Crossing Over: The Bridge Connecting Staff
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Problem Statement: The IRB at this institution reviews both biomedical and social behavioral research. IRB staff consists of seven Research Compliance Administrators (RCAs) who pre-review IRB submissions. Historically, the staff worked in silos. Social behavioral RCAs reviewed social behavioral submissions and biomedical RCAs reviewed biomedical research. This workflow was sufficient until the IRB was inundated with social behavioral submissions in the fall, or when there was a drop in biomedical submissions. The staff did not feel comfortable reviewing submissions outside their area of expertise and functioned as two distinct camps rather than a cohesive team. Staff were also segregated in the types of applications they reviewed. Some reviewed only initial applications (pre-approval), while others reviewed amendments and applications for continuing reviews (post-approval). Again, this became problematic when the IRB received a surge in initial applications, especially when staff who typically reviewed initial applications were on leave. The IRB needed to become more efficient and adapt to seasonal fluctuations in workload.

Description of the Program: IRB administration began cross-training IRB staff. Those who primarily reviewed biomedical research began reviewing social behavioral research, and those who were comfortable reviewing social behavioral research began reviewing biomedical. While the applications for these two types of research are similar in areas, they are also very different depending on the type of research being proposed. Social behavioral IRB staff were trained to review Food and Drug Administration regulated clinical trials that required additional education, while biomedical staff received training in the review of student research and other areas of social behavioral research such as anthropology and psychology. Additionally, staff who were accustomed to reviewing initial submissions began reviewing applications for continuing reviews and amendments.

Evaluation: The IRB is now better equipped to respond to seasonal fluctuations in volume, maintaining a consistently high level of customer service to our researchers. The IRB delivers competitive turnaround times during these fluctuations, and the IRB staff has become a more unified cohesive team with increased morale. When embarking on an initiative to cross train biomedical and social behavioral IRB staff, it is important to keep in mind that not everyone embraces change. When presenting the idea to staff, it is helpful to stress that each of them are important members of a larger team that serves the research community. Additionally, IRB staff can cross train each other as opposed to having administration conduct the training.