New Board Member Education: Developing a Collective Approach to New Board Member Education to Address Individual Needs

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Background: IRB board members are expected to complete thorough reviews of proposed research activities. To do so, members must possess knowledge of regulations, ethical principles, and institutional policies governing human subjects research. Adequate education is essential to fulfilling this obligation.

Board Member Education Overview: Previously, board member education varied in consistency depending on the assigned trainer, receiving a disparate emphasis of the regulatory, ethical, and institutional requirements. In late 2013, the Board Member Education Group ("Group") was created to standardize the educational program and to provide continuing educational opportunities for existing board members. Members of the Group include the: Assistant Director, Education Coordinator, Staff Expedited Reviewer, Project Manager, eResearch Coordinator, and Board Secretary. New board members receive three months of initial education before presenting a mock (practice) review to an IRB Co/Vice-Chair, including: An in-person session with the Education Coordinator, discussing broad concepts of human subjects research. Additionally, the board member receives: a standard, published Board Member Handbook, an internally-developed handbook providing summaries of relevant regulations and institutional practices, and an internally-developed reference book providing guides related to Board Meeting activities; an in-person session with the eResearch Coordinator regarding eResearch; mentorship with an established board member who is available to answer questions and offer advice. The mentor also provides the new member with education regarding submission review, regulatory requirements, and institutional policies. The Group tracks new member progress by: Reviewing self-assessment questionnaires, completed after attendance at three board meetings and again at the end of three months; reviewing Co/Vice-Chair feedback; and reviewing staff feedback regarding the member's capability and availability. Each member is evaluated by the Group on an individual basis so that education can be appropriately tailored to the member’s particular skill level, expertise, and needs. If necessary, the new board member's initial education is extended beyond three months. Additionally, the Group offers continuing education to all members by: Providing reference materials during meetings to ensure decisions are made using appropriate regulatory and institutional criteria; organizing education sessions to reinforce concepts; and providing education on emerging research topics.

Conclusion: By involving various staff members in new board member education, we have been able to provide a consistent educational program while simultaneously allowing the program to be tailored to the needs of the individual. To date, the initiative has been well received; we continue to integrate feedback in order to further enhance the overall experience.