**Research vs. Quality Improvement Comparison**

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| **RESEARCH** | | **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** | |
| **INTENT** | Develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge | | Improve a practice or process within a particular institution or ensure institutional practices or processes conform with expected norms;  Not designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge |
| **DESIGN** | Systematic;  Quantitative studies typically follow a rigid protocol that remains unchanged throughout the research and often use randomization with statistical testing to generalize to a broader population;  Qualitative studies are designed to contribute to theory | | Adaptive, iterative design that may or may not be systematic;  Generally does not involve randomization;  Can involve hypothesis testing but the results are not generalizable outside of the institution |
| **EFFECT ON STUDY LOCATION** | The research was not designed to benefit individuals or practices at the study location. | | Findings are expected to directly affect individuals and/or institutional practices at the study location  The study location must provide a letter stating that the project will help improve agency outcomes or processes. |
| **PARTICIPANTS** | Usually involves a subset of individuals (i.e., a sample from a population);  Recruitment and the informed consent process make it clear that there is no obligation to participate;  May involve statistical justification of sample size to achieve endpoints | | Responsibility to participate may be a component of the program or process;  Exclusion of some individuals significantly affects conclusions  For graduate projects, recruitment and informed consent processes can ask whether or not participants give permission for their data to be included in the written product (e.g., thesis, dissertation, capstone, etc.) |
| **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS** | As outlined in the Belmont Report, plus a concern for confidentiality of personal information | | The Belmont Report and concern for confidentiality still apply.  Special care must be taken to avoid undue influence or coercion when participants are subordinate to a member of the project’s leadership team (e.g., students in a class or employees at a worksite). |

*-Adapted in part from University of Wisconsin-Madison Health Sciences IRBs Comparison of the Characteristics of Research, Quality Improvement, and Program Evaluation Activities*

*-Adapted from Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research and Innovation.*

**What if my project is both QI and research?**

Some projects might meet both criteria. For example, investigators want to determine the effectiveness of a new technique for math teaching, with the purpose of shaping one district’s decision about whether or not to purchase new curricula. But the investigator also wants to have the findings be robust enough to influence decisions in other places as well. So the investigator plans an experiment to test the new technique/curricula in several schools. This research design warrants conclusions that apply to a broader population. Because this project meets the federal definition of research, it should be submitted to the IRB as research.

**What if my project started as QI but begins to evolve into research?**

If a project was started as QI – either with IRB review or not – and then begins to take on a more systematic design that could lead to generalizable findings, please contact the IRB. The project may need to be reviewed as research before the research-like features can be implemented.

**Are you unsure about whether your project is research or QI?**

Email [IRB@gonzaga.edu](mailto:IRB@gonzaga.edu) with details about your project. We are always willing to answer your questions and collaborate to decide whether a project would be best defined as research or QI.