



Promoting a Culture of Care

Aim of this resource

To help IACUC members ensure the concept of a Culture of Care is understood and supported within the institution.

Relevant IACUC task

A good Culture of Care is fundamental to all IACUC tasks, because it helps to ensure humane animal care and use, robust science and good staff wellbeing.

Recommendation

Use this resource to help set up initiatives around the Culture of Care, and to monitor how effective these are.



The issue

Many institutions say their Culture of Care is good, but they do not always set out their own vision of this, or take steps to assess whether it is having a genuine impact. The IACUC is in a good position to develop and promote the Culture of Care, and there is much that it can do to help realise the benefits for animals, staff morale, scientific quality and openness with the wider community.

This resource sets out some ideas to help IACUCs show leadership and help all staff to engage with and develop the Culture of Care.

Key points:

- The 'Culture of Care' describes an institution-wide, demonstrable commitment to improving animal welfare, scientific quality, care of staff, and transparency for all stakeholders, including the public. It goes beyond simply complying with the law.
- This sheet includes links to resources and real-life, practical examples of IACUC initiatives that promote a Culture of Care.
- Every institution should have a clear vision of their local Culture of Care. Some use input from a range of staff to define their own Culture of Care.
- The Culture of Care is not just about caring for animals. It also includes staff morale and how effectively the 3Rs are implemented. It should lead to tangible benefits for animals, people, and science.
- Some institutions 'assess' their Culture of Care and the IACUC could take a lead with initiating this.
- Local induction and training for all staff – regardless of whether they are directly involved with animal care and use – should include the Culture of Care as a core element.
- Clear and respectful communication between staff with different roles is essential.
- The Culture of Care should recognise the 'emotional labour' of staff and make sure support is in place.
- Caring for the wider community should also be included, by ensuring that the public is informed about the Culture of Care in an open and meaningful way.

Background information:

- **The Culture of Care describes an institution-wide commitment to improving animal welfare, scientific quality, care of the staff, and transparency for all stakeholders, including the public.** The IACUC is not solely responsible for this, but is well placed to help drive the Culture of Care and show leadership.
- **The Culture of Care is about more than caring for animals.** It encompasses other factors including **how staff treat one another and communicate**, how effectively the **3Rs** are implemented, expectations for **high-quality science**, and how committed people are to **going beyond minimum legal requirements**.
- **Each institution has its own culture, so all institutions should have a clear vision of what a Culture of Care means for them.** A 2021 [survey](#) conducted with IACUCs in the UK highlighted some aspects of a good Culture of Care. You can also find relevant information and references on a dedicated web page hosted by [Norecopa](#). Some institutions hold an exercise to set out a definition of their Culture of Care, with input from a wide range of staff, for everyone to sign up to. You may like to suggest this.
- **It may be possible to ‘feel’ when institution culture is good, but it is also possible for impressions to be subjective and for culture to drift or vary within organisations.** The Culture of Care should lead to tangible benefits for animals, in the form of better implementation of the 3Rs and rigorous ethical review of their use.
- **The European Commission working [document](#) on European IACUCs makes five suggestions for these to help promote a Culture of Care:**
 - Encourage **scientists to work with** (and value the contribution of) **animal technicians and care staff**
 - Provide for on-going **involvement of project licence holders** in the IACUC
 - Provide the **opportunity and encouragement** for any staff member to attend IACUC meetings and **raise issues** with IACUCs
 - **Communicate with all staff** and promote 3Rs advancements, welfare improvements, policy changes, roles of care staff, training persons and veterinarians, and the IACUC itself
 - **Provide information on the role and functions of the IACUC** for new staff and encourage their contributions

Fostering a positive Culture of Care:

- **IACUCs may periodically review how effectively they promote a Culture of Care.**
 - **Care-full stories** provide thought-provoking interactive [training resources](#) in the form of role-plays that can be a useful starting point to **initiate discussion**.
 - Other practical examples of relevant activities for IACUCs are provided [here](#) and in the [Guiding Principles on good practice for IACUCs](#).

IACUCs tend to have full agendas and limited time, so you may find it more resource-efficient to make sure internal communications are good and the IACUC knows whether some of the tasks are already being undertaken by other individuals or bodies. If so, the IACUC could take on an oversight role, receiving reports on activities and progress, rather than owning the tasks.

- **Some institutions have begun to assess their Culture of Care, using a survey and information-gathering approach.** This can help to **evaluate the impact of initiatives to progress local culture**, ensuring ongoing progress and challenge to the *status quo*, and checking on **staff wellbeing and animal welfare**. This requires a manageable number of indicators that are subjective (e.g. a survey question asking participants to rate statements like '*I feel accountable for animal welfare*'), objective (such as whether the veterinarian visits regularly and is sufficiently available), and animal-centred (e.g. information on enrichment or the fates of animals). For practical examples, see this [survey](#); ideas for indicators can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- **The local Culture of Care should be a core element of induction and training materials for all staff.** This includes those who do not work with, or contact, the animals, in the name of **internal openness**. This could take the form of a presentation and discussion session.
- **The aspect of caring for staff includes fostering mutual respect between people with different roles and recognising the emotional labour of staff such as animal technicians and vets.** For practical examples of initiatives to improve communication between scientists, animal technologists, vets and the IACUC see this [information sheet](#) and a [poster](#) summarising this. All staff, especially animal technicians, care staff, and vets, can struggle with the emotional impact of caring for animals experiencing adverse effects, or euthanasia (more information available [here](#)). It is not always possible for them to talk to family and friends about this. The IACUC can check whether there is **adequate support in place** (within the task of supporting technicians and other staff dealing with animals).
- **There is an informal, international Culture of Care network that someone at your institution may like to join.** Members include scientists, animal technicians, vets, IACUC members, and regulators. You can find out more [here](#).
- **For more materials on the Culture of Care, developed by the RSPCA and colleagues, click [here](#).**