

# Bridging the Gap Between Training and Practice: A Competency Checklist for Clinical Research Staff

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## BACKGROUND



At Winship Cancer Institute, all newly hired research staff are required to complete a standardized onboarding training program and pass a post-training assessment. While this approach has effectively increased both general research knowledge and cancer center-specific policy knowledge, staff often encounter challenges when translating this knowledge into practice. To address this gap, we plan to implement a structured competency checklist for clinical research staff. This tool will be designed to ensure staff can consistently and accurately perform essential job responsibilities, strengthening the connection between training and real-world application.

## GOALS



The primary goal of this initiative will be to enhance the practical readiness and performance of newly onboarded clinical research staff at Winship Cancer Institute. By introducing a structured competency checklist, we aim to ensure that staff can reliably demonstrate the skills required to carry out essential job functions. Additional goals include standardizing expectations across disease teams, reducing variability in training quality, and improving the transition from theoretical learning to applied practice. Ultimately, the effort will seek to improve operational efficiency, data quality, and protocol compliance by equipping staff with validated, job-specific competencies.

## SOLUTIONS & METHODS

To address the observed gap between foundational training and practical application, we will develop and implement a structured competency checklist for newly onboarded clinical research staff. Competencies will be organized into categories such as informed consent, screening and eligibility, essential log completion, reproductive status assessment, preparing for a research visit, and management of participants on study. Each competency will be mapped to specific, observable behaviors. Staff will complete each task under supervised observation, with evaluators documenting proficiency and providing targeted feedback.

The checklist will be created collaboratively to ensure alignment with essential job functions across disease teams. Implementation will include evaluator training to promote consistency in competency assessment. Completion metrics and evaluator feedback will be analyzed to assess performance trends, identify training gaps, and guide continuous improvement of the onboarding process.

- Collaboratively developed across disease teams
- Supervised observation of specific, observable behaviors
- Evaluator training to ensure consistency
- Data-driven analysis to identify gaps and drive continuous improvement

## KEY INTERVENTIONS PLANNED

<p><b>STRUCTURED COMPETENCY CHECKLIST</b></p> <p>Define essential job functions and observable behaviors across key competency categories.</p>	<p><b>SUPERVISED OBSERVATION</b></p> <p>Staff complete tasks under supervision; evaluators document proficiency.</p>	<p><b>TARGETED FEEDBACK</b></p> <p>Evaluators provide feedback to reinforce strengths and address gaps.</p>	<p><b>EVALUATOR TRAINING</b></p> <p>Train evaluators to ensure consistency in assessment and scoring.</p>	<p><b>DATA ANALYSIS &amp; GAP IDENTIFICATION</b></p> <p>Analyze completion metrics and feedback to identify trends and training gaps.</p>	<p><b>CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT</b></p> <p>Use insights to refine the checklist, training, and onboarding process.</p>
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## LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- LESSONS LEARNED**
- Refine the checklist based on completion trends, evaluator feedback, and identified training gaps.
  - Additional role-specific competency checklists will support ongoing skill development beyond onboarding.
  - Digital tools will streamline documentation, enhance visibility into progress, and support real-time quality monitoring.

- FUTURE DIRECTIONS**
- Build and integrate digital dashboards for tracking progress and performance.
  - Evaluate impact on operational efficiency, protocol compliance, and staff retention.
  - Expand implementation across disease teams and refine based on outcomes.
  - Develop a comprehensive, competency-based professional development framework.

## OUTCOMES

<p><b>ENHANCED PRACTICAL READINESS</b></p> <p>Validate staff ability to consistently and accurately perform core job functions.</p>	<p><b>IDENTIFY COMPETENCY GAPS</b></p> <p>Metrics and evaluator assessments highlight common areas for improvement.</p>	<p><b>TARGETED TRAINING INTERVENTIONS</b></p> <p>Insights inform training updates and support focused skill development.</p>	<p><b>IMPROVED RESEARCH OPERATIONS</b></p> <p>Stronger performance leads to greater efficiency and data quality.</p>	<p><b>ENHANCED PROTOCOL COMPLIANCE</b></p> <p>Consistent competencies support regulatory and protocol adherence.</p>	<p><b>SMOOTHER TRANSITION TO PRACTICE</b></p> <p>Accelerates staff confidence and independence in their roles.</p>
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**OUR COMMITMENT:** By aligning training with practice through a competency-based approach, we are building a stronger foundation for our people, our research, and the patients we serve.