

CHAPTER 3 Developing into an Experienced Member

Members may face additional challenges as their IREC membership progresses. This chapter provides tips and strategies for overcoming challenges and transitioning from an inexperienced member into a confident and well-trained one.

MENTORING A NEW MEMBER

New members need guidance from the IREC staff and other IREC members. Because new members may not yet be familiar with the institution's culture, assistance and advice from a mentor can be very beneficial. IREC chairpersons, IREC members, and/or IREC staff should provide mentoring to new community members. Ideal mentor qualities include knowledge, patience, and a willingness to share their personal experience with serving on the IREC.

A mentor should be available to help the new member review their first protocol. Having another person go over the review will help boost the new member's self-confidence and assure that the important points have been captured in the review.

BUILDING NEW MEMBER SKILLS

Achieving confidence, familiarity, and understanding of the IREC review process can come from a variety of sources. Below are recommendations for building new member skills:

a. Observe research activities

A useful way to become familiar with human subjects research is to observe the conduct of research as it is occurring. Getting a sense of what subjects undergo while participating in research will not only make reviewing a protocol easier, but it will help the new member empathize with the subject portion of the review. In addition, witnessing the informed consent process may influence reviewer recommendations.

b. Don't be afraid to ask questions

If it is discomforting to raise questions during a meeting, submit questions and/or concerns to the IREC staff or Chair either before or after the meeting. Providing insight into protocol review depends partly on the new member's willingness to seek out explanations about unfamiliar procedures/concepts/methodology. Note: agreement is assumed if no questions are asked, or concerns are raised.

c. Learn about regulations and controversial research and ethics issues

Read articles given out at meetings and/or related articles online or in newspapers.

d. Join an internet community/listserv

Join a group that shares common interests in the IREC process such as IREC Forum (<http://www.IRECforum.org/>). With these groups, members can ask questions and get opinions and thoughts from other IREC members outside of NU. Joining will provide supplementary education on important debates and new programs/initiatives from IRECs around the world.

e. Keep a notebook

Taking notes on important, sometimes controversial issues gives a permanent resource for reference. It will allow you to refer back to a previous meeting's discussion where a particular issue was discussed. The notebook can also provide important information for reviewing protocols because issues often recur.

f. Foster relationships with other board members

The IREC Chair should create an environment where ALL members feel empowered to contribute opinions. Attending more full board meetings will result in becoming comfortable with the other committee members. Interacting with other members outside of the meeting fosters the exchange of IREC related information and many will be willing to offer assistance outside meeting sessions.