

Frequently asked questions for the MPHAT Research Evaluation Process:

How often does MPHAT accept applications to assess research proposals? What is the anticipated turnaround time once an application is submitted to MPHAT?

MPHAT meets twice a year, in late fall (November) and early spring (April).

Researchers should account for a one to two-month turnaround time from the date of their submission. At times, the MPHAT research group has availability to meet on an ad hoc basis to review applications, and in these cases the turnaround time may be faster.

What kind of information should a researcher include in their MPHAT application?

All applications should include a complete review form. If a researcher is in the pre-funding stage, the researcher should include any documents they have developed, such as a research or funding protocol. If a researcher is in the post-funding stage or the project does not require funding, the researcher should include a copy of the project's approved Institutional Review Board protocol, a copy of their informed consent form(s), any planned recruitment materials, and any research or funding protocol that has been developed.

What are MPHAT's priority areas for research?

Current priority areas are listed below. However, Colorado State University and USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station are currently working on a needs assessment that will clarify firefighters' and researchers' priorities for health-focused future research. We expect our priority areas in the future to incorporate the results of this study.

- Effects of smoke exposure on acute, sub-acute, and long-term health
- Effects of cumulative fatigue and sleep deprivation and optimal rest and recovery periods and impact of existing rest and recovery periods on health
- Mental and behavioral health stressors and/or evidence-based preventative/treatment strategies
- Chronic disease and cancer risk
- Musculoskeletal impacts from arduous and repetitive work
- Assessment of health effects or exposure in historically underrepresented groups in fire (i.e. Tribal firefighters and women)

Does MPHAT review student proposals?

Yes. Students are encouraged to schedule a pre-application meeting with MPHAT to get feedback on their research projects prior to beginning the evaluation process.

What kinds of criteria does MPHAT look at when reviewing research proposals?

MPHAT considers how well research projects address priority areas, whether research duplicates the efforts of other studies that have been conducted or are in process, whether the research would create undue burdens or disruptions to firefighters' work, and whether the research is conducted using best practices.

What are some best practices when doing research with wildland firefighters?

Researchers should follow the best practices in their respective disciplines. Additionally, researchers should be aware that conducting health, safety, and well-being research with wildland firefighters can be sensitive. Posing questions about personal health may cause distress or increases in mental health symptoms for participants. MPHAT recommends that researchers create a plan to notify participants in advance of sensitive subjects that may arise in the research, provide a list of mental and physical health resources for first responders and create an internal plan to support participants in case the research is upsetting. One example of a list of resources for first responders is located here: <https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/hurricane-support>. Forest Service employees can access support through the Employee Assistance Program. Additionally, researchers should be aware of the [Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards](#) and how diagnosis and disclosure of medical conditions may affect wildland firefighters' medical review and fitness for duty.

What are some next steps if the project receives approval from MPHAT?

Research projects that receive approval from the MPHAT research group will be sent on to the MPHAT core team. From there, the FMB will review the proposal to provide final approval. Projects that receive FMB approval will be presented to DOI Safety Managers and the FS Risk Management Branch Chief. Approved projects will be assigned POCs who can liaise between researchers and fire personnel.

What are some next steps if the project is rejected by MPHAT?

Researchers with projects that are not approved by MPHAT can review the team's recommendations and revise their proposals if applicable

Is MPHAT an IRB and/or does this group provide legal or labor relations assistance?

No, MPHAT is not an IRB. The review process does not intend to rigorously review human subjects protections, evaluate the scientific merit of proposed projects, or address legal, union, or labor relations issues.

Will MPHAT connect researchers with firefighters?

No, MPHAT will not connect researchers directly with firefighters. We expect researchers to make their own connections with crews and individuals they are recruiting to participate in research, after following the MPHAT review process and being connected with POCs. Firefighters should also be informed that even though a project has received MPHAT approval, participation is always voluntary. Federal employees may not be coerced or offered incentives of any kind for participating in research studies during their duty time.

What is the purpose of the pre-application meeting?

Researchers can use the pre-application meeting to learn about the MPHAT process and receive initial feedback on their proposal idea.

How should researchers share study results with MPHAT?

Researchers should email their study results to the MPHAT research group prior to publication or public dissemination with the wildland fire community.