

COORDINATION

CLUSTER GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE

This section covers:

- Cluster structure overview
- Developing a Cluster ToR
- Role of the Cluster Lead Agency
- Sub-national coordination
- Strategic Advisory Groups
- Technical Working Groups (TWiGs)

CLUSTER STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

REQUIREMENTS

A CCCM Cluster should have the following in place:

- ✓ Cluster ToR
- ✓ MoUs for any cluster co-coordination arrangements
- ✓ Strategic Advisory Group, with a ToR
- ✓ ToRs for any Technical Working Groups
- ✓ ToRs for all Cluster coordination team positions (full-time staff, and focal points)
- ✓ Coordination team contacts available for partners

KEY DOCUMENT

See [CCCM Cluster Checklist in Toolkit Section 1.2 Coordination – Core functions of a Cluster.](#)

These should be put in place when first establishing a CCCM Cluster, and introduced or updated as needed if the Cluster structure changes.

TERMINOLOGY¹

- **Cluster Lead Agency (CLA)** – the UN agency with responsibility for Cluster leadership, where Clusters are formally activated, designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) upon the request of the country operations. For CCCM, UNHCR is the CLA in conflict situations and IOM in disaster situations. The CCCM Cluster is led by UNHCR and IOM together at the global level. At country level, update of the CLA may happen later in response, on discussion with the HCT. At country level, the CLA has specific responsibilities for the Cluster defined by the IASC, including acting as *Provider of Last Resort*, and is accountable for the CCCM response in country.
- **Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner** – one or more humanitarian organizations or government entities that is selected by the CLA through a consultative process to provide leadership support at national and/or sub-national level (cluster co-coordination).
- **Cluster Coordinator** – a person appointed by the CLA to coordinate the day-to-day work of the Cluster at national level, in collaboration with the Co-Coordinator, if in place
- **Information Management Officer** – a person appointed by the CLA to establish, operate, and maintain information systems for the Cluster
- **Cluster Co-Coordinator** – a person appointed by the Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner to co-coordinate the Cluster at national level, in collaboration with the Cluster Coordinator

¹ From GCCG (2023) *Country-level Cluster Terms and Definitions*, 24 March 2023

- **Sub-National Coordinator or Focal Point** – staff member identified by the CLA or Co-Coordinating Partner to coordinate the Cluster in a specific sub-national location. Other titles might be used depending on the coordination structure: e.g. Area Focal Point

DEVELOPING A CLUSTER TOR

CLUSTER TOR

Each CCCM Cluster must have a ToR (Terms of Reference) in place. Usually, this is developed when the Cluster is first activated, although may need updating later, for example when new co-coordination arrangements are introduced. It should include reference to the responsibilities and accountabilities of the Cluster Lead Agency.

The ToR should outline the objectives and responsibilities of the CCCM Cluster, including: specific objectives, leadership, responsibilities of the cluster, accountabilities, and membership. It should reflect the IASC Core Functions of a Cluster (see [Toolkit Section 1.2 Coordination – Core Functions of a Cluster](#)). It should also include commitments to localisation and the Principles of Partnership.

The following can be used to help draft a CCCM Cluster ToR:

- *Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level*, IASC (Related Resources below)
- Example Cluster ToRs (Toolkit resources below)
- Minimum commitments for cluster participation ([Toolkit Section 1.3 Cluster Membership & Participation](#))
- *Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localisation in Humanitarian Coordination*, for information on the Principles of Partnership ([Toolkit Section 9.7 Cross-cutting Issues – Localisation](#))

TOR FOR SITE MANAGEMENT AGENCIES

Where Camp/Site Management Agencies are appointed, a ToR should be developed for these responsibilities. Find guidance on drafting these ToRs in [Toolkit Section 8.1 - Types of CCCM](#).

ROLE OF THE CLUSTER LEAD AGENCY (CLA)

A **Cluster Lead Agency (CLA)** is the agency with responsibility for leadership of clusters and cluster-like mechanisms. When a cluster is formally activated at country level, the CLA is designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) upon the request of the country operation. The CCCM Cluster is co-led by UNHCR and IOM at global level. UNHCR is the IASC lead of the CCCM Cluster in conflict situations and IOM in disaster situations. At country level either UNHCR or IOM is designated as CLA according to this division of responsibility. (Exceptionally, though not recommended, both agencies may co-lead the cluster at country level.)

CLAs have defined responsibilities and accountabilities for the coordination of sectoral response through the clusters they lead. At country level, the CLA is responsible for “*facilitating a process aimed at ensuring well-coordinated and effective humanitarian response*”. The CLA’s Country Representative/Chief of Mission is accountable to the UN Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) for the Cluster’s functioning and for serving as *Provider of Last Resort*. In turn, the HC, with support of OCHA, is accountable to the UN’s Emergency Relief Coordinator for the adequacy, coherence, and effectiveness of the overall humanitarian response².

FIND OUT MORE

Read more about the responsibilities and accountabilities of a CLA in:

- [IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at Country Level](#)
- [IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response](#)

² IASC (2006) *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*

This means that at country level IOM or UNHCR as CLA are accountable for, and must support, the six core functions of the Cluster, as outlined in [Toolkit Section 1.2 Coordination – Core Functions of a CCCM Cluster](#).

The designated CLA is not expected to carry out all the necessary activities within the sector they lead, but, as well as supporting the six core functions of the Cluster, is required to commit to being the **Provider of Last Resort**. This means that “*where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as Provider of Last Resort, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan*”³.

Responsibilities of the CLA also include ensuring that the cluster has adequate resources at both national and sub-national levels (this may include staffing from a Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner). At a minimum, the CLA appoints a national-level Cluster Coordinator and Information Management Officer.

Where appropriate and possible, co-leadership of clusters with Government bodies and co-coordination with NGO partners is strongly encouraged⁴. However, when these arrangements are in place the designated CLA retains its core accountabilities and responsibilities, and these are not replaced by the Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner.⁵ See [Toolkit Section 1.5 Coordination – Shared Leadership](#).

SUB-NATIONAL COORDINATION

Sub-national or area-level coordination structures might be established for a humanitarian response in areas of particular importance where multiple humanitarian actors are responding, and when the response is very large or remote. The structure and coverage (and sometimes, terminology) of sub-national coordination will be designed based on the context and can involve more than one level. For example, a CCCM Sub-National Cluster might cover a specific region, with multiple CCCM state or area focal points within it.

Sub-national structures decentralize decision-making, improve accountability to affected populations, and can work closely with local authorities and operational partners to adapt response to the local situation. A Sub-national Coordinator should be empowered to represent the Cluster and to take appropriate decisions, but not act as a separate entity to the national Cluster.

SETTING UP AND STAFFING

- Sub-national clusters do not need to mirror the national structure – staff or focal points could be provided by the CLA, Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner, an operational CCCM partner, or government counterpart
- Sub-national coordination gives opportunities for **sharing leadership** with NGOs or local authorities, and for **localisation** of coordination functions – and this should be promoted as a good practice when sufficient resources are made available. For example, through national NGOs coordinating the cluster at sub-national level, or acting as a district focal point.
- Sub-national staff might be full- or part-time. If staff will ‘double-hat’ they must neutrally represent the cluster and not her/his agency when performing cluster functions (see below for guidance)
- A **ToR** should be developed for each position, describing the responsibilities and establishing lines of accountability and reporting/communication between the national and sub-national clusters. See [Toolkit Section 1.6 Coordination – Coordination team staffing](#) for example ToRs.
- Ensure sufficient IM as well as coordination capacity: this might require dedicated sub-national IM roles, or ensuring IM support from national level

HOW DO I ENSURE GOOD LINKS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND SUB-NATIONAL COORDINATION TEAMS?

³ IASC (2015) *IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level*

⁴ IASC (2015) *IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination at the Country Level*, p.7

⁵ GCCG (2022) *Country-level Cluster Terms and Definitions*. 24 March 2023

- ✓ Make sure there is clear agreement and understanding of the scope of sub-national clusters, including what a sub-national team should be working independently on and what issues and decisions should be brought to the national Cluster coordination team or national Cluster meeting/SAG.
- ✓ Schedule regular support calls between national and sub-national coordinators, and be available and responsive for ad-hoc support as needed. Visit sub-national hubs and partner programmes.
- ✓ Aim to foster a sense of being one team: organize regular calls bringing all coordination staff together; organize periodic visits between teams.
- ✓ Include sub-national coordinators and area focal points in national Cluster meetings.
- ✓ Share information regularly, both ways: e.g. national cluster team updates on national ICCG discussions, HCT decisions, etc; meeting minutes should be shared.
- ✓ Ensure sub-national coordination staff input to national-level planning.
- ✓ Ensure all coordination staff and focal points are well-briefed on their responsibilities and the Cluster system, especially if they are new to coordination roles. And make sure they have access to this Toolkit!

STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUPS

Each CCCM Cluster should have a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) in place. The SAG is a small group of key operational CCCM partners who provide advice and guidance to the Cluster coordination team and contribute to the development, review, and update of the Cluster's response strategy and priority work areas. If Cluster membership is limited a separate SAG might not be needed, but decisions and endorsement on Cluster strategy, priorities, and workplan should be taken by Cluster members.

A SAG should be representative of overall cluster membership, but with limited membership to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the group. It must continually promote local participation, have a balance of UN, INGO, and NNGO members, and include a government representative where possible. It is the responsibility of the Cluster Coordinator to ensure decisions of the SAG are communicated to CCCM Cluster members.

Example SAG composition:

- *Cluster Coordinator & Co-Coordinator [alternating chairing]*
- *1 government counterpart [co-chairing, if possible]*
- *1 or 2 UN agencies (including the CLA)*
- *1 or 2 international NGOs*
- *1 or 2 national NGOs*

TOOLS

See Related Resources for

- **SAG ToR template** to use
- Example SAG ToRs

The CLA (UN) and the Cluster Co-Coordinating Partner (INGO, NNGO, or government) are invited to be members of the SAG. They must be represented by a technical staff member *not* the Cluster Co-/Coordinator.

A **ToR** for the SAG must be developed and endorsed by the Cluster partners, defining responsibilities of SAG members including to the other Cluster partners. See CCCM Cluster **SAG ToR template** in Related Resources.

A transparent **election process** should be held for the SAG, allowing Cluster partners to self-nominate to stand for election, and to vote for SAG members. Each organization that is elected to the SAG should nominate one person to be a SAG member.

As part of the election process, SAG member **eligibility criteria** can be agreed with Cluster partners. For example

1. *Operational relevance in the emergency*
2. *Technical expertise*
3. *Demonstrated capacity to contribute strategically and to provide practical support*

4. Commitment to contribute consistently⁶

An example process for a SAG membership election is:

- Cluster Coordinator issues a 'Call for Expression of Interest' to all Cluster partners, usually by email, attaching the SAG ToR, any eligibility criteria for SAG members, and details of the election process
- Interested organizations submit an application, providing information on their nominated staff member, confirming they meet the eligibility criteria, and stating their interest
- The Cluster coordination team holds a transparent election process, allowing Cluster partners to vote for their preferred SAG members
- Results published by the Cluster Coordinator, with explanation on how the decision was reached, if needed.

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS

You may wish to establish Technical Working Groups (TWGs, sometimes referred to as TWiGs) under the Cluster, to work on specific technical issues or thematic areas of work. For example, to agree minimum standards or to produce guidelines and recommendations. TWGs can also be established *between* clusters, where the cluster partners want to work together on joint issues. For example, a CCCM-Shelter TWG. TWGs should be small, and focused on specific tasks, and be time-bound – i.e. should be dissolved once they have completed their task.

TOOLS

See Related Resources for

- **TWG ToR template** to use
- Example TWG ToRs

All TWGs must have a **ToR**, endorsed by the SAG. See CCCM Cluster **TWG ToR template** in Related Resources.

Members of a TWG should be individuals who have the expertise to work on the issues. The chair of a TWG might be a technical expert from a Cluster partner or sometimes one of the Cluster coordination team with relevant technical expertise. Frequent updates on the work of a TWG should be provided to Cluster partners.

It is good practice to promote participation and leadership of local and national actors in TWGs.

Related Resources

Title	Type	Language	Date
IASC Generic ToR for Cluster Leads at the Country Level	Guidance	English	2010
Country-level cluster terms and definitions, GCCG	Guidance	English	2023
Template - SAG ToR for CCCM Clusters	Template	English	2023
Template - TWG ToR for CCCM Clusters	Template	English	2023
Cluster ToR Example 1 - South Sudan	Example	English	2014
Cluster ToR Example 2 - Iraq	Example	English	2015
Cluster ToR Example 3 - RCA	Example	French	2014
Cluster ToR Sub-National Example 1 – RCA	Example	French	2022
SAG ToR Example 1 – Nigeria	Example	English	2019
SAG ToR Example 2 – Yemen	Example	English	2021
SAG ToR Example 3 – RCA	Example	French	2021
SAG ToR Example 4 – Tchad	Example	French	2022
TWG ToR Example 1 – Iraq	Example	English	2021
TWG ToR Example 2 – Yemen	Example	English	2021

⁶ IASC (2015) *IASC Reference Module on Cluster Coordination*

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](#))
- NGO Cluster Co-Coordination Manual, NRC 2013 (see [Toolkit Section 1.5 Shared leadership](#))
- [IOM Emergency Manual, Camp Coordination and Camp Management](#)
- [UNHCR Emergency Handbook, Cluster Approach](#) (IASC)
- [UNHCR Emergency Handbook, Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster](#) (IASC)
- [Health Cluster Guide – A Practical Handbook](#), WHO, 2020
- [HumanitarianResponse.Info, Cluster Approach](#)
- Inter-Agency Toolkit on Localisation in Coordination, 2022 (see [Toolkit Section 9.7 Localization](#))