



The Role and Functions of IHTSDO Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope

The purpose of this guidance document is to describe the role and functions of the IHTSDO Special Interest Groups (SIG) as IHTSDO moves forward with effective work plan management and a coordinated approach to the delivery of products and services. It clarifies the roles of the SIGs in relation to other bodies within the IHTSDO governance and advisory structure as set out in the Articles of Association. This document is also intended to help those who are both considering and undertaking the role of Chair/Vice-Chair of a SIG.

IHTSDO uses the term “Working Group” to cover both Special Interest Groups and Project Groups. The roles of Project Groups are not covered within this document because they are established as “task and finish” groups, linked to specific IHTSDO work items with their own Terms of Reference specified by IHTSDO during project set up.

1.2 Audience

The audience for this guidance document includes:

- IHTSDO governance and advisory bodies
- IHTSDO staff
- Special Interest Group members (including Chairs and Vice-Chairs)
- Organizations with whom IHTSDO establishes collaborations where a SIG may be a component

2 IHTSDO Articles of Association

Special Interest Groups are a type of Working Group that performs an advisory function to the IHTSDO Management Board and relevant Committees. The IHTSDO Articles of Association specify the general role of Working Groups and their relationship to other IHTSDO bodies in the clauses referenced below:

9.5.7 If approved by the Management Board each Standing Committee can create Working Groups that shall, subject to any terms of reference set for the Committee, address business specific to the function of that Committee. More than one Standing Committee may jointly create a Working Group, in which case the Working Group’s terms of reference will be jointly determined by those Committees.

9.5.8 Membership of Working Groups shall be open to interested parties who can demonstrably contribute to the work of those bodies. Responsibility for some activities and deliverables may be assigned to specific individuals by the relevant Standing Committee.

3 General principles of Special Interest Group role and functions

The following are general principles for IHTSDO Special Interest Groups. IHTSDO SIGs:

- Are open and transparent, with minutes posted on IHTSDO's collaborative site.
- Are advisory to IHTSDO, providing subject matter expertise where required.
- Are not normally expected to undertake specific IHTSDO work plan items, but rather are expected to provide expert advice.
- Adhere to the Terms of Reference agreed to by the relevant Committee and signed off by the IHTSDO Management Board.
- Are open to all, including individuals in non-Member countries, with no formal nomination process (aside from Chairs and Vice-Chairs, who are nominated and elected).
- Provide regular reports to the responsible IHTSDO Committee or the Healthcare Professional Coordination Group (see below).
- Do not represent IHTSDO externally in any way.

4 Types of Special Interest Groups

IHTSDO has a number of SIGs that either have been in place since the inception of IHTSDO or added as a result of harmonization activities. They are continuing bodies that advise on issues related to their specific areas, relevant to the interests of IHTSDO, its Members and the community of practice. The SIGs can be classified under 2 main groups: Professional SIGs and Functional SIGs.

4.1 Professional SIGs

4.1.1 Role and functions of Professional SIGs

Professional SIGs have the following characteristics:

- They engage practicing professionals in a given clinical domain, discipline or specialty.
- They provide links to relevant international professional bodies.

Their role, in conjunction with IHTSDO, includes the following:

1. Serving as a professional liaison – e.g. working with professional bodies in the specialty to:
 - a. promote SNOMED CT within the specialty, including activities such as the publishing papers in professional academic and informational journals and giving presentations at professional meetings and conferences.
 - b. manage and route input/feedback about international requirements and usage within the specialty.
2. Advising on content development

- a. Activity directed or moderated as relevant by: Content Committee, Head of Terminology and Head of Content.
 - b. Input routed as relevant to: Content Committee, Authoring Team, and/or Mapping Team.
3. Engaging in practical implementation activities
 - a. Activity directed or moderated by: I&E Committee and Head of Education
 - b. Input routed to: I&E Committee and Implementation and Education Team

Professional SIGs are key stakeholders in the IHTSDO content development process and have an advisory role in the review/evaluation stages of relevant content development projects.

4.1.2 Current Professional SIGs

- Nursing (in liaison with the International Council of Nurses)
- International Family Practice/General Practice (in liaison with Wonca)
- Dental (in liaison with American Dental Association)
- Anesthesia
- International Pathology and Laboratory Medicine - IPaLM (in liaison with the World Association of Societies of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine - WASPaLM)
- Pharmacy

4.1.3 Healthcare Professional Coordination Group (HPCG) -

The Healthcare Professional Coordination Group brings together representatives (Chairs and Vice-Chairs) from all the Professional SIGs to work with members of the IHTSDO Management Team and other IHTSDO staff as required. The overall aim of this group is to ensure coherent and comprehensive professional input to IHTSDO standards. A subsidiary aim is to demonstrate strong IHTSDO commitment to health professional stakeholders. The HPCG has Terms of Reference agreed by the IHTSDO Management Board.

4.1.3.1 Role of the HPCG

The role of the HPCG is to provide a forum:

1. to oversee professional stakeholder input into IHTSDO business, identifying gaps and shaping processes to ensure appropriate/proportionate engagement;
2. to allow the agendas of the professional SIGs to be shared and confirmed;
3. to allow cross-cutting issues to be managed amongst the SIGs;
4. to coordinate professional feedback into IHTSDO priorities;
5. to develop any “generic” communications about IHTSDO, SNOMED CT and its derivatives for use by health professional organizations;
6. to advise IHTSDO on existing and emerging harmonization/collaboration agreements with professional bodies on an international basis;
7. to provide a forum to which Member countries can address specific professional requirements of IHTSDO products;
8. to provide support to new and existing professional SIGs, enabling shared learning to support SIG productivity.

4.1.3.2 Management of the HPCG:

This group meets every two months, virtually and face to face at IHTSDO Business meetings if there is business to discuss and members are in attendance. The Healthcare Professional Coordination Group is facilitated by the IHTSDO Head of Collaboration and the chair is from the Management Board.

4.1.3.3 Reporting lines for the HPCG:

HPCG reports directly to the IHTSDO Management Board. The professional SIGs report through this route rather than through individual Standing Committees since their roles, as outlined above, cover areas that apply to more than one Standing Committee.

4.2 Functional SIGs

4.2.1 Roles of Functional SIGs

Functional SIGs have the following characteristics:

- They provide expertise and feedback on core functional areas within the scope of IHTSDO work.
- They are not specific to particular clinical specialties.
- They are international in their perspective.

Their roles include the following:

- Providing advice and expertise on IHTSDO work activities.
- Providing advice and expertise on related work in Project Groups.
- Providing advice on frameworks and methods that assist in creating consistent development and maintenance of IHTSDO products and services.
- Facilitating the sharing of experiences from Member countries, e.g. with mapping or translation.
- Promoting the appropriate use of SNOMED CT and its derivatives in health information systems.

4.2.2 Current Functional SIGs

- Education
- Mapping
- Implementation

4.2.3 Accountability of the Functional SIGs

Accountability and reporting is as follows:

- Education: I&E Committee
- Implementation: I&E Committee
- Mapping: Content Committee

5 Membership of SIGs

Membership of SIGs is open to anyone. The Chair and Vice-Chair should work with the responsible IHTSDO Management Team member to ensure that membership:

- Has the appropriate mix of professional knowledge and experience;
- Covers different cultural and language aspects;
- Is focused on IHTSDO work plan delivery and future development based on Member country requirements; and
- Manages conflicts of interest as per IHTSDO policy.

6 Role of SIG Chairs and Vice-Chairs

IHTSDO has adopted a formal “Process for appointment of leadership of IHTSDO Working Groups.” This document defines the process for the election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of SIGs but does not define the roles of those elected to these posts.

The role of Chairs and Vice-Chairs is:

1. To provide leadership for the SIG and to ensure that the SIG works effectively and in line with IHTSDO policies and the specific Terms of Reference of the SIG.
2. In the case of Functional SIGs, to work with a designated, responsible IHTSDO Management Team member, thus providing a liaison to the Management Team and relevant Standing Committee. The responsible Management Team member provides direction to the SIG but may not be in attendance at all SIG meetings.
3. For Professional SIGs, to work with the chair of the HPCG and the Head of Collaboration.
4. To plan and conduct meetings (the SIG Chair primarily, or, in his or her absence, the Vice-Chair).
5. To work with IHTSDO to ensure appropriate membership and skills within the SIG, thus ensuring that the SIG can undertake its specific agenda.
6. To take notes of all meetings, recording actions and their status.
7. To direct SIG activities in advising on related IHTSDO Work plan activities and the Association’s Strategic Directions. The advice of the responsible IHTSDO Management Team member shall be sought in any situation where an activity is planned which may have an impact of the IHTSDO Work plan.
8. To ensure that all advice provided by the SIG is evidence-based.

7 Activities of SIGs

Given the summary roles and responsibilities outlined in section 4, SIG activities may also include:

- Advising and/or reviewing specific Work Items in the IHTSDO Work plan.

- Identifying areas of new work of relevance to the mission and strategic direction of IHTSDO.
- Providing a forum for interchange of activities at international level to ensure sharing of best practices.

8 Terms of Reference for SIGs

A standard template is provided by IHTSDO to ensure consistency of Terms of Reference and is available from the relevant Management Team member.

The Terms of Reference for each SIG will be signed off by the HPCG in the case of the Professional SIGs and by the relevant Standing Committee for the Functional SIGs. This will then be communicated to the IHTSDO Management Board for approval. As noted below, IHTSDO centrally will ensure consistency across Terms of Reference and also ensure that regular updates take place to content and the template (as necessary).

9 IHTSDO Management/Administration of SIGs

IHTSDO will provide the following for SIGs:

- Teleconferencing facilities
- Desktop sharing facilities (e.g. GoToMeeting, Webex etc.)
- A designated web-based workspace for communications, meeting management and documentation, formatted in a common way
- Option of one face-to-face meeting of the SIG annually where there is a business requirement
- Coordination of Chair and Vice-Chair elections
- Coordination of Terms of Reference to ensure consistency

Note that IHTSDO support will be coordinated through the IHTSDO Head of Collaboration.

10 Meetings of SIGs

SIGs can meet as often or seldom as their agendas require. However, in order to provide key advice to IHTSDO, it is suggested that SIG meeting frequency should usually be between once every two weeks and once every two months. At a minimum, any SIG should meet at least four times per year – it is the view of IHTSDO that this is the minimum needed to ensure the SIG can function effectively and maintain the interest of the community of practice.

IHTSDO will provide the option for a face-to-face meeting for SIGs at its October conference each year only if there is a key business requirement. Additional face-to-face meetings will be supported if,

in the view of the IHTSDO Management Team, a specific work item requires this and this requirement is not met by specific project funding for project meetings.

SIGs may meet face-to-face at other events that are convenient to a cross-section of SIG participants subject to the following conditions:

- All face-to-face meetings of the SIG must be approved by the responsible IHTSDO Committee or the HPCG, as relevant.
- Approval will not be granted if a significant number of SIG participants object to the timing and or location, and there is no remote access provided.

Professional SIGs are encouraged to consider meeting at recognized international conferences of their Professional Colleges, where they can demonstrate that this will enhance the use of SNOMED CT or directly engage a wider international representative group of experts in the work of the SIG.

Informal and ad hoc meetings may take place when the opportunity arises. The responsible IHTSDO Management Team member should be informed and minutes should be taken to share with non-attending members, with all decisions then ratified at the next scheduled meeting.

11 Liaison with Other Bodies

As identified already, an IHTSDO SIG may be set up directly as a result of a collaboration agreement, e.g. the International Dental SIG and Nursing SIG. In such cases, IHTSDO has formal agreements in place, which include details of how the two bodies will work together through the SIG. Such SIGs, however, do not represent IHTSDO.

It is recognized that other types of relationships are of benefit to IHTSDO, e.g. IHTSDO Nursing SIG membership of the Alliance for Nursing Informatics. Such alliances/representation need to be clearly documented with scope and purpose, discussed with the responsible IHTSDO Management Team member and agreed by the relevant Committee. This ensures communication within the organization as well as management of expectations over time.