

## **Group Exercise: Review of NITAG Composition and Functions**

### **Format:**

Several exercises are presented which guide participants through a review and evaluation of the composition and functioning of their National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG). Total activity time = 1 hour.

### **Learning objectives:**

Through the exercises presented, participants will

- understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the composition and functioning of their NITAG, and
- be poised to develop strategies to improve them by developing / updating / revising relevant documents (NITAG Terms of Reference, Charter, Declaration of Interests, Standard Operating Procedures; Ministry of Health orders)

### **Instructions:**

Read the first exercise and complete the table. Be prepared to present.

### **Time required for completion:**

20-30 min for each scenario

### **Exercise 2A-1: Review of NITAG composition (15 mins + 5 mins to present)**

→ Using the table below, individually review each aspect of the composition of your NITAG by comparing it to the corresponding WHO recommendation. Then complete the table by listing the strengths of this aspect in your country and areas for improvement. Discuss with your group and present the aspects that were common in your group, the features that were different, and what are your recommended areas for improvement. Keep your notes handy as it will be useful for the activities later.

Aspect of membership	WHO recommendations	Strengths in your country	Areas for improvement in your country
<b>Voting members</b>			
# of core voting members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10-15 members is ideal</li> <li>• critical mass for decision-making</li> <li>• enables manageable discussion</li> <li>• allows functioning if all members are not present (quorum required by internal NITAG procedures is ideally half + one members)</li> <li>• minimizes budget for meetings</li> <li>• odd number useful for tie-breaking</li> </ul>		
Technical expertise	At least 5 areas of expertise from these areas: clinical medicine (pediatrics, adult medicine, geriatrics), epidemiology, infectious disease, microbiology, public health, immunology, vaccinology, immunization program, health systems and delivery, health economist, social scientist.		
Independence from MoH and from pharmaceutical companies	Core members should not be MoH or immunization programme employees (nor have a direct or indirect supervisory relationship with them). In addition, they must also not be associated or employed by pharmaceutical companies.		
<b>Non-voting members</b>			
Ex-officio	Selected due to their key positions in government agencies that relate to immunization, i.e., MoH officials (heads of departments, specialists) vaccine licensing bodies, vaccine control laboratory, responsible for immunization programs, planning, education, finance.		
Liaison	Represent important professional societies, other national advisory committee, and key technical partners (WHO, UNICEF).		

Participation of industry and observers	Industry should not be allowed in meetings and do not have the power to vote, but occasionally they can be invited to highly structured settings to provide specific information.		
Membership Terms			
Selection of Voting Members	Should be nominated and appointed by senior govt officials through a well-defined transparent process.		
Rotation of Membership	Limited duration of service for the core members (5-6 years), staggering of members to provide continuity and ensure the terms of all members do not expire at the same time and can help with orientation of new members. <i>(Small countries with limited number of experts at the national level may choose not to rotate NITAG members.)</i>		
Voting	Only core members should have the power to vote on NITAG's discussions. Members of the secretariat, ex-officio members, liaison members, invited experts can contribute to discussions but cannot vote.		
Termination	Written SOPs must specify the termination process method and the authority who can initiate the process. Possible reasons for termination of membership include – not attending a specified number of consecutive meetings, conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality etc.		

**Exercise 2A-2: Review of NITAG modes of functioning (15 mins for individual reflection + 15 mins for group SWOT discussion and presentation).**

→ Using the table below, individually review each aspect of how your NITAG functions by comparing it to the corresponding WHO recommendation. Then complete the table by listing the strengths of this aspect in your country and areas for improvement. Based on your notes, discuss it with your group and present a SWOT analysis of your group (activity 3A - 1).

Aspect of functioning	WHO recommendations	Strengths in your country	Areas for improvement in your country
Declaration of interests	Should be done in writing by all members before appointment and verbally before each meeting. NITAGs should develop a policy to manage conflict of interests.		
Confidentiality agreement	Members and special invitees should sign agreement stating that they will keep information confidential.		
Open versus closed meetings	Countries select option appropriate for them: open meetings increase transparency and may improve public acceptance but may make the process less efficient.		
Process for agenda development	Items should come from MoH, but NITAG and stakeholders may suggest issues.		
Process to review and share evidence	Prior to meetings, specific questions should be articulated to the NITAG. Agenda and background documents circulated at least 2 weeks in advance of meetings.		

Working groups	For gathering, analyzing, and preparing information to help NITAGs with decision making. Comprised of 1-2 voting members with additional subject matter experts.		
Meeting frequency	At least once a year, with flexibility for additional meetings as needed.		
Decision by vote or consensus	NITAGs need to decide if decisions of its core members will be made by majority vote or by consensus, and how many members need to be present (quorum) to formulate recommendations.		
Recordkeeping and communications (optional)	Summary minutes of each meeting focusing on main conclusions and recommendations should be available and endorsed by NITAG within 60 days of meeting. Minutes can be public or private. Clear process and format for communicating recommendations to decision makers (who, to whom, when, how formatted)		

Exercise 3A-1: Based on your notes from activity 2A-1 and 2 above, present a SWOT analysis of your group.

**SWOT Analysis – Group Activity**



**Strengths:**

**Opportunities:**

**Weakness:**

**Threats**

**Exercise 3A-2: Brainstorming potential changes to the NITAG Charter (10 mins).**

→ Based on the gaps identified in your discussions and reflections, complete the table below by noting recommended changes to implement in your Charter and the MoH order for your NITAG.

<b>Aspects of NITAG membership and functioning</b>	<b>Changes to Charter</b>
Voting and non-voting members	
Selection process of core members	
Rotation of membership for voting members	
Termination of membership	
Participation of industry and observers	
Declaration of interests	
Confidentiality agreement	
Open versus closed meetings	
Working groups	
Process for agenda development and sharing of evidence	
Meeting frequency	
Decision by vote or by consensus	
Recordkeeping and communications (optional)	