



Enhancing Community Engagement in Research

Empowering and Training the Community Advisory Board to Review Broad Research and Enhance Equity

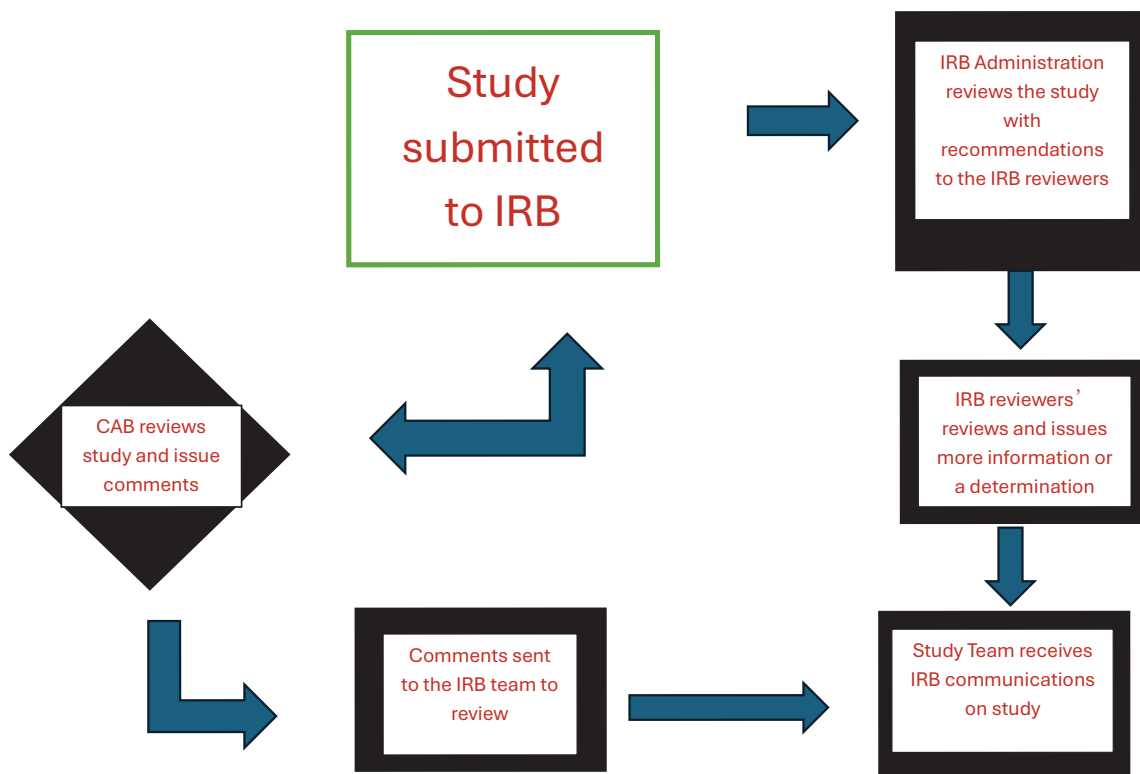
By Jeralyn Pierre

The Rutgers Office for Research Regulatory Affairs (RRA) is proud to announce the launch of a strategic initiative aimed at deepening community engagement in research through the establishment of a grassroots Community Advisory Board (CAB). This board is designed to ensure that the voices of community members are integral to the research process, offering valuable feedback on research projects and ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. The CAB initially met with an introductory presentation of the historical reasons that eventually led to the formation of the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) nationwide, which operate under ethical guidelines established by the Belmont Report. The Belmont Report is a foundational document that outlines the principles of: 1) Respect for Persons, 2) Beneficence, and 3) Justice in Human Research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The CAB collectively discusses the enforcing federal department of all IRBs, or the Department of Health and Human Services, and how they enforce these ethical guidelines through the Common Rule. The Common Rule is a set of federal regulations that govern the ethical conduct with human research that all HRPP adheres to via reviewing all research involving participants and the IRB provides mandatory requirements per the law on how the research project can proceed. After informing the CAB of the IRB review process, we then added the missing component of community engagement that we want to include in the IRB

review process to inform IRB committee members of culturally sensitive ideas or social and economic burdens that may exist in a study for participants, that may be overlooked.

In the next step, we asked the members to agree to doing the Community Involvement in Research and Training (CIRT) and provide the certificate of completion by the third meeting. Subsequent meetings involved continuous review of various case studies and discussions with the lenses of the cultural knowledge, inclusivity, undue burdens, and opportunities for improvement to be considered for the respect of the participants, with the goal of improving the participants' experience. Once the board was comfortable in reviewing various studies and understanding the kinds of lenses they needed to use to provide comments, we went to work in the next meeting! Studies were delivered via private software for CAB review two weeks prior to the CAB meeting. Members provided their written comments to the Research Regulatory Affairs Coordinator to consolidate and organize prior to the meeting. The CAB are reminded of the safe space guidelines prior to the discussion so everyone can understand the comment and then vote on comments that will be submitted to the IRB team and principal investigators.

The CAB initially formed through word-of-mouth recruitment, however, the CAB is now broadening its outreach efforts, connecting with various community centers, including the YMCA and specialized health centers, to ensure a wider representation of voices.



The CAB's primary objective is to cultivate diverse and inclusive dialogues that enhance our understanding of community perspectives. The board reviews studies and provides thoughtful, non-binding recommendations to the IRB. These recommendations are intended to complement, rather than disrupt, the IRB's review process and timelines.

To ensure that CAB members are well-prepared to review research across a range of disciplines, we have implemented a comprehensive training program that includes:

- **Community Involvement in Research and Training (CIRT)**
- **analysis of case studies** spanning multiple academic disciplines
- **equity and inclusion training opportunities**
- **access to relevant literature and references** to deepen their understanding of historical research issues

The impact of this training has been significant, enabling CAB members to contribute meaningfully by:

- recommending modifications to recruitment strategies;
- suggesting adjustments to inclusion and exclusion criteria relevant to the study's functional needs;
- providing alternative approaches for including participants with diverse abilities and financial constraints;
- offering guidance on enhancing communication protocols, consent processes, surveys, and advertisement materials;
- identifying additional disorders that align with the study's objectives;
- ensuring that study design procedures effectively address the cultural dynamics of the populations under study;
- advocating for translation services to better serve impacted communities.

Our Office for Research recognizes that researchers may face challenges in creating their own CAB-specific boards due to constraints such as budget, staffing, and time limitations associated with sponsored projects. The feedback generated by the CAB also serves as a valuable training resource for IRB staff, review boards, research personnel, and principal investigators, fostering a

culture of continuous improvement and encouraging the integration of community and cultural humility initiatives into future research projects.

Moreover, participation in the CAB offers members unique career development opportunities in research administration. CAB members can engage with research administrators to explore resources and opportunities, leveraging their experience on the board as an introductory training on the structure of research studies, the roles of overseeing agencies, and the various organizations involved in the Human Research Protection Program. The hands-on training provided by our dedicated training manager during CAB meetings further educates members on regulatory standards and IRB processes, enhancing their ability to contribute community and culturally sensitive perspectives to research design.

Within the Office for Research and Regulatory Affairs, we believe this initiative exemplifies our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in research. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities in research that directly impacts them, we advance the Justice pillar of the Belmont Report, striving to create a research environment that is more representative, inclusive, and ultimately beneficial to all. ■

Reference

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html



Jeralyn Pierre is a project management professional turned research compliance administrator at the Research Regulatory Affairs department at Rutgers, dedicated to advocating for marginalized community groups. With expertise in project management, she ensures ethical research practices while amplifying voices often overlooked. Through collaboration and community engagement, Jeralyn bridges gaps between researchers and marginalized communities. Committed to social justice, she champions inclusivity and equity, both within the HRPP and beyond. Jeralyn's passion for advocacy drives her to make tangible differences, inspiring colleagues, and communities alike with her unwavering dedication to uplifting those most in need.