

Is it Research or Program Assessment?

The initial information for this document was adopted with permission from the George Washington University Committee on Human Research Institutional Review Board.

The following document has been modified to reflect the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Boards intent.

Program Assessment / Quality Improvement / Quality Assurance consist of activities undertaken to measure effectiveness of a process, program or service, the results of which are to be shared only with individuals associated with the process, program, or service being evaluated. Research consists of a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable public knowledge, the results of which will be shared with individuals whether directly or indirectly associated with the particular investigation.

The results of the Program Assessment / Quality Improvement / Quality Assurance are intended for a narrow, internal audience, largely restricted to those directly associated with the activity; whereas research is intended for a broader audience, especially persons outside the inquiry activity..

The UAF IRB has adopted the following approach: if activities measure the effectiveness of a process, program or service AND are designed or intended to be shared with individual outside of the process, program or services, the activities constitute human subject research and require IRB review and approval.

	Research	PA/QI/QA
Purpose	To make a careful, systematic, patient study, investigation or probing inquiry in some field of knowledge.	Evaluate a process, program, or system
Starting Point	There is a formal research question, literature review.	An established set of standards
Benefits	Knowledge sought need not benefit subjects involved in study.	Knowledge that is sought, directly benefits the process/program/system.
Risks/Burdens	May put subjects at risk	No risk, with exception of possible privacy/confidentiality concerns
Data Collection	Systematic or exploratory methods	Systematic data collection limited to aspects of a particular process, program or system.
End Point	Establish certain facts, discover phenomena or broad principles that contribute to public, discipline-based or interdisciplinary body of knowledge.	Improve a specific program/process/system or some specific portion of one.
Testing/Analysis	Describe frequency and importance of factors, inquire about existence and strength of relationships among factors, determine temporal order of factors, establish likelihood of certain outcomes.	Compare the program/process/system to established set of standards
Intended Result	Share findings with individuals associated with the investigation and individuals not associated with the investigation; disseminate in public forums, publications or other media	Share findings with only those individuals associated with the evaluated process/program/system.

If Program Assessment / Quality Improvement / Quality Assurance activities do not constitute research, proceed with the activities without seeking further IRB guidance. If unsure call the UAF Office of Research Integrity at (907) 474-7800.