin to slowly ramp up research in certain domain areas: “santé, des sciences naturelles, de l’agriculture, de la foresterie, du génie, ainsi que les activités extérieures saisonnières dont l’urgence du redémarrage est vitale peuvent débuter leurs activités dès maintenant.” The Office of the Vice-Principal, Research and Innovation is aware that the research closure and the metered ramp-up of research activities is affecting research productivity, especially for those research groups whose students and staff are not able to shift their activities to a home environment (e.g. needing access to on-campus facilities, inability to work from home due to family care responsibilities).

This memo aims to summarize how announcements from the federal granting councils on various dates in April, 2020 (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC), the announcement from the federal government on April 22, 2020 titled “Support for students and new grads affected by COVID-19,” and announcements from the FRQ may mitigate the effects of the research closure on research grants, and, in turn, on principal investigator support for research trainees and staff at McGill.

Tri-Agency: Approvals of Grant Extensions due to COVID-19 as of May 5, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)</th>
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<td>• Academic institutions can immediately approve extensions requests (without additional funding) up to 12 months for Agency grants with an end date between February 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 inclusively. This provision applies to all grants, regardless of whether they have received a previous time extension of any length for any reason (including, where applicable, automatic extensions).</td>
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<td>o Implementation at McGill: Research Financial Management Services (RFMS) will contact the researchers who have active research funds that meet the above date criteria to assess the need for an extension. RFMS will work closely with Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) to process these extensions and will be responsible for notifying the Tri-Agency. Under this exceptional framework, extensions should be considered only if the research has been delayed due to COVID-19 and not because the units have to process expenses.</td>
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| **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)** | **Extension with funds:** All active Discovery Grants can elect to receive a one-year extension with funds at their current funding level. This includes grants from the recent 2020 competition. In light of these extensions, the 2021 Discovery Grants competition will be for new applicants (those not currently holding a Discovery Grant) and those who choose not to accept the extension.  
  
  - This one-year extension will be granted for the following programs: Discovery Grants, Discovery Grants – Subatomic Physics (Individual, Project and Major Resources), Discovery Grants – Northern Research Supplements and Discovery Development Grants. NSERC will contact grantees and universities with details on how to confirm their grant extensions.  
  
  - On May 5, 2020, NSERC confirmed that the grants in their automatic one-year extension are not considered as active grants for granting extensions with additional funding. | **Time Extension without funds:**  
  
  - Academic institutions can immediately approve extensions requests (without additional funding) up to 12 months for Agency grants with an end date between February 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 inclusively. This provision applies to all grants, regardless of whether they have received a previous time extension of any length for any reason (including, where applicable, automatic extensions).  
  
  - **Implementation at McGill:** Research Financial Management Services (RFMS) will contact the researchers who have active research funds that meet the above dates criteria to assess the need for an extension. RFMS will work closely with Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) to process these extensions and will be responsible for notifying the Tri-Agency. Under this exceptional framework, extensions should be considered only if the research has been delayed due to COVID-19 and not because the units have to process expenses.  
  
  - This provision will have no impact for applications awarded in the fall 2020 competitions. | **Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)** | **Time Extension without funds:**  
  
  - CIHR also implemented an automatic one-year extension without funding to the authority-to-use-funds date for all active grants. This will give researchers an additional full year to use any residual funds not yet spent to compensate for disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. |
CIHR has been working closely with colleagues at the U15 and Universities Canada, who are currently considering their proposal to provide a full-year extension to all those individuals who are within the probationary period and tenure stream.

- Implementation at McGill: CIHR allows extensions to grants that are currently ending between March 31, 2020 and March 31, 2021 (inclusive) without any justification. OSR has started approving these (about 110 extension requests) using the end date including the one-year automatic extension. We have excluded Project Grants from this list as they may benefit from the extension with funds.

Extension with funds:

- In light of the cancellation of the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition, CIHR will financially extend, by one year, the investigator-initiated research grants scheduled to expire between June 30, 2020 and March 30, 2021, held by those researchers who applied to the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition.

- Additionally, CIHR will financially extend the bridge grants provided to Nominated Principal Investigators (NPIs) in the Fall 2019 Project Grant competition who also applied to the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition.

  - Implementation at McGill: CIHR has contacted some PIs to offer them an extension with funds under the condition that they will not apply to the fall 2020 Project grant competition. CIHR did not copy OSR on these communications but some PIs forwarded them to OSR. PIs were to answer CIHR by April 28th, so OSR should receive a list or revised notices of awards from CIHR for the concerned grants.

Notes for all Tri-Agency:

OSR is currently only processing extensions for grants where the lead PI is at McGill, not inter-university transfers (i.e. those grants where McGill will need to extend sub-out agreements to other institutions on grants it extends, and receive extensions on the sub-ins McGill get from other institutions if they approve).

For all Tri-Agency grants, it is still not entirely clear whether the end date the Agencies consider is the end date including the one-year automatic extension. It seems to be the case for the time extensions only, but for extensions with funds, it seems to be the end date before the extension. This has yet to be confirmed.
In addition, the Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat (TIPS) announced that 2018 New Frontiers in Research Fund Exploration award recipients will be allocated top-ups equivalent to approximately 2.2 months of funding to help ensure continued support for students, fellows and research personnel during the pandemic, and, when research resumes, to complete the project.

All NFRF Exploration grants are eligible for a one-year automatic extension without funding. Award holders may request an additional extension up to 12 months, if needed. This is to mitigate any delays in projects due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cancellation of funding by some industrial partners might have an impact on funding from partnership programs (e.g. NSERC Collaborative Research Development (CRD) grants).

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**Tri-Agency: Support for research trainees and staff at Canadian institutions – what we know about the Federal government Announcement of April 22, 2020.**

| Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) | On April 22, 2020, the federal government stated that they will extend expiring federal graduate research scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships, and supplement existing federal research grants to support students and post-doctoral fellows, by providing $291.6 million to the federal granting councils. All universities are waiting to hear about the implementation of this supplemental funding. The agencies intend to supply further details on the specific measures announced on April 22, 2020 and the implications for their respective research communities as this information becomes available. We assume this information will be shared on agency websites (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC) and social media feeds. |
| Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) | |
| Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) | Additional Information From the Granting Council Websites: |

> Given the ever-evolving circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC recognize that grant recipients and/or research team members may continue to incur ongoing research costs, as well as incremental costs that would not normally be incurred (for example, compensation and travel) related to agency-funded research activities. The agencies would like to remain as flexible as possible to support grant recipients during this time and acknowledge that some of these costs may be eligible to be paid from agency grant funds. The agencies will therefore defer to administering institutions to determine if incremental costs are consistent with the principles and directives set
out in the **Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration** (and if they are, then those expenses will still be eligible to be paid from grant funds).

The agencies also understand that not all planned research activities are possible as research institutions are closed requiring that the majority of people work remotely, if they are able to work at all. The agencies consider that continuing to pay any members of the research team, eligible to be paid from an agency grant, is an eligible expense in the context of COVID-19 (and that these individuals should continue to be paid).

**SSHRC:** SSHRC recognizes that in some cases, other costs may be incurred related to ongoing financial commitments, such as salaries or stipends of individuals paid out of agency grants. For example, one of these individuals may be required to self-isolate and/or unable to work or telework due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SSHRC confirms these costs can be paid from existing grant funds, provided they are not covered by other sources of funds from within the institution and these expenses would have otherwise been eligible to be paid out of the grant.

SSHRC is committed to supporting scholarship and fellowship recipients, and trainees in general, interested in pursuing research careers that have been interrupted as a result of COVID-19. As such, SSHRC is providing additional support through specific targeted research training programs it administers, as well as through tri-agency trainee and fellowship programs (e.g., Canada Graduate Scholarships, Banting Fellowships). We will provide further information soon on additional measures that would address extensions across the remaining SSHRC programs, and we thank you for your patience.

**NSERC:** In addition to the reimbursement of non-refundable travel and meeting costs as previously described, NSERC recognizes that in some cases other costs may be incurred in relation to ongoing financial commitments, such as the remuneration of individuals paid out of agency grants. For example, individuals receiving a salary or stipend from grant funds may be recommended or required to self-isolate, and/or may be unable to work or telework for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic. NSERC confirms that if the costs are not covered by other sources of funds within the institution, and provided these expenses would otherwise have been eligible to be paid out of the grant, these can be paid from existing grant funds.

**CIHR:** no additional specifics
**Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ): Approvals of Grant Extensions due to COVID-19 as of May 5, 2020**

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<th>Fonds de recherche du Québec – Nature et technologies (FRQNT)</th>
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<td>Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC)</td>
<td>• The FRQ have stated that the provisions of the Common General Rules continue to apply with regard to the period for the end of grants. The grant end date thus remains March 31, 2020. However, if an additional year to use unspent funds is necessary in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the finance departments of institutions may request it directly in the electronic 2019-2020 financial report. An automatic extension (without additional funding) will then be granted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS)</td>
<td>• FRQ has not announced any general measure for grant extensions. PIs wishing to benefit from a COVID-19 related extension (without funding) must submit a request to the FRQ as per the standard process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Time extensions with funds:**

- All Strategic Clusters, Centres, Institutes and Research Networks supported by the FRQ will receive a one-year extension with additional one-year funding. Consequently, this results in the postponement by one year of the next competitions of all these programs. The forms linked to these will therefore open in the summer of 2021, if applicable.

**Other Funding Sources**

While research funding from contracts and agreements with industry, federal, provincial, and foreign governments, and not-for-profit organizations makes up a relatively small proportion of overall research funding at McGill, these are meaningful sources of funds for some PIs, students and research staff. For that reason, the Office of the Vice-Principal, Research and Innovation is actively monitoring the situation with McGill’s research partners, and is reviewing individual contracts and agreements on a case-to-case basis to assess vulnerabilities, adjust research activities, and reduce/mitigate impacts/risks to McGill.