



28 June 2017

# Strategic document of the Global NITAG Network

This document was initiated by the core group of NITAGs following consultation and deliberation at the first meeting of the Global NITAG Network in 2016. It was reviewed and endorsed by members of the Global NITAG Network at the second meeting in Berlin in **June 28<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017**.

## Background and rationale

A key objective of the Global Vaccine Action Plan is for all countries to have, or have access to, a functional national immunization technical advisory group (NITAG) by 2020.

Globally, NITAGs have different levels of experience, resources and expertise. The statutory status of NITAGs also varies along with the willingness of Ministries of Health to fund and implement the recommendations. However, they face many similar challenges such as limited resources (experts' availability, funds to support work of NITAG secretariat), lack of access to data needed to make evidence-informed recommendations and a need for better methodologies.

To foster collaborations between countries and create opportunities for pooling resources and increasing effectiveness through sharing NITAG experiences, lessons learned, and documentation, the Global NITAG Network (GNN) was established in May 2016. While respecting each NITAG's autonomy, the aim of the GNN is to provide value by

- ✚ allowing NITAGs to improve functionality through more efficient access to and use of resources,
- ✚ strengthening individual NITAGs through sharing of knowledge and promoting innovation; and
- ✚ strengthening the global immunization community through enhanced coordination and concerted action on common issues.

This document establishes the organizational make up and operating procedures of the Network.

### 1. Vision, mission and objectives

**VISION:** An environment where each country, using the best practices and data available, makes sound, evidence-based recommendations on immunization that are most appropriate for their context in order to facilitate their adoption and implementation.

**MISSION:** The mission of the Global NITAG Network is to enhance the ability of NITAGs to efficiently make evidence-informed recommendations on immunization through global collaboration and cooperation with input from regional networks

#### OBJECTIVES:

1. To provide a global platform to enable NITAGs to efficiently share and access knowledge, technical reviews, data, lessons learned, trends and innovations,
2. To liaise with regional NITAG networks to flag needs, develop relevant tools to address needs, and identify, evaluate, and document best practice and innovation. GNN does not replace regional networks.
3. To help develop standards for processes to ensure evidence-based decision making and evaluate NITAGs
4. To facilitate evaluations and capacity building of NITAGs.
5. To advocate for NITAGs.

## 2. Values and principles

For a network to be functional it requires genuine commitment from all members, shared accountability, and the appreciation that all members have contributions to make whatever their level of experience. The following are the key values and principles on which the GNN is based.

**CONTRIBUTION:** All NITAGs have something to offer based on their knowledge and experience that can benefit others. The strength of the network lies in the contribution of all members, both through sharing of information and technical support. All members are expected to contribute actively. However, participation should be a help, not a burden, to members.

**OPENNESS:** In the same manner that applies to NITAG best practices, the GNN will operate with complete openness, ensuring that decision-making processes are clear and held to the highest standards.

**INDEPENDENCE:** All GNN actions and dealings are independent from external influence by vaccine manufacturers, vertical disease introduction initiatives, and donors to ensure country ownership of immunization policy.

**RESPECT OF AUTONOMY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:** The GNN acknowledges that each NITAG has its own regulations regarding sharing of information that must be respected.

## 3. Type of network and regional links

Participation in the GNN is voluntary; all NITAGs are eligible to participate in the Network. Members are expected to be actively engaged with the Network. Membership is formalised through official request from the NITAG Chair or authorized representative to the GNN Secretariat and then acknowledged by an official communication.

The GNN is not a decision-making or implementing body. It does not take the place of advisory bodies or networks. Rather, it seeks to create an avenue for communication between such bodies. NITAGs can potentially interact productively through regional networks that benefit from geographical proximity and other common factors such as language, culture, disease burden, and economic status. Therefore, ideally, a NITAG network will be developed in each region that will liaise with the GNN to provide input on NITAG issues in their region. The GNN will prioritize these issues by relevance and urgency to develop an agenda and plan activities. The GNN aims to complement and respond to regional networks, but not to replace them. In acknowledgment of its limitations, the GNN cannot address each and every concern of every NITAGs due to time, financial, and capacity constraints.

The regional NITAG network leads should collaborate closely with the GNN to ensure two-way communication and sharing, for example on needs, innovations, and successes from the countries, and on technical resources, tools, and advocacy needs from the GNN. The networks should regularly seek feedback from all NITAGs in the region to ensure the network meets the needs of the members. All regional network actions and dealings should be independent from external influence by vaccine manufacturers, vertical disease introduction initiatives, and donors to ensure country ownership of immunization policy. Efforts will be made to ensure that burdens are not duplicated in regards to activities of the GNN and the regional networks.

## 4. Membership

Membership is open to all NITAGs.

Each NITAG will nominate one person to be the key point of contact with the GNN. However, the NITAG as a whole is a member of the GNN and all members of a NITAG should participate in the collaboration and the sharing and benefit from the Network.

NITAGs will nominate who attends any meetings of the GNN or who will provide specific technical support.

Regional NITAG networks will be represented within the GNN by individuals designated by the regional networks. Regional network representatives will represent the region rather than a specific NITAG.

NITAG partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), UNICEF, and other global partners may attend the GNN meetings and activities, but they are not official members and will not participate in decision making.

## 5. Functions

The role of the GNN is to encourage, facilitate and support NITAGs but not drive them. Efforts are supportive rather than prescriptive.

The GNN may meet its objectives by performing the following activities or others that may be deemed useful by the Network.

- ✚ Fostering the exchange of information and knowledge
  - Promoting dissemination and use of good practices
  - Collectively generating information and knowledge on common topics
  - Collectively promoting the use of new knowledge relevant to common issues
- ✚ Capacity building
  - Facilitating learning experiences
  - Sharing technical resources
  - Creating opportunities (virtual and real) for discussion on complex issues
  - Fostering NITAG twinning or collaboration opportunities, including with countries outside the region
  - Developing tools
- ✚ Evaluating
  - Regularly eliciting feedback from countries to ensure relevance of the GNN to country needs
  - Facilitating NITAG evaluations
  - Improving evaluation approaches and tools
- ✚ Mobilizing resources for joint efforts
  - Advocating for NITAGs with global partners
  - Developing a pool of trainers and/or evaluators that can be readily accessed by NITAGs;

## 6. Governance

The GNN will be governed by a Board made up of 6 NITAG representatives reflecting the 6 WHO regions and 6 alternates; members will rotate every 2 years but initially in a staggered fashion every 2-4 years. A chair of the Board will be selected by consensus of the members and appointed for a period of 2 years, with rotation among the regions. The chair will be responsible for ensuring that Board activities are carried out. The Board will meet regularly. Decisions will be made by consensus among Board members.

The Board is responsible for

- ✦ developing the agenda and setting priorities, based on input from NITAGs in the regions, for exchange of information, development of resources/tools, and capacity building,
- ✦ developing an annual activity plan and accompanying budget,
- ✦ planning annual meetings and other activities of the GNN,
- ✦ developing and pursuing fundraising strategies, and
- ✦ overseeing regular network evaluation, including assessment of value to the member countries.

## 7. Secretariat Functions

WHO is requested to support core Secretariat functions. This is consistent with the 2017 World Health Assembly Resolution on strengthening immunization to achieve the goals of GVAP, in which the Resolution requests the Director General of WHO to support member states in strengthening NITAGs.

The Secretariat is responsible for the following:

- ✦ Maintaining the regular administrative duties of the GNN; such as records of membership and meeting minutes,
- ✦ Coordinating requests for support and information from members,
- ✦ Coordinating the communication and liaisons between NITAGs,
- ✦ Maintaining the existing NITAG Resource Centre website (<http://www.nitag-resource.org/>) and developing new functions, links and resources,
- ✦ Facilitating the sharing of information through a specific GNN portal on the NRC,
- ✦ Identifying areas of possible synergy and connecting members,
- ✦ Establishing and maintaining rosters of technical support,
- ✦ Interacting with the WHO Regional Office in their facilitating role in the regional NITAG network,
- ✦ Producing a regular newsletter to keep members informed of GNN news,
- ✦ Managing the planning and logistics of GNN meetings,
- ✦ Producing regular monitoring and evaluation reporting for members and donors,
- ✦ Fostering development of publications on progress and problems recognized by GNN.

## 8. Sustainability and resilience

The Board and Secretariat should seek to mobilize resources from interested partners to support the activities of the GNN.

Fundraising and in-kind support generation should be carried out in a way that avoids conflicts of interest in terms of the agenda and priorities. Financial sponsors should not have influence over the agenda of the GNN, nor dictate who should attend annual GNN meetings.

It is envisaged that funds will be used to support the following:

- ✚ Core Secretariat functions
- ✚ Operational activities
  - Innovations
  - IT solutions
  - Translations of high value documents on NRC
  - Organization of meetings (board and scientific meetings)
  - Printing and distribution of materials
- ✚ Technical activities
  - Studies and research
  - Training
  - Evaluations
  - Tools development

Endorsed by consensus on June 28th 2017.