

Regional Technical Advisory Group on Immunization Standard Operating Procedures

Composition of the RTAG

- The RTAG will be composed of 8–10 members.
- Consideration should also be given to the geographic and gender representation of the group.
- Chairs and members of NITAGs as well as experts from outside the region could be considered for membership for RTAGs.
- All core members will be experts in areas relevant to immunization programmes, serving in their own capacity and will not represent the interests of a particular group or stakeholder. Members will refrain from promoting the policies and views and products of the organization/institution for which they work.
- Members will represent a broad range of disciplines encompassing aspects of immunization and vaccines, (vaccinology, epidemiology, immunology, public health, paediatrics, family medicine, internal medicine, health economy, regulations, vaccine delivery, communication, etc) and a range of affiliations (governmental, academia, private practice) and with collective expertise necessary to address the specific functions expected from the group.
- Members should be free of conflict of interests and enjoy satisfactory credibility. Members with declared interests conflicting with serving on the committee will be asked to excuse themselves from participating in the discussion and decision-making of the issues relating to that interest. A member who is in any doubt as to whether they have an interest which should be declared, or whether they should take part in the proceedings, should ask the Secretariat and Chairperson for guidance. Appearance of conflicts of interests should be avoided through both pre- and post-appointment considerations.

Nomination process

- Members, including the Chair, will be formally appointed by the Regional Director or delegated senior level official upon recommendation of the secretariat.
- Members can be nominated by other members of the RTAG, by the secretariat or through public calls for nominations. An independent selection committee will review all nominations and propose experts for RD's approval and appointment.
- The Chair will be identified by the Secretariat as a widely respected and independent core member, and will be proposed to the RD for approval and appointment.
- Prior to being appointed, members will be asked to complete a declaration of interests with enough detail and specificity to identify what would constitute a potential conflict of interest. It will then be determined by the Secretariat and the Chair if the declared interests, which indicate actual or potential conflicts, would completely preclude the expert from serving on the committee or if they should just be reported and the member be excluded from decision making or even discussing specific issues at a given meeting.
- Members of RTAG will work on voluntary basis and will not be financially compensated for serving on the RTAG. Travel-related expenses will be compensated as per WHO rules.

Rotation of membership

- Members will be appointed for a term of 3 years, which could possibly be renewed for a second term subject to review by the selection panel and RD approval. Renewal for a third term will need exceptional approval from the RD.
- In order to ensure continuity of the function of the committee, ideally members' terms would not expire at the same time.
- New committee members will be provided with briefing sessions and/ or informational packages and oriented, by the secretariat and the chair, on the terms of reference of group.

Termination of membership

Termination of membership will occur in the following situations

- a failure to attend two consecutive planned meetings, provided adequate time (at least 3months) prior to the activity is provided for the date and venue of the meeting
- a change in affiliation resulting in a conflict of interests;
- a lack of professionalism involving, for example, a breach of confidentiality.

Secretariat of the RTAG

- The unit of Vaccine Preventable Diseases and Immunization (VPI) of the department of communicable Diseases Control (DCD) will serve as Secretariat of the RTAG
- Regional Adviser, vaccine Preventable diseases and Immunization (RA/VPI) will serve as focal point of the secretariat
- Secretariat of the RTAG will be responsible for:
 - informing all the members about date of the meeting well in advance,
 - prepare background materials of the topics under discussion,
 - prepare for briefing of the new members, in collaboration with the Chair
 - circulate reports of the meetings

Modes of functioning/process of meetings and meeting frequency

- Core members involved in the decision making process will be differentiated from observers or invited experts. Observers or invited experts will contribute to the discussion and can help to provide background material or needed evidence, but they will not be involved in the final decision making because they represent particular interests.
- The Chair and members of the Committee will play a critical role in ensuring the RTAG's continued standing as an internationally recognized leading body in the field of immunization and that it continues to observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in its deliberations and that its recommendations are driven by available scientific evidence.
- Interaction between the secretariat and the RTAG members and regular interaction between the RTAG Chairs and the focal person will take place the whole year around. Regular meetings will be scheduled in advance. The meetings will take place at least once a year. Dates of meetings will be scheduled as much as possible one year ahead and the date and location will be communicated to RTAG members at least 3 months in advance.

- RTAG meetings will preferably be combined with meeting of the national EPI managers. Linkage will be arranged also with other important relevant regional groups such as meeting of the regional verification commission for measles elimination/hepatitis control.
- RTAG might be called for an ad-hoc meeting to discuss important decisions or urgent matters.

Conduct of meetings and process/basis for decision making

- RTAG will meet in open meetings in which invited participants and observers can attend. Closed sessions, involving RTAG members and the secretariat, can be arranged to discuss confidential issues
- In preparation for the meeting, specific questions put to the committee will be clearly articulated. The agenda will be circulated at least 2 weeks before the meeting with necessary relevant background documents.
- Members should feel free and encouraged to express their views even if at odd with that of the organization.
- The decisions will normally be taken by consensus.
- RTAG may establish working groups for specific issues as required
- Members will have to invest the necessary time in getting ready for the meeting and reviewing information ahead of meetings.

Communication/reports

- Summary minutes of each meeting, with focus on the main conclusions and recommendations, will be circulated for comment and endorsement by the members within two weeks after a meeting and the members would be required to respond within two weeks after receiving the communication. The minutes will be circulated to all member states and partners.
- Debriefings by the RTAG Chair to the RD or his/her delegated senior staff will be facilitated.