



October 2016

Dear Members of the VCU and VCU Health Research Community,

Last May, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) administered a quality improvement survey to the full time faculty and staff at VCU and VCUHS to measure the IRB's current performance and to identify actionable areas for improvements. We greatly appreciate the feedback that was provided and have implemented changes in response to the comments and suggestions.

Survey respondents were asked to rank the top three areas that they thought the IRB should strive to improve. Below are the priorities and some of the ways the IRB is working to address your feedback:

1. Timeliness of Reviews:

- The IRB has set a goal of reducing time to approval by at least 30% without sacrificing quality and is regularly monitoring timeline data.
- The IRB has been restructured to have a single IRB panel that meets weekly in order to review full board studies more quickly.
- Expedited and exempt reviews are being done by experienced, in-house IRB analysts.

2. Consistency of Reviews:

- The IRB Chair and Vice Chair are at each meeting and bring consistency to full board reviews.
- The IRB staff holds weekly meetings to discuss and resolve areas of inconsistency.
- Internal audit procedures are being developed to identify areas of inconsistency.

3. Focus on Human Subjects Protection:

- IRB staff and reviewers are being trained to request changes only if the issue is related to 1) regulatory requirements, 2) local or institutional policy requirements, and 3) incomplete, inconsistent, or inaccurate information.
- IRB reviewers are now using checklists and templates to keep reviews focused and consistent.
- IRB meeting discussions are driven by the criteria for IRB approval outlined in 45 CFR 46.111.

In addition, the survey responses identified areas of improvement in the templates and guidance materials available on our website, topics of training and educational events, and ways to contact the IRB office. Below are some of the improvements we are making based on your feedback:

- Developing intermediate/advanced RAMS-IRB training and offering expanded training times
- Connecting with new researchers via VCU HR orientation materials
- Enhancing the IRB's phone and email accessibility
- Making the IRB's webpage more user friendly, including simplifying regulatory language in the IRB's Written Policies and Procedures
- Creating new guidance materials and consent templates
- Making a template/worksheet that will allow researchers to draft responses to the major text-based submission questions before opening a study in RAMS-IRB
- Expanding the help text in RAMS-IRB

Please watch for upcoming announcements about these new resources and educational opportunities. We hope that these changes will have a positive impact on the VCU research community, and we look forward to collaborating with you to protect human research participants at VCU.