# Guidance for Supporting Non-Tenured/Non-Tenure Track Faculty in Human Subjects Research

**Background:** Non-tenured faculty usually have contract positions and hold ranks such as lecturer, instructor, or visiting assistant professor. Non-tenured faculty also contribute to research and service, but the majority of non-tenured faculty focus on teaching.

**Purpose:** To ensure ethical and compliant human subjects research, non-tenured and non-tenure track faculty members at Teachers College (TC) must secure a signed letter of support from their Department Chair or an authorized designee. This document outlines the requirements for obtaining this support and provides a template for drafting the necessary letter (please refer to page #3 of this document for a [*Non-Tenured/Non-Tenure Track Faculty in Human Subjects Research Department Letter of Support Template*](#_heading=h.meelpcuhynas)for reference).

**Department Requirements to Support Non-Tenured Faculty Involved in Human Subjects Research:**

* **Mandatory Department Letter of Support:** All non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty members must obtain a signed letter of support from the Department Chair or an authorized designee. This letter is crucial for both minimal risk and greater than minimal risk (GTMR) studies.
* **Authority of the Department Chair:** The decision to endorse a non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty member’s research engagement is made at the discretion of the Department Chair, *independent* of the TC IRB.
* **Single Department Letter for Minimal Risk Studies:** If the non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty member intends to engage in Exempt or Expedited research (considered minimal risk), *a single letter* of support is required (see letter template section *“IF INVOLVED IN PROJECTS THAT ARE EXEMPT AND EXPEDITED ONLY”*). This letter will be filed under the faculty member’s name in Primary Investigator (PI) Documentation in the Mentor IRB system and cover *all minimal risk study involvement for the non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty member.*
* **Unique Letter for Each Greater Than Minimal Risk (GTMR) Study:** If the faculty member intends to participate in a GTMR study, a separate protocol-specific letter is necessary, even if a department letter is already on file with the TC IRB for minimal risk studies. The letter must include the TC IRB protocol number, study title, and a description of the specific GTMR activities the *non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty member* will be involved in for the project (see letter template section *“IF INVOLVED IN A PROJECT THAT IS GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK*”). Each unique letter will be filed under the faculty member’s name in Primary Investigator (PI) Documentation in the Mentor IRB system and cover the *non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty members’ involvement for that particular greater-than-minimal risk study.*

**Understanding Research Categorizations:**

* **Minimal Risk Human Subjects Research:** Research may be categorized as "exempt" or suitable for "expedited" review by the IRB to facilitate a smoother review process without compromising the protection of human subjects.
	+ *"Exempt"* research refers to certain types of minimal-risk human research defined in federal regulations. It is important to note that "exempt" does not imply exemption from IRB submission but indicates that the research may not require full IRB review.
	+ *"Expedited"* research also pertains to minimal risk studies but requires ongoing IRB oversight. Expedited review is applicable if the research falls within specified categories, involves minimal risk, and does not involve sensitive populations or topics.
* **Greater Than Minimal Risk Human Subjects Research:** Research that poses greater than minimal risk (GTMR) to participants involves a higher probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort. Such studies undergo a thorough review at convened IRB meetings. The level of risk, probability of moderate-severity events, and safety monitoring measures are carefully assessed to ensure adequate protections are in place for participants.

# Non-Tenured/Non-Tenure Track Faculty in Human Subjects Research

# Department Letter of Support Template

**Instructions to the Department Chair or Authorized Designee:*****Please use this template on your department letterhead. Modify sections as applicable, depending on the non-tenured/non-tenure track faculty member’s research involvement. Sections marked for specific types of research should only be completed, if relevant. Delete this instructional text when you have completed the letter of support.***

*[Department Letterhead]*

*[Re: Non-Tenure Faculty Member’s First and Last Name]*

*[To: Teachers College, Institutional Review Board (TC IRB)]*

*[Date]*

Dear Research Compliance Director,

**Subject:** Department Support for *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]* involved in Human Subject Research Activities

As the Chair of *[Department Name]* at Teachers College (TC), I am writing to extend my full support to *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]*, who has been contributing significantly to our department as *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's Title/Role]*, on a *[describe the nature of the role and duration, if applicable, e.g., "case-by-case contract basis for the academic year 20XX-20XX"].*

*[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]* plays a crucial role in our department’s research initiatives, particularly in projects involving human subjects. As part of these responsibilities, *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]* is actively involved in the IRB protocol processes, ensuring all research activities adhere to the highest ethical standards.

IF INVOLVED IN PROJECTS THAT ARE EXEMPT AND EXPEDITED ONLY:

In their capacity, *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]* may serve as a faculty sponsor, a Primary Investigator (PI), and/or a Co-Primary Investigator (Co-PI) for **any** exempt and expedited minimal-risk project. This involvement may include recruiting, consenting, collecting, or analyzing data and/or advising graduate student research involved in human subjects.

IF INVOLVED IN A PROJECT THAT IS GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK:

In their capacity, *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]* serves as *[select appropriate: "a faculty sponsor", "a Primary Investigator (PI)", "a Co-Primary Investigator (Co-PI)"]* on *[include the TC IRB protocol # and study title]*. This involvement includes *[specify activities, e.g., "recruiting, consenting, collecting, or analyzing data", AND/OR “and/or advising graduate student research involved in human subjects”].*

I want to highlight the department's awareness and endorsement *of [Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]*'s research activities. We recognize the importance of their contributions and are committed to supporting them in these endeavors. *[Include any additional details that may relate to the individual's role as a researcher or faculty sponsor (of student work) under the department's umbrella.]*

Should you have any questions or require further information regarding *[Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name]*'s activities or the department's research projects, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your support for our department's endeavors.

Sincerely,

*[Your Signature]*

*[Your Name]*

*Department Chair*

*[Department Name]*

Teachers College at Columbia University

*[Contact Information]*

*cc: [Non-Tenure Faculty Member's First and Last Name], [Non-Tenure Faculty Member's Title]*