COORDINATION

CLUSTER MEMBERSHIP & PARTICIPATION

This section covers:

- Who is a cluster member?
- The Principles of Partnership
- Minimum Commitments for cluster participation
- Tips for encouraging participation
- Briefing & introductions for new cluster members

The term Cluster *partner* is mostly used through this Toolkit, although is sometimes used interchangeably with Cluster *member.* The term Cluster *participants* could also be used.

WHO IS A CLUSTER MEMBER?

The Global Cluster Coordination Group provides the following definitions[1]:

> **"Partners or Members**[2]**:** *Local, national or international organizations which participate in a cluster at national or subnational levels and adhere to the minimum commitments for cluster participation, as outlined in the IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination. In particular, cluster members commit to actively participate in the cluster; contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities; work cooperatively with other cluster members; take on leadership responsibilities, as needed; and adhere to humanitarian principles, the Principles of Partnership, cluster-specific guidance and internationally recognized programme standards, including the Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse – among a range of commitments.*

> **Observers:** *Local, national or international organizations which may engage but do not formally participate in a cluster, contribute to its work or coordinate with the UN due their mandate or independent nature of their functioning (e.g. ICRC or MSF). Observers also can include entities which are not operational in the technical area (e.g. donors, academia, private sector companies, OCHA or even other cluster coordinators). They may be invited to cluster meetings on the basis of the unique expertise or perspective they bring and are not required to adhere to all of the minimum commitments for cluster participation, as outlined in the IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination"*

PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

The Principles of Partnership are the commitments of UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations on how they will work together[3]. They also provide a basis for how all actors in the humanitarian space (UN, INGOs, NNGOs, government, private sector, and affected populations) can engage in a more equal, constructive, and transparent way. A CCCM Cluster should follow these principles and promote them to cluster members. They help define an ideal culture for cluster coordination.

- **Equality.** *Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognise each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organisations from engaging in constructive dissent.*

- **Transparency.** *Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organisations.*

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[1] GCCG (2023) *Country-level Cluster Terms and Definitions*

[2] *For some CLAs and Global Clusters, the term 'cluster members' refers only to those entities which go through a formal membership application process, are official signatories to a strategy, or provide direct delivery of activities included in the cluster response plan. For them, the term 'cluster partners' refers to any entity that engages in humanitarian action and attends clusters meetings. (GCCG, 2023)*

[3] The Principles of Partnership Statement of Commitment was endorsed in 2007 by the Global Humanitarian Platform, comprising UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations.

- **Result-oriented approach**. *Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and operational capacities.*
- **Responsibility**. *Humanitarian organisations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.*
- **Complementarity**. *The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.*

SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN THE CLUSTER

MINIMUM COMMITMENTS FOR CLUSTER PARTICIPATION

The IASC minimum commitments for cluster participation set out what all local, national, or international organizations should undertake to contribute. They emphasize mutual responsibility, not seeking to establish barriers or exclude organizations or authorities from participation in clusters.

MINIMUM COMMITMENTS **FOR CLUSTER PARTICIPATION**[4]

"*The minimum commitments are not prescriptive… since cluster-based responses vary greatly in scale and complexity. They are a starting point and should be considered as an absolute minimum.*"

1. Commitment to humanitarian principles, the Principles of Partnership, cluster-specific guidance and internationally recognized programme standards, including on PSEA

2. Commitment to mainstream protection in programme delivery (including principles of non-discrimination, do no harm)

3. Readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected people, in line with the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations

4. A demonstrated understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with membership of the cluster, as defined by IASC ToRs and guidance notes, any cluster-specific guidance, and country cluster ToRs, where available.

5. Active participation in the cluster and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work.

6. Capacity and willingness to contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities, which must include inter-cluster coordination.

7. Commitment to mainstream key programmatic cross-cutting issues (including age, gender, environment, HIV/AIDs).

8. Commitment by a relevant senior staff member to work consistently with the cluster to fulfil its mission.

9. Commitment to work cooperatively with other cluster partners to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources, and share information on organizational resources.

10. Willingness to take on leadership responsibilities in sub-national or working groups, subject to capacity and mandate.

11. Undertake advocacy, and disseminate advocacy messages to affected communities, the host Government, donors, the HCT, CLAs, the media and other audiences.

12. Ensure that the cluster provides interpretation (in an appropriate language) so that all cluster partners are able to participate, including local organizations (and national and local authorities where appropriate)"

Source: IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level, 2015 p.23-25

SETTING COMMITMENTS FOR CLUSTER PARTNERS

It can be helpful to draft context-specific guidance on minimum commitments for participation in the Cluster, and expectations of Cluster members. For example, where organizations who are new to implementing humanitarian response or new to working in the cluster system are Cluster partners. The above minimum commitments from the IASC guidance can be contextualised and added to as appropriate. This type of document ideally should be drafted with inputs from cluster members. Discussion of this could be complemented by communication on the benefits of cluster membership/participation for organizations.

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[4] IASC (2015) *IASC Reference Module for Cluster Coordinator at Country Level*, Section 7 Minimum Commitments for Participation in Clusters p.23-25

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION OF CLUSTER PARTNERS

✓ **Ensure organizations have something to gain from being a Cluster partner:** Benefits may include access to up-to-date critical information required for programming, technical guidance and support, opportunity to engage with authorities to ease implementation, opportunity to engage with donors[5]

✓ **Keep information and reporting demands to a minimum:** Establish clear understanding on information required from Cluster partners, in what form, and how often – and share products back with partners

✓ **Engage directly and actively with members to understand their expectations and constraints**

You might need to make specific effort to ensure inclusion and encourage the full participation of local and national actors. See Toolkit Section 1.8 Coordination – Localization in Coordination and Toolkit Section 9.7 Cross-cutting issues – Localization for tips and guidance.

BRIEFING NEW CLUSTER MEMBERS

When new organizations join the CCCM Cluster – especially local and national actors who might not have worked in a cluster system before – you should ensure that they understand and can fully participate in the Cluster.

Consider briefing new members as necessary on: the cluster approach, coordination meetings, cluster governance structures, what being a cluster member involves, value to them of being a cluster member, and how they can access any Cluster tools, technical guidance, and information products.

- See *Checklist for induction and onboarding of new coordination group members* in Related Resources
- See *Quick Guide on humanitarian coordination & the cluster approach* in multiple languages

INTRODUCTION / BRIEFING PACKS

If you are working in a context where there are often new actors joining or engaging with the CCCM Cluster, you might want to consider developing an introduction or briefing pack that introduces what the Cluster does and what guidelines and standards are available. Or, if the Cluster produces a large number of guidelines this can also act as a reference document for Cluster members to easily access relevant links.

Introduction / briefing packs can be useful for local / national actors who are less familiar with the coordination system – explaining the work of the CCCM Cluster and demonstrating the value the Cluster could bring to them, to encourage their engagement. Don't forget to translate!

Related Resources

Title	Type	Language	Date
Checklist for induction & onboarding new coordination group members from *Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localization in Humanitarian Coordination*	Guidance	English	2022
Cluster Info Pack Example 1 – Iraq 2017	Example	English	2023
Cluster Info pack Example 2 – Nigeria 2020	Example	English	2023
Cluster Info Pack Example 3 – Somalia 2021	Example	English	2023

References & further reading

- IASC (2015) *IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level* (see Toolkit Section 1.2 Core functions of a CCCM Cluster)
- Global Health Cluster (2020) *Health Cluster Guide – A Practical Handbook*, WHO
- *Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localization in Humanitarian Coordination*, 2022 (see Toolkit Section 9.7 Localization)
- Principles of Partnership – A Statement of Commitment, 12 July 2007
- ICVA – Principles of Partnership

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[5] Global Health Cluster (2020) *Health Cluster Guide – A Practical Handbook*