6   INFORMATION SHARING, NETWORK MEETINGS, TRAVEL GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

The Microbicide Trials Network (MTN) Leadership and Operations Center (LOC University of Pittsburgh [Pitt] and FHI 360) has overall responsibility for facilitating and managing MTN's scientific agenda and research operations. Because MTN is a large, international network comprised of multiple organizations and clinical research sites (CRSs), its success depends on efficient and productive communication among its members. The MTN LOC (Pitt and FHI 360) are responsible for ensuring that processes and opportunities exist for MTN's committees, working groups and protocol teams to meet, plan and discuss shared research-related activities. Vehicles for communication include regularly scheduled conference calls, email alias lists, the MTN website and strategically planned face-to-face meetings. *Ad hoc* calls and meetings are also scheduled in response to emerging needs, such as protocol- or site-specific issues.

Unless otherwise indicated, MTN LOC (Pitt and FHI 360) staff manage logistical support for conference calls, and MTN LOC (Pitt) staff manage logistical support for face-to-face meetings. Travel guidelines for each meeting are disseminated by MTN LOC (Pitt) staff to all invited attendees. Generally, each CRS is responsible for arranging and covering the costs for CRS staff to attend an MTN-related meeting. MTN LOC (Pitt) staff handle arrangements for invited attendees not affiliated with the Network.

6.1   Meetings

The MTN LOC (Pitt) is responsible for the planning and logistics of MTN-sponsored face-to-face meetings and, in many instances, for stipulating and/or coordinating associated travel-related

arrangements. At present, no face-to-face meetings are scheduled due to the scale down of the network. If a face-to-face meeting should be scheduled, the following guidelines and procedures should be followed.

6.2   Network Meeting-Related Travel Guidelines and Procedures

All approved MTN-related travel for which the MTN LOC (Pitt) covers the costs directly and/or reimburses the traveler for allowable expenses (see Section 6.2.1 of this Manual) must follow the *MTN Travel and Reimbursement Guidelines & Procedures* unless the traveler has been informed otherwise. Staff from CTUs and CTU-affiliated CRSs and staff from other MTN organizational units for whom these guidelines do not apply, should consult their own organizational policies and procedures regarding travel and reimbursement.

The complete *MTN Travel and Reimbursement Guidelines & Procedures* are available on the MTN Website at http://www.mtnstopshiv.org/node/2655, and described in brief below.

6.2.1   Pre-Approval Requirements

MTN Leadership determines whose attendance is required at a particular MTN-sponsored meeting and whose travel and/or accommodations will be supported by the MTN LOC. The MTN LOC (Pitt) Travel Management Team notifies the designated MTN staff of the meeting and provides specific instructions concerning travel arrangements and logistics.

For travel paid for by the MTN for attendance at non-MTN sponsored meetings, staff of the MTN LOC (Pitt and FHI 360) and MTN LC, members of MTN working groups or resource committees or any other affiliated staff, must obtain prior approval from their supervisors. Approval by MTN Leadership may also be required. Verifiable proof of approval must be submitted to the MTN LOC (Pitt) Travel Management Team via Cheryl Richards, MTN LOC (Pitt) MTN Director of Operations and Fiscal (crichards@mwri.magee.edu), before any travel arrangements can be made.

6.2.2   Allowable Expenses and Per Diem Rates

Reimbursements will be made only for approved business travel and allowable expenses as determined by U.S. Government regulations and/or *MTN Travel and Reimbursement Guidelines & Procedures*. Travelers will be reimbursed for meals and incidental expenses at rates calculated in accordance with U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) guidelines for the specific city or cities where the MTN-related business is taking place. The cost of lodging should generally be within GSA's per diem rates unless pre-approved by MTN. Exceptions are made under special circumstances (for example, when a meeting is taking place at a particular hotel, for safety reasons or if the overall cost would be lower due to transportation needs from the hotel to site/meeting). All exceptions must be pre-approved by MTN in advance of travel and/or prior to incurring the expenses. Travelers may not be reimbursed for expenses that have not been pre-approved.

Staff who have incurred expenses for MTN-related business travel must complete an MTN Travel Reimbursement Memo form and provide clear documentation of all related expenses in order to be reimbursed.

- For travel within the U.S., staff must retain original, itemized receipts for all expenses. The allowable government per diem will be used as a guideline for what is a reasonable meal

amount. Meals costing more than the allowable per diem will be reimbursed only for the amount that is allowed.

- International travelers will be reimbursed the allowable government per diem to cover meal expenses and are not required to provide receipts for meals, but must retain original receipts for all other expenses, such as ground transportation, hotel accommodations or internet service.

The Travel Reimbursement Memo form must list any meals that were provided by the conference/event and/or included in the room rate (e.g., breakfast). These meals will be deducted in calculating the per diem or reimbursement to be paid. Meals purchased when a meal is already provided will be at the traveler's own expense. Travelers should consult the *MTN Travel and Reimbursement Guidelines & Procedures* for additional information about eligible and ineligible expenses. Both the guidelines and the MTN Travel Reimbursement Memo form are available on the MTN website at http://www.mtnstopshiv.org/node/2655.

The schedule of per diem rates for lodging, meals and incidental expenses for both U.S. and non-U.S. locations can be found at https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates and https://aoprals.state.gov/web920/per_diem.asp, respectively.

6.2.3 Air Travel

Only coach class fares may be purchased for travel within the United States. Because MTN is funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, air travel to foreign destinations must be made on a U.S. Carrier or Code Share Carrier per the Fly America Act. More information about the Fly America Act and exceptions that are allowed under the Act can be found at https://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps/HTML5/section_4/4.1.11_fly_america_act.htm. Any exceptions for MTN travelers must be pre-approved by the MTN LOC (Pitt) Travel Management Team via Cheryl Richards, MTN Director of Operations and Fiscal (crichards@mwri.magee.edu).

With few exceptions, only coach fares may be purchased for foreign travel. First-class and business-class seats cannot be purchased or reimbursed by the MTN.

6.3 Conference Calls

Conference calls are used extensively by MTN working groups, resource committees and protocol teams to facilitate MTN's research activities. U.S. participants can join conference calls through a toll-free number. Non-U.S. participants are connected by a teleconference operator or the coordinator of the call or, if available, by dialing an in-country, toll-free number. For those calls which are scheduled using Microsoft Teams, U.S. and non-U.S. participants can participate using the appropriate technology, where available. Because conference calls are often scheduled back-to-back, they must end promptly at their allotted times.

The MTN LOC (Pitt and FHI 360) provide a broad range of administrative support for conference calls. Support includes polling participants for scheduling purposes; preparing and/or distributing call agendas and preparatory materials; emailing reminder notices; and preparing, distributing and archiving summaries of conference calls.

6.4   Email Alias Lists

Email alias lists are used to facilitate communication among members of protocol teams, working groups, resource committees and various other groups. The MTN LOC (Pitt) is responsible for creating and maintaining these lists. A comprehensive list is available on the MTN website at https://www.mtnstopshiv.org/people/directory/email-groups. The use of a particular email alias list is limited to its members and those with administrator approval. To protect against spam and unauthorized use of email alias lists, messages that are sent by any other party are screened by the list administrator who approves or disapproves delivery. Requests for new email alias groups, or changes to existing groups should be directed to the MTN Web Team at mtnweb@mtnstopshiv.org.

6.5   MTN Website

The URL for the MTN website is http://www.mtnstopshiv.org. The MTN website provides a wide range of information and documents, and is compatible with all major browsers, including Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Safari, Firefox and Mozilla. The general philosophy governing the design, maintenance and content of the MTN website is to provide a resource that contains useful and up-to-date information about the MTN organization and its studies and accommodates various internet connections and software and hardware limitations across MTN organizations.

The design and maintenance of the MTN website is the responsibility of the MTN LOC (Pitt), which also oversees its content. Most content posted on the MTN website is in the public domain. Some documents are considered private and can only be accessed by individuals with a user ID and password. New and updated information is posted regularly to ensure timely availability.

The website maintains pages for each MTN study, including current and previous versions of protocols, study-specific procedures manuals and other study-implementation materials. The website also maintains a listing of MTN-affiliated CTUs and CRSs with staff contact information.

All MTN website pages have horizontal tabs for access to the main site content. Each tab or link takes browsers to the various channels of information, and each channel provides users with access to distinct information associated with its topic. Navigation of the MTN website can be displayed via the site map found at https://www.mtnstopshiv.org/site-map.

Many of the documents available on the MTN website are in Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (also known as PDF). Adobe Reader is required to open these documents and can be downloaded free of charge from https://get.adobe.com/reader/. Several documents are also in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel format. Visitors to the website should be using Microsoft Office 2007 or higher to allow for compatible viewing and ease of download of posted documents.

Questions and comments about the website may be sent to mtnweb@mtnstopshiv.org.