



UNAFFILIATED IRB MEMBER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, & FAQs

The University of West Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for oversight of all human subject research conducted by staff, faculty and students at the University of West Georgia. You can learn more about the [IRB from our website](#). IRB members come from a variety of backgrounds and it is important to have representation from the surrounding community. According to Federal regulations, an IRB must:

1. have at least five members with varying backgrounds to promote complete and adequate review of the research activities commonly conducted by the institution;
2. make every nondiscriminatory effort to ensure that the membership is not composed of entirely men or entirely women;
3. include at least one member whose primary concerns are in scientific areas and at least one member whose primary concerns are in nonscientific areas;
4. include at least one member who is not otherwise affiliated with the institution and who is not part of the immediate family of a person who is affiliated with the institution; and
5. not allow any member to participate in the initial or continuing review of any project in which the member has a conflicting interest, except to provide information requested by the IRB.

Please see the regulations at [45 CFR 46.107](#) for complete information on all of the required qualifications to properly compose an IRB.

The mission of an unaffiliated IRB member (sometimes called the “community member”) is to help to protect the rights and welfare of those individuals volunteering as research subjects (i.e. participants). Unaffiliated members are not required to have a scientific background. In fact, most have no scientific background. Each brings their individual knowledge and community experiences to the discussion to reflect the perspective of the volunteer research participants.

What experience is necessary?

No experience is necessary to become an unaffiliated IRB member. In fact, it is preferred that our unaffiliated member(s) have no scientific background in order to represent the interests of research participants. Effective unaffiliated members have good communication skills, are comfortable speaking to others in a meeting setting, like to read, and are comfortable working on a computer and a web-based system.

What is the time commitment?

Voting unaffiliated members attend one IRB committee meeting per month. The meetings generally last 1-2 hours and take place on weekdays. Meetings take place in person and have an option for members to join virtually should they need to. Members may spend 3-4 hours per month preparing for the meeting. Members must attend the majority of the meeting and be present during voting times to be counted as part of quorum. Alternate unaffiliated members would only attend meetings that the voting unaffiliated member is unable to attend. In such circumstances, the voting member will inform the IRB Chair that their alternate will be attending and voting in their stead.



What training do I receive?

All new unaffiliated IRB members must complete an orientation session (where they will learn about things like the role of the IRB, the unaffiliated member, the necessary training, and our application submission process), observe at least one IRB meeting, and complete online education modules before becoming an official member. The modules are offered through [CITI](#), a national research ethics training organization. Unaffiliated members will complete two courses: 1) IRB Member – Basic/Refresher course; and 2) Social/Behavioral Research Responsible Conduct of Research course. These courses explain the function of the IRB, regulations surrounding human subject research, and how to apply them to the protocol under review.

Who else is on the IRB Committee?

Each IRB committee is made up of at least 5 members (see above). The members are mostly faculty, but staff may also serve. All committees have scientist and non-scientist members. At the University of West Georgia, the majority of the committee is made up of non-scientist members as much of the research conducted at UWG is behavioral or educational. The committee is run by the IRB Chair.

What will I review for the meetings?

Each member is asked to review a description of research plan (protocol), consent forms and any associated materials. Some of the protocols are technical, but we ask non-scientific unaffiliated members to focus on the consent forms to determine how clearly and completely the investigator explains his/her research plans and any associated risks. The protocols come from all departments in the University and represent a wide variety of topics. No scientific background is necessary and is preferred for our unaffiliated members.

What happens at the meeting?

At the committee meeting, all members present their comments and concerns (verbally and in writing) which are discussed by the entire committee. The IRB members come to a consensus on the issues related to the protocol and vote on whether it should proceed. The materials are provided by the IRB Administrator via OneDrive and reviewers may post their comments on documents.

What if I have a conflict of interest?

You can learn more about conflict of interest from CITI, which has a training course on conflicts of interest. A potential or actual conflict of interest arises when an individual's commitments and obligations to the University or to widely recognized professional norms are likely to be compromised by a person's other interests or commitments, particularly economic, especially if those interests or commitments are not disclosed. Members cannot participate in the discussion or vote on a protocol if a conflict of interest is identified.

Do I get paid?

You do not get paid for participation on the IRB.

Who should I contact for more information?

Please contact irb@westga.edu to learn more about IRB membership. We are sure you will find the experience to be very rewarding!