

University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB) Unaffiliated Community Membership



The University of Pittsburgh IRB is committed to the protection of the rights and welfare of all human subjects enrolled in research under its oversight

What is an Institutional Review Board?

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee of research experts and members of the community who review research projects that study people. In the United States, all research that involves people, their data, or their biospecimens must be approved by an IRB before it starts. IRB review makes sure human subject research meets high ethical standards, as well as federal and local laws.

IRB members gain experience reviewing medical, social, and behavioral research. IRB service also offers an opportunity to hear about current research in the Pitt community. Members participate in ethical discussions relating to current studies and help represent the thoughts and concerns of the surrounding community.

How is the Pitt IRB set up?

The Pitt IRB is made up of six main multi-disciplinary boards, two specialty boards (one for continuing review and one for emergency exceptions). There is also an Executive Committee that reviews regulatory and compliance issues and policies and procedures. Each board meets at least once per month.

Why is community representation important?

Unaffiliated community members are individuals whose primary concerns reflect those of the population where research participants are coming from. They bring fresh insights and perspective about how to best protect research participants. Unaffiliated community members review from the point of view of sharing community and cultural awareness in the context of the research.



What experience is necessary?

No experience is necessary to become a community member. In fact, it is preferred that IRB community members have no scientific background in order to represent the perspective of research participants. Effective community members have good communication skills, are comfortable speaking to others in a meeting setting, enjoy reading, and are comfortable working on a computer and a web-based system.

How much time does it take?

Members are asked to attend one board meeting per month. The meetings last about 2 hours and take place weekday afternoons on Zoom. Members typically spend 3-4 hours per month preparing for the meeting. Members must have reliable access to the internet and be able to participate in Zoom meetings with their camera on.

How am I trained?

All new members must complete an orientation session, observe at least one IRB meeting and attend a session to learn about our on-line submission system, PittPRO. Each member must also complete online education modules about IRB Members, Responsible Conduct of Research and Human Subjects Protection. Members learn the function of the IRB, regulations surrounding human subject research and how to apply them.

Who else is on the board?

Each IRB board is made up of at least 5 members. They may be faculty physicians, psychologists, nurses, social workers, physical therapists or other health care professionals. All boards have non-scientists as well. Each board is run by a Vice Chair and an IRB staff members.

What will I review for the meeting?

Each member is asked to review a description of research plan (protocol), and consent forms. Scientists on the board are asked to focus on the medical parts. We ask non-scientific community members to focus on the consent forms to make sure that they are clear, accurate and easy to understand for patients who will be reading them.

The protocols come from all departments in the University and UPMC and represent a wide variety of topics. No scientific background is necessary and is preferred for our non-scientific community members.

How do I get the information for review?

Protocols are provided through our on-line submission system, PittPRO and all members post their comments through the system. Members need to be comfortable working on computers and web-based applications.

What happens at the meeting?

All members of the board discuss their comments related to each protocol and decide whether it should move forward.

Will I be paid?

Unaffiliated community members are reimbursed \$50 per month for internet service. The payments are given out every three months using a Vincent™ stored value card. The MasterCard-branded card can be used for point-of-service purchases or to withdraw cash at an ATM.

What if I can't make it to a meeting?

All meetings take place on Zoom and can be accessed from anywhere you have internet service. However, we know there are times when you cannot be present. We just ask that you let us know as soon as you can so that we can be sure that we will have enough people to have the meeting.