Tiered Education: Updating Course Offerings Based on Experience and Feedback
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Submission Type: Programmatic
Topic Area: Education and Training
Poster Number: 20

Overview: Providing relevant and ongoing education to the research community is a paramount responsibility for IRBs. In early 2012, responding to the needs of our research community, our former education program was replaced with a tiered approach. In late 2013, we began re-examining this program, and solicited recommendations for improvement from the research community. Based on feedback, and experience from administering the program, substantial revisions were made to the program.

Background: The Tiered Education program was designed in collaboration with several departments and individuals, and is tailored to meet the educational needs of the research community. The program is based on four tiers, with each tier providing increasingly specialized information: Level I — Fundamental courses provide broad understanding of biomedical research and human subject regulations; Level II — Intermediate courses provide more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter; Level III — Advanced courses provide information related to specific subject matters; and Level IV — Specialized courses address very specific and limited circumstances. Course offerings within the tiers are structured in subject groups, with classes increasing in complexity from one level to the next. Subject groups initially included: Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality, Regulations, Reporting, and Specialty.

Modification: A collaborative approach was utilized to elicit feedback from the research community. Based on feedback, and experience from administering the program, substantial revisions were made to the program in January 2014. Changes included the addition of three more subject groups, including: Agreements – Classes about Data Use Agreements, Material Transfer Agreements, and IRB of Record Agreements; eResearch – Classes about working within eResearch with specifics related to the various applications and application types; and Non-Standard Applications – Classes about “non-standard” applications; for example: Exempt, Not-Regulated, Secondary Use, Compassionate Use, and Ceding Regulatory Oversight. Feedback also indicated a desire for classes to be available online. Utilizing our experience with another ongoing initiative, we’ve begun the process of moving some shorter or specialized subjects to that format. Other changes to the overall education program included: scheduling of courses further in advance, updating course descriptions, modifying the education pages on our website to improve usability, and revising existing courses.

Conclusion: The updated Tiered Education program has been well received by the research community. Feedback from individual sessions will continue to be integrated into the course materials, ensuring the program remains responsive to the needs of the community.