Implementation of a Cloud-based IRB Material Distribution System
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Background: The distribution of material for IRB member review is an often cumbersome and costly process. For institutions that have not migrated to electronic submission and review software, the cost of printing IRB material and the reliance on antiquated methods for distribution of material, such as courier or US Mail, has forced the discussion of alternate distribution methods to improve efficiency and save money. A cloud-based option for IRB member reviews was promoted by this institution’s IT department as a cost-efficient method to provide the bridge between paper review and a fully electronic IRB software system.

Methods: Cloud-based systems use remote servers to store documents and provide access to the information through a web browser. The technology was already available to the institution and needed only to be tailored to our program needs. The IRB members had been contentedly reviewing IRB material in a paper-based system for years and had varying comfort levels with new technology. A new system had to include a strategic approach to training the IRB members, using different venues and methods, and providing ample time for learning the new tool. The plan to implement an electronic cloud-based IRB material distribution system followed these specific steps: Development of cloud-based folder structure for organization of material for 100+ IRB members to access reviews; development of group-based and individual training sessions and instructional guides for IRB members; reorganization of IRB operations tasks to incorporate the new system for distribution; and evaluation of IRB member proficiency with system.

Findings: Overall, implementation was deemed a success. The new system was found to significantly cut department printing and shredding costs, and IRB operations staff efficiency was improved. The IRB member response to the new tool varied greatly with each having vastly different interests in training and acceptance. Three IRB members retired from service directly because of the new system; however, this number was less than anticipated. IRB chairperson support was also found to be critical to the effort. The successful IRB implementation has led to expansion of the system to other committees within the organization. Additionally, the cloud-based technology is used freely in the office for other shared, secure collaborations. Other institutions can easily implement a similar system to distribute IRB member review material in a cost effective and secure manner. It does not require the purchase of IRB-specific software, but rather the use of one of many available cloud-based collaboration tools.