Northwestern | INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

IRB Bulletin: November 2026

Announcements

As a part of the Northwestern University IRB Office's initiative to share timely resources and information with the research community, the IRB publishes the Bulletin at the beginning of each month, which contains relevant updates from the IRB Office. You can also find the IRB Bulletin on the **IRB News & Announcements** page. Please keep reading for this month's updates.

New Resource: Writing Consent Forms in Lay Language

Clear consent starts with clear communication!

Informed consent is more than a document—it is an ongoing, interactive process that helps prospective participants understand what participation involves and decide whether a study is right for them. The consent form supports that process by giving participants information they can understand and refer to before and during the study.

To help research teams create clearer, more participant-friendly consent documents, the Northwestern University IRB Office has launched a new **Writing in Lay Language** page as part of the **Consent Templates & HIPAA Requirements** resources.

Why does this matter?

A consent form may contain all of the required information and still be difficult for a participant to understand. Clear organization and plain language can help participants identify the information that matters most—such as what will happen during the study, what participation involves, and what they may need to consider before deciding whether to participate. It can also support faster IRB review, since reviewers must confirm that the study meets **regulatory requirements for informed consent**, including that participants can understand the consent form.

Before submitting your next consent form for IRB review, take a fresh look at the language from a participant's perspective. Could someone unfamiliar with research understand what you are asking them to do?

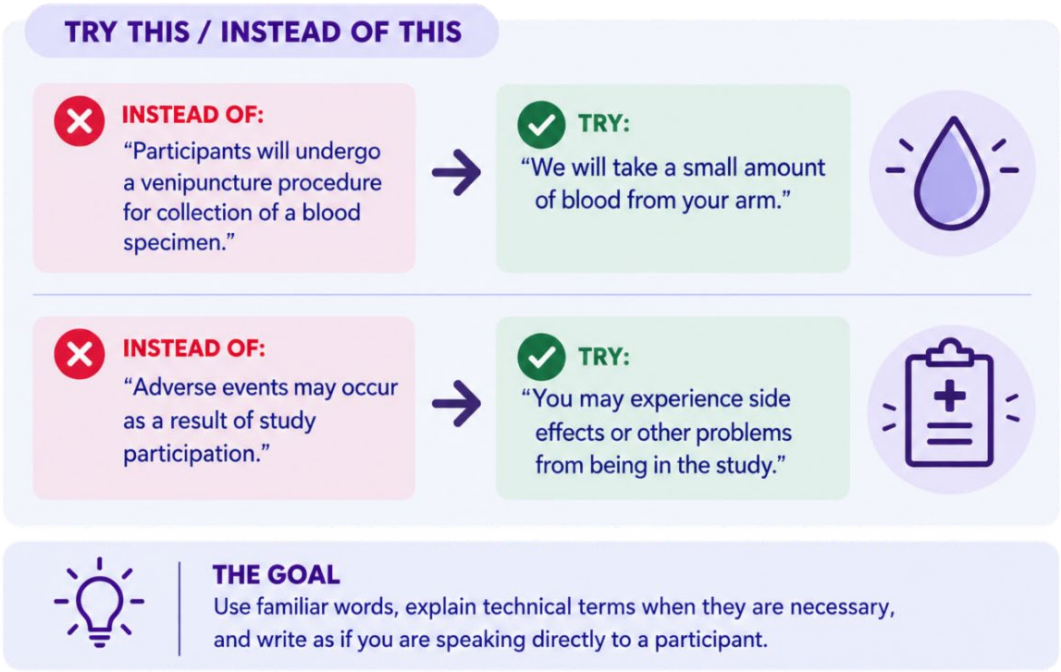
What will you find on the new page?

The page provides practical tips for writing consent information in language that is familiar and understandable to people who may not have a medical or research background. Key recommendations include:

- Start with the current IRB consent template. Using the most recent template helps ensure that your consent document includes the appropriate required information.
- Use plain, familiar language. Define technical terms, uncommon words, and acronyms when they are necessary.
- Keep it clear and concise. Short, focused sentences can make complex information easier to understand.
- Use active voice. For example, “The researcher will collect a blood sample” is more direct than “A blood sample will be collected by the researcher.”
- Organize information for easy reading. Descriptive headings, bullet points, tables, and adequate white space can make information easier to navigate.
- Consider visuals. Diagrams, images, tables, or other visual formats may help explain study procedures, visit schedules, or complex concepts.
- Write for your intended participants. Consider the age and characteristics of the population you plan to enroll.
- Read it aloud. Hearing the consent form can help identify sentences that are overly complicated or awkward.
- Test for understanding. Ask someone unfamiliar with the study to explain key information in their own words. This can reveal areas that may need clarification.

Don’t forget readability

The new resource also provides guidance on checking the reading level of your consent form. The IRB Office recommends writing consent forms at or below an **eighth-grade reading level**. Readability tools, including Microsoft Word’s readability statistics, can help identify portions of a document that may be difficult to understand. However, a good readability score does not automatically mean that the writing is clear, especially for the key information section.



Clear consent language helps participants better understand what research participation involves and supports informed decision-making. Explore the new **Writing in Lay Language** resource for practical tips and tools to make your consent forms clearer, more accessible, and participant-friendly.

UPCOMING BROWN BAG

IRB Education and Communication: Training, Learning, and Staying Informed

Wednesday, November 11, 2026 | 12:00 - 1:00 PM

REGISTER HERE

Please join us virtually for our monthly IRB Brown Bag Session featuring Kim Rowan, Senior Education & Communication Analyst, IRB Office Education Team.

How do researchers know what IRB training they need, where to find resources, and how to stay up to date with human research protections requirements, changes, and

educational opportunities? This session introduces the IRB Office's Education and Communication resources, including Northwestern University's Human Research Protections Training (HRPT), IRB Courses, Brown Bags, Special Event Training, website resources, and IRB communications. We'll walk through HRPT requirements and renewal, how training records connect with eIRB+, and how the IRB Office keeps researchers informed about updated resources, requirements, regulatory developments, and educational opportunities.

By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Navigate the Northwestern University IRB website to locate key information and guidance, and to address common IRB questions.
2. Describe Northwestern University's Human Research Protections Training requirements, including the CITI Program training and renewal process.
3. Explain how Human Research Protections Training records can integrate from CITI to eIRB+ and how to verify training status.
4. Identify IRB education resources and opportunities, including IRB Courses, Brown Bags, and Special Event Training.
5. Identify how to stay informed about IRB requirements, resources, and updates through the IRB website, IRB Bulletin, and other communications from the IRB Office.

Important Note About Joining IRB Brown Bags:

- **Registration is required for unique users:** Please ensure every individual attending from your team has registered individually via Zoom.
- **Add to your calendar**: Use the confirmation email sent directly from Zoom to add the invite to your calendar and to access your Join Webinar link.
- **Do not forward your confirmation link**: Links are unique to each registrant and should not be shared.



Please view the **Events Page** for details and registration information for upcoming **IRB Brown Bag** informational sessions.

In case you missed last month's Brown Bag session, *Clinical Research Coordination 101: A Practical Crash Course for Getting Started*, the slides and recording are now available on our **IRB Brown Bag** page. Based on the **NUCATS Clinical Research Coordinator Basic Training** curriculum, this session introduced the core responsibilities of a clinical research coordinator, with an emphasis on participant protection, regulatory compliance, and day-to-day study management.

UPCOMING EDUCATIONAL EVENTS AROUND NORTHWESTERN

Info Session on Kellogg-NUCATS Course Set for November 10

Registration is now open for an upcoming information session on **Leadership and Management Strategies for Clinical Investigators**, a collaboration between NUCATS and the Kellogg School of Management. Led by Kellogg faculty in an interactive classroom setting, this four-day course offers practical strategies for navigating key leadership and management challenges.

Course Title: Leadership and Management Strategies for Clinical Investigators

- **Next offering: May 10–13, 2027**
- **Info Session: Tuesday, November 10, 12–1 p.m. via Zoom.**

*Faculty can also complete the **course interest form** to attend the May 10-13 course.

Clinical Research Coordinator (CRC) Basic Training - Register Today!

Registration is open for the Winter offering of **Clinical Research Coordinator (CRC) Basic Training**. CRC Basic Training is a five-session, scheduled online training program for coordinators that provides practical information to get them up and running in the clinic, with many tools and templates to assist with study implementation. Registration ends November 4th.

UPDATED DOCUMENTS

New Document Alert 📣: Spanish Biomedical Consent Document Now Available!

The IRB Office is excited to share a new resource for study teams: the **Spanish version of the Biomedical Consent Document**

This new resource, Biomedical Consent Document, Spanish (HRP 592ES), is designed to help study teams more easily include Spanish-speaking participants in research studies while saving valuable time and effort in preparing translated consent documents.

Important things to note:

- **Instructional text:** The Spanish version does not include the instructional text found in the English template, Biomedical Consent Document (HRP-592).
- **Optional consent language:** The Spanish version does include optional consent language and paragraphs that may be applicable to individual studies.

The IRB Office encourages study teams to use this template when appropriate to support the enrollment of Spanish-speaking participants and streamline consent document preparation. Access the new document and additional consent form templates on the **Biomedical & Social Behavioral Consent Templates** page.

The following was updated and is now available on the **Human Research Policies & Guidance** page:

- Registries, Student Subject Pools, and Specimen Repositories Guidance (HRP-1904)

The following was updated and is now available on the **Checklists & Worksheets** page:

- Exemption Determination (HRP-312)
- HIPAA Applicability (HRP-329)

The following was updated and is now available on the **Standard Operating Procedures** page:

- Suspension or Termination Issued Outside of Convened IRB (HRP-026)

The following was updated and is now available on the **Northwestern Serving as the IRB of Record** page:

- Relying Site Local Context Form (HRP-1825)

For more information on updated documents, reach out to irb@northwestern.edu

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Meet Rachelle Price!



I'm excited to join the IRB Office as an IRB Reliance Analyst! I hold a Master of Public Health in Global Communicable Diseases with a minor in Infection Control from the University of South Florida, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Genetics, Cell Biology and Development with a minor in Spanish from the University of Minnesota.

I bring more than a decade of experience in clinical research data management, regulatory compliance, and project management. Most recently, I worked as a Clinical Research Associate in Feinberg's Division of Infectious Diseases. Prior to joining Northwestern, I worked in the Department of Anesthesiology at Lurie Children's and held several in-vitro laboratory positions at other organizations. It was through these experiences that I discovered my passion for clinical research.

Outside of work, I enjoy traveling, staying active, crafting, baking, and pretty much anything else that sounds interesting! Pictured above is my cat, Kumori, who was adopted from Kuwait!

IRB Office - Contact Us

IRB Office Unit	Email/Phone	Virtual Office Hours
Biomedical Research/General	**irb@northwestern.edu** 312-503-9338	**Monthly** - Every Second Wednesday 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM **Register**
Social and Behavioral Research	**sbirb@northwestern.edu** 847-467-1723	Weekly - Every Wednesday 2:30 - 3:30 PM **Register**
Compliance	**irbcompliance@northwestern.edu** 312-503-1376	Appointment Available Upon Request **Email Compliance**
Reliance	**irbreliance@northwestern.edu**	Weekly - Every Tuesday 3:00 - 4:00 PM **Register**
Education and Communication	**irbtraining@northwestern.edu**	Appointment Available Upon Request **Email Education**

eIRB+ Technical	**eIRB+ Support Form**	---

Please use the Northwestern University IRB Office Website
as your primary source of information and resources on human research protections

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