

Clinical Research Onboarding Program: Cultivating Competent and Confident Research Professionals

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1. Background

City of Hope identified that traditional, unstructured onboarding led to inconsistent processes, increased errors, and potential risks to data integrity. To mitigate these risks and enhance research efficiency, a robust 90-day standardized onboarding program was implemented for all new clinical research staff.

2. Goals

This initiative sought to achieve several key objectives:

1. Establishing a standardized, institutional-wide process for all new clinical research hires
2. Providing comprehensive training in core research concepts, regulatory compliance (GCP), and best practices
3. Ensure practical competency through structured mentorship and hands-on experience
4. Reducing overall time-to-productivity for new staff while fostering a culture of quality

3. Solutions and Methods

The program utilizes a phased 90-day approach:

- **Phases 1 (Weeks one to three): Foundational Knowledge.** Participants complete Association of Clinical Research Professionals (ACRP) modules covering Good Clinical Practice (GCP) and data management. This is supplemented by live sessions with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from Regulatory Affairs and Research Protections to provide institutional context
- **Phase 2 (Weeks four to twelve): Preceptorship.** Trainees are paired with experienced onsite preceptors for direct mentorship
- **Practical Application:** Training covers the full study lifecycle, including recruitment, screening, enrollment, and regulatory document management
- **Assessment:** Knowledge assessments follow each SME session, and formal competency checkoffs are required before staff are released to independent work

4. Outcomes

Preliminary data from the implementation phase indicates significant institutional benefits:

- **Knowledge Retention:** Post-training assessment scores showed a significant improvement over previous onboarding methods
- **Retention Rate:** The program achieved 100 percent staff retention for the new hire cohort
- **Efficiency:** Observations indicate a marked reduction in the time required for new hires to reach independent performance levels

- **Satisfaction:** High levels of satisfaction were reported by both trainees and preceptors regarding program structure and delivery

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Critical success factors included early SME engagement and the use of structured preceptorships. Future iterations will expand the program to include Principal Investigators, introduce advanced research topics, and implement a longitudinal evaluation plan to track long-term impacts on research quality and institutional compliance.