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## **7 NETWORK MEETINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Communication and information dissemination are critical to the successful management of a large, international, multicenter network such as the [Infectious Diseases Clinical Research Consortium \(IDCRC\)](#). IDCRC uses a variety of approaches to enhance communication within the Network to disseminate news about network-wide and study-specific research initiatives. The Leadership Operations Center (LOC) supports and coordinates much of the communications within IDCRC through conference calls, in-person meetings, electronic and written materials, an electronic file sharing platform, and announcements and postings through IDCRC’s newsletter and website. The website serves as a main driver of general and public communication, where study-specific information and postings about Network-wide activities can be found.

### **7.1 Communications**

The IDCRC communications team engages the IDCRC key stakeholders and consortium members and interacts regularly to ensure an active and bi-directional exchange of information and assure progress that is productive and transparent. Frequent interactions ensure that units are learning from each other, sharing progress and findings, and committee discussions and scientific findings are broadly disseminated internally to the critical components that makeup the network (EMT, COU, LOU, SDSU, Expert Working Groups, and Key Function Committees, NIAID and VTEU leaders). In addition, information is shared selectively with key external organizations, such as the news media, other NIH networks, collaborators, and identified partners.

The LOC and its Administrative Core will develop and nurture a culture of open communication and trust across the IDCRC through consistently branded electronic communication vehicles, virtual (facilitated via video conference) and (when possible) face-to-face meetings, collaborative media relations, as well through facilitation of other close internal communication among administration, leadership, and VTEU sites via listservs. The LOC institutes a communication plan each year to connect the components of the LG, the VTEUs, NIAID, and other stakeholders to maintain a robust bi-directional flow of information.

## **7.2 Meetings**

### **7.2.1 Annual Network Meeting**

In collaboration with the IDCRC leadership (PIs), the LOC Co-Chairs and LOC Administrative group organizes an annual Network meeting to bring together IDCRC members and collaborators to discuss network priorities, research goals, review data from ongoing trials, examine cross-cutting issues, and provide an overview of the IDCRC scientific agenda. In addition, the meeting provides opportunities for training, identifying key issues, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of IDCRC members. The meeting generally includes plenary sessions to update IDCRC members on the latest scientific research related to the Network's mission and agenda as well as breakout sessions to encourage and facilitate smaller group discussions on current priorities as identified by leadership. Updates from the Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Units (VTEUs), Clinical Operations Unit (COU), Laboratory Operations Unit (LOU), Statistical and Data Science Unit (SDSU), may be presented

In collaboration with DMID, the LOC Admin is responsible for the overall logistics of the meeting; facility identification, invitations, preparation of agendas and background materials, meeting organization and facilitation; and subsequently, dissemination of any required materials for the LG, EAB, EWG and other specific sessions in collaboration with the chair of the respective committee, team, or group. Additionally, the annual Network meeting may provide training opportunities.

In the event when an in-person meeting cannot occur, the meeting will still be organized virtually on a platform allowing for as many interactions as possible between stakeholders.

### **7.2.2 Leadership Retreats**

As described in Section 7.2.1, Network leadership groups (COU, LOC, LOU and SDSU) may convene meetings, which are generally held annually. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the priorities and direction of the IDCRC Network. The LOC Admin is responsible for the overall logistics of the retreat including preparation of agendas and background materials and distribution of minutes.

### **7.2.3 Protocol Team Meetings**

In addition to routine conference calls, protocol teams may meet in-person during protocol development to facilitate the process, with the appropriate timing to be discussed and agreed upon by the team, as described in Section 9. The Protocol Specialist (PS) assigned to the protocol with assistance from LOC Admin staff will be responsible for the overall logistics of the in-person meetings including polling for meeting time and distribution of agendas, meeting facilitation, background materials and documentation of key decisions, action items and minutes dissemination. Protocol teams may also hold in-person meetings during the annual network meeting, as needed.

## 7.2.4 Conference Calls

Conference calls are used extensively to facilitate the Network's research activities. For each call, preference is given to widely-used internet based platforms such as Zoom or Teams.

Routine schedules of calls are established for various IDCRC groups and committees. As needed, the LOC admin or appropriate team member would query IDCRC members involved in protocol or committee work to schedule conference calls or meetings. Prompt response to these scheduling requests is required for efficient set-up of conference calls.

The LOC admin provides a broad range of administrative support for appropriate committee conference calls; preparation and/or distribution of call agendas and pre-meeting materials; sending email meeting reminder notices; and preparation, distribution, and archiving of conference call summaries. As part of their support of these groups, LOC admin staff generally document and distribute summaries of LOC, VTEU, COU, LOU, SDSU, and other Network conference calls. Separate groups may still organize and distribute their own calls.

In addition, webinar support may be provided to allow for interactive slide presentations, breakout sessions, chat room facilitation and other media rich methods for sharing of information and data.

## 7.2.5 Material Distribution

Staff of the IDCRC central resources (LOC, COU, SDSU, and LOU), as well as FHI 360, disseminate IDCRC information and study materials using a variety of techniques including shared drive, email via listserv, website postings, and electronic newsletters. If necessary, mail and express mail services may also be utilized. To ensure information transfer, each Network unit must:

- Have the capacity to send, access, and receive materials distributed using the above techniques
- Ensure that IDCRC communications and materials are distributed to all appropriate staff members
- Maintain all key study and IDCRC communications in a well-organized, and secure, filing system

Key IDCRC information is posted on the public [https://IDCRC.org\\_website\\_and\\_shared\\_drive](https://IDCRC.org_website_and_shared_drive) for access by all Network members. Information from central resources and from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are included and maintained regularly to ensure accuracy, timeliness of material availability and dissemination. Other websites with information relevant to the Network include:

- Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP): <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/>
- US Food and Drug Administration (FDA): <http://www.fda.gov/>
- COVID-19 Prevention Network (CoVPN): <http://www.coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org>
- [IDCRC Contacts spreadsheet](#)

## 7.2.6 Network Website

The IDCRC website <https://IDCRC.org> provides a wide range of materials.

The general philosophy governing the design, maintenance, and content of the website is to provide a site that (1) contains useful and up-to-date information on the Network organization and studies; and

(2) accommodates various internet and web-based software connections across this multinational Network.

Documents available on the IDCRC website are in PDF and version controlled unless otherwise noted. All documents generally open in new windows, thus providing browsers with easy access back to the main website.

Information on the IDCRC website is updated frequently. This may include posting IDCRC protocols, letters of amendments, full protocol amendments, and study-specific materials including laboratory processing charts, manual of procedures, training, and study implementation materials. Study-specific pages are developed to suit the needs of each particular study. An updated list of site names and numbers and a list of protocols (numbers and titles) that includes participating sites and status of each study is also posted and updated regularly. The website also features a searchable IDCRC publications database. The website includes news, partnerships, resources, establishes cross links with NIAID and VTEU partners, maintains a constant entry to the IDCRC shared drive, contact information, a concept proposal form, explanation of the IDCRC, structure and leadership roles, communication toolkit, approved MOPs, and IDCRC training opportunities.

The design and maintenance of the IDCRC website is the responsibility of the LOC. Questions and comments on the website may be sent to: [IDCRC@emory.edu](mailto:IDCRC@emory.edu).

### **7.2.7 Monthly Newsletter**

The monthly IDCRC e-newsletter is shared broadly via Campaign Monitor and the All-IDCRC listserv which includes the COU, all EWGs, LOU, LOC, and SDSU members, EAB, VTEU, NIAID, and DMID communication professionals, and partner institution communicators. Newsletter sections include:

- Feature
- Funding
- Education
- Community
- Events
- Study Status/Stats
- KFC/EWG Update

Newsletter stories and briefs are repurposed for the website. The newsletter includes news articles about scientific studies planned or in progress, collaboration opportunities, community-focused activities, stories of discovery or scientific advances, quick stats, and profiles of scholars and trainees within the consortium. The news articles feature science advances geared towards all stakeholders and present scientific breakthroughs made with NIAID support. The team works with the COU (Study Update Form), LOC (Concept Pipeline Report), and Collaborations & Publications KFC (monthly Publication Report) for collection of newsworthy milestones. We also curate and/or create stories highlighting IDCRC and VTEU achievements that we anticipate will be reposted by local and regional media outlets of the consortia. The newsletter supports on-going cross-VTEU communication so that best practices are used. Finally, cross network monthly updates (example: EWGs and KFCs) will be requested and published so components can be adopted by others when relevant and appropriate.

## 7.2.8 Communications Toolkit

The [toolkit](#) contains links to the IDCRC Communication Plan, all (15) IDCRC listservs, logo, letterhead, newsletter banner, PowerPoint design, boiler plate language, meeting agenda template, email signature preference, and publications citation guidance.

## 7.2.9 Listservs

IDCRC listservs facilitate two-way email communication to the appropriate audience while archiving conversations for later review. Only members of the list can send, receive, and review messages on the list/s. Links to each list are stored on the shared drive and in the website Communication Toolkit. The 15 IDCRC lists are maintained by the communications team and include representatives from all IDCRC partners including DMID:

- COU
- EWG-CORONAVIRUS
- EWG-EMERGINGINFECTIONS
- EWG-ENTERICDISEASES
- EWG-MALARIATROPICALDISEASE
- EWG-RESPIRATORYDISEASES
- EWG-STI
- LOC
- LOU
- SDSU
- SOGC
- VTEUs
- LGEMT
- MENTORS
- MENTEES
- ALL (+ communications contacts)

## 7.3 Release of Information to the Public

### 7.3.1 Public Information Policy

Investigators and site staff may have access to proprietary and sensitive information as a result of their participation in IDCRC protocols. The following guidelines relate to disclosure of product and study-related information to the public. These guidelines are in keeping with the policies and procedures of the DMID communication team that is part of the Office of Scientific Coordination and Program Operations

Inquiries from the press, community representatives, and public officials concerning general study status may be addressed by the study investigators to whom questions are directed to; however, investigators may not independently provide public comments related to study outcomes or adverse events. Such activities are to be coordinated between the protocol team and the sponsor.

Press inquiries more specifically or generally about IDCRC activities should be handled by VTEU PIs with guidance from product manufacturers, NIAID and DMID.

Proprietary information about study products in development or used in a trial conducted under an Investigational New Drug (IND) application may not be discussed publicly by anyone without written permission of the product's manufacturer.

### **7.3.2 Press Releases and Public Announcements**

All Network-related press releases and public statements will be developed or approved by NIAID, as appropriate. When such materials are developed by the sponsor(s), NIAID and IDCRC LOC will coordinate review by Network and/or study leaders as needed; reviews should take place in parallel to preserve timelines. When these materials are developed within the Network, IDCRC LOC will ensure that they are reviewed by required groups. Before any materials undergo NIH review, the IDCRC LOC ensures they have been reviewed and/or approved by relevant parties within the Network. Study-related press releases and materials must be approved by the protocol chair and the IDCRC Network chair.

To ensure accuracy of information and proper identification of IDCRC, NIH, and other funding sources, all press releases generated by the Network must be reviewed by the IDCRC LOC, which will coordinate additional review by the appropriate funding institutes, as necessary. Investigators should allow sufficient time for this process.

All press releases, statements, publications, and public announcements must properly acknowledge that the activities of the IDCRC Network are performed cooperatively with NIAID and DMID.

The IDCRC LOC ensures that NIAID and DMID program leadership and their respective communications offices are notified five days in advance of all IDCRC news releases and statements before they are publicly disseminated.