



OFFLU Modus Operandi

(Formally adopted with the agreement of FAO and OIE in June 2013)

I. Background

OFFLU is a network of expertise on animal influenza established jointly in 2005 by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (hereafter the parent organizations) to support and coordinate global efforts to prevent, detect and control important influenzas in animals.

OFFLU works as a global open network of expertise encompassing the OIE and FAO Reference Centres, other diagnostic and research facilities, and world leading experts from a range of disciplines including diagnostics, classic and molecular epidemiology, virology, animal production, and vaccinology. Owing to its strong institutional links and participatory nature, it is a robust mechanism for the exchange of information within the animal health network and between human and animal health sectors. WHO participates in OFFLU activities at the human animal influenza interface, coordinated by the OFFLU liaison officer at WHO.

The Network consists of a Steering Committee, an Executive Committee, and designated focal point officers from each of the parent organizations, a Secretariat, and one or more OFFLU scientists. The relevant expertise from the OFFLU network is focused on specific issues through the formation of specialist working groups, hereafter called Technical Activities so as to differentiate them from other working groups established by the parent organizations.

It should be noted that OFFLU is not a legal entity separate from the parent organizations. Any contractual arrangements are managed through the parent organisations or with individual participating institutions.

The purpose of this document is to provide Terms of Reference for each of the functional components of OFFLU within the context of the Vision and Objectives of the OFFLU network, thereby providing a Modus Operandi for the network and its governing structures.

II. OFFLU Vision/Mission Statement/Objectives/Terms of reference

Vision:

The animal health community will provide early recognition and characterisation of emerging influenza viral strains in animal populations, and effective management of known infections, thereby better managing the risk to human health and supporting global food security, animal health and welfare, and other community benefits derived from domestic animals and wildlife.

Objectives:

- To share and offer technical advice, training and veterinary expertise to international organisations and Member Countries to assist in the prevention, diagnosis, surveillance and control of animal influenza.
- To exchange scientific data and biological materials (including virus strains) within the network, to analyse such data, and to share such information with the wider scientific community.
- To collaborate with the WHO on issues relating to the animal-human interface, including pandemic preparedness for early preparation of human vaccine.
- To highlight influenza surveillance and research needs, promote their development and co-ordination.

III. Terms of Reference of OFFLU Steering Committee

A. Purpose and Responsibilities

1. The Steering Committee (SC) is the decision making body of OFFLU and is responsible for developing OFFLU strategy, policy and endorsing programmes of work proposed by the Executive Committee. The Steering Committee reports to the Director General of OIE and to the CVO of FAO.
2. The SC appoints members of the OFFLU Executive Committee (EC).
3. The SC may identify funding needs for OFFLU activities (advised by the Executive Committee) and refer this to the parent organisations, who are responsible for budgetary management and for seeking funds.

B. Membership

1. The members of the OFFLU SC are appointed by mutual agreement between the Director General of OIE and CVO of FAO.
2. The Chair of the SC should be an independent scientist with experience in international animal health, awareness of the roles and responsibilities of OIE and FAO, and familiarity with the global influenza situation in animal species.

3. Other members of the SC shall include a designated spokesperson for OIE, a designated spokesperson for FAO, and a veterinary scientist with expertise in animal influenza.
4. The Chair and other SC members shall be appointed for three years, renewable for one further term of three years by mutual consent of the member, the OIE and FAO. Membership changes should be staggered to the extent possible so as to ensure continuity within the SC.
5. The Chair of the Executive Committee attends meetings of the SC as an observer, and to communicate issues arising from the Executive Committee.
6. At the discretion of the Chair focal point officers from FAO and OIE may attend meetings of the SC.
7. The FAO and OIE reserve the right to advise on SC membership at any time.

C. Mode of Operation

1. Decisions of the SC shall normally be by consensus, but if necessary the Chair shall have the casting vote.
2. The SC should meet at least once a year, or more often as required. Meetings may be held face to face or by tele- or video-conference.
3. The SC refers its decisions to the EC for implementation.
4. Administrative support is provided by the Secretariat.

IV. Terms of Reference for OFFLU Executive Committee

A. Purpose and Responsibilities

1. The Executive Committee (EC) is the operational body of OFFLU, guided by the OFFLU Steering Committee and supported by the OFFLU Secretariat.
2. The EC implements decisions and directions from the SC.
3. The EC shall develop and present proposals to the SC.
4. The OFFLU EC is responsible for providing regular updates about OFFLU activities to the SC.
5. The EC develops and manages OFFLU activities, aided by the Secretariat and OFFLU Scientists, including meetings, workshops, projects and conferences.
6. At the request of/ and in consultation with the SC and/or OIE and FAO the EC may develop technical opinions or positions on newly emerging issues regarding influenza in animals or at the human animal interface, to contribute to international debate. If there are political or policy implications these shall be cleared with the SC and with FAO and OIE before being made public.

7. The EC, supported by the Secretariat, disseminates information about OFFLU activities and about global trends in animal influenza. Such communications may be directed towards the scientific community, international organisations, or the wider public. Communications, including press releases, with potential political implications shall be cleared with the SC and with FAO and OIE.
8. The EC coordinates the scientific activities of the OFFLU network through the designated OFFLU scientists and Technical Activities.

B. Membership

1. The members of the OFFLU EC are appointed by the OFFLU SC by consensus.
2. The OFFLU EC comprises a Chair, two animal influenza experts (including expertise in avian and swine influenza), and the OFFLU focal point officers at OIE and FAO.
3. The Chair of the EC should be an independent scientist with experience in international animal health, awareness of the roles and responsibilities of OIE and FAO, and familiarity with the global influenza situation in animal species.
4. The Chair and other EC members other than the focal point officers from OIE and FAO shall be appointed for three years, renewable for one further term of three years by mutual consent of the member and the SC. Membership changes should be staggered to the extent possible so as to ensure continuity within the EC. For practical operational reasons OFFLU focal point officers from OIE and FAO may serve for as long as nominated by the parent organizations.
5. Ad Hoc members from different regions or with additional expertise may also be invited to participate in specific EC discussions upon decision of the SC.

C. Mode of Operation

1. The EC shall normally reach decisions by consensus; if consensus cannot be reached, the issue may be referred to the SC for resolution.
2. The EC should meet face to face at least twice a year, or more often as opportunities arise. Other meetings may be held by tele- or video-conference.
3. Routine business between meetings should be progressed through email discussions.
4. The EC should refer its decisions to the SC for endorsement.
5. The EC responds to identified technical issues that are relevant to OFFLU through specific OFFLU discussion groups ('Technical Activities') and
 - Consults with both OIE and FAO through the designated focal point officers regarding all such proposed Technical Activities prior to their establishment to ensure that the issue does not duplicate existing activities.
 - Consults with the nominated members of each Technical Activity to confirm the purpose of the activity and develop specific objectives, leading to measurable outputs, and set these to a timeframe.

- Submits the proposed Technical Activity objectives and membership to the SC for approval.
 - Monitors progress of Technical Activities. The focal point officer of the organization (OIE or FAO) which is most involved in the activity will take the lead on any given Technical Activity, including a monitoring and supervisory role and reporting to the EC. They will be assisted in this by the OFFLU secretariat and the OFFLU scientist(s), when needed.
 - Recommends closure of a Technical Activity when appropriate; normally when the issue has been resolved or for other reasons such as decreased relevance of the technical issue or lack of progress in resolving it.
6. Administrative support is provided by the Secretariat.

V. Terms of Reference for OIE and FAO focal point officers

A. Purpose and Responsibilities

1. The OFFLU focal point officers are responsible for representing the day to day interests of OIE and FAO in OFFLU activities, and representing OIE and FAO in the EC. They report to their respective organisations and the SC.
2. The focal point officers are responsible for maintaining effective communication between OIE and FAO on all OFFLU matters, including seeking approval of communication material, written guidance, and for proposed OFFLU activities from their respective organisations.
3. The focal point officers are responsible for supervising operational activities, including Technical Activities.
4. The focal point officers are responsible for supporting and supervising the OFFLU Scientist(s) and the OFFLU Secretariat.

B. Membership

The OFFLU focal point officers are designated by the Director General of OIE and the CVO of FAO.

C. Mode of Operation

1. The focal point officers shall meet by teleconference or physically at least once every two months to discuss progress with OFFLU matters and to develop ideas for proposal to the EC.
2. The focal point officers shall maintain on-going communication with leaders of Technical Activities and offer assistance and support where needed.
3. The focal point officers shall actively participate in the OFFLU EC and, when invited attend the OFFLU SC meetings.

4. The SC and the EC shall take the contributions of the focal point officers on any matter as representing the views of the parent organizations.
5. The focal point officers line manage the OFFLU scientist and secretariat, held at their respective organisations.
6. The OFFLU or designated focal point officers shall maintain contact with the WHO Liaison person on issues relating to the human animal influenza interface, and with other counterparts in external organisations and agencies as required to carry out operational duties.
7. On behalf of their organisations the focal point officers shall comment on and approve communication material, minutes of meetings, correspondence, and make day to day decisions on OFFLU related matters.
8. The OFFLU focal points, in coordination with SC and EC, should foster a sustainable future funding basis for OFFLU activities. This could include sourcing of external funding opportunities.

VI. The OFFLU Liaison at WHO

A. Purpose and responsibilities

To act as a point of contact within WHO for communication with OFFLU and to ensure that lines of communication stay open between OFFLU and WHO.

B. Membership

To be designated by WHO ADGO responsible for zoonoses and influenza.

C. Mode of Operation

1. The OFFLU liaison at WHO shall attend and contribute to OFFLU SC, EC and technical meetings as requested by OFFLU whenever possible.
2. The OFFLU liaison at WHO shall contribute to OFFLU strategic, administrative, and technical discussions as requested by OFFLU whenever possible.
3. The OFFLU liaison at WHO acts as a point of contact for urgent and routine communication with WHO, and forward actions to others in WHO as required.
4. The OFFLU liaison at WHO acts as a point of contact for OFFLU communication with the WHO Collaborating Centres and other WHO institutions or facilitates such communication through other WHO staff.
5. The OFFLU liaison at WHO shall engage in OFFLU Technical Activities and other OFFLU projects, including development of new activities, as requested by OFFLU whenever possible.

VII. Terms of Reference for OFFLU secretariat

Purpose and responsibilities

1. The OFFLU Secretariat is responsible for providing coordination and logistic services to the OFFLU SC, EC and Technical Activities, including:
 - a. Organization of teleconferences on behalf of the SC, EC or OIE/FAO with prior agreement from the SC or EC Chairs and OIE and FAO focal points on the agenda, Chair and invitees;
 - b. Preparation of OFFLU SC, EC and other OFFLU meetings as requested including letters of invitation on behalf of OIE and FAO, coordinating venue needs, and preparation of meeting materials; and
 - c. To record and circulate the minutes of OFFLU meetings or any strategic document for comment and finalization by OIE, FAO, and invited experts.
2. The OFFLU Secretariat shall assist the EC to manage OFFLU communications including:
 - a. Management of the OFFLU website:
 - i. To ensure website remains functional and relevant;
 - ii. To communicate outputs from OFFLU Technical Activities, projects, meetings, conferences and other activities as well as news items as approved by the EC;
 - iii. To consult OFFLU network members to ensure timely updates on the activities of OFFLU;
 - iv. To conduct regular/real time updates to the overall content of the OFFLU website in agreement with OIE and FAO focal points and the OFFLU SC and EC. To add new documents and remove the obsolete ones, when need arises; and
 - v. To manage the secretariat@offlu.net email system.
 - b. Drafting of an OFFLU annual progress report for approval by SC and EC before submission to FAO and OIE principles for comments/approval before further dissemination.
 - c. Drafting of press releases as requested by the SC or EC for approval and dissemination by FAO and OIE principles.
 - d. Assistance in Scientific publications.
3. The OFFLU Secretariat shall ensure that all correspondence and enquiries received by the OFFLU Committees and Secretariat are appropriately addressed by directing queries to the relevant persons or Committees, with copies sent to focal points at OIE and FAO for their knowledge, with additional follow up when needed and monitoring that the enquiry has been resolved.

4. The OFFLU Secretariat shall maintain and update relevant OFFLU databases including:
 - a. A database of OFFLU contributors and experts; and
 - b. An inventory of participation in OFFLU meetings.
5. The OFFLU Secretariat shall work with OFFLU Scientist(s) to coordinate actions, communication (teleconferences, mailing) needs for the OFFLU contribution to the WHO vaccine strain selection meetings (WHO VCM) twice yearly, and maintain relevant records of such actions.

VIII. Terms of Reference for OFFLU scientists

A. Purpose and Responsibilities

1. To support and deliver scientific activities of the OFFLU network, identified by the OFFLU EC, through interaction with relevant partners.
2. To assist the OFFLU Secretariat in coordinating network activities and developing communication material.
3. To co-manage the delivery of strategic programmes of laboratory work identified by the OFFLU EC in consultation with relevant Technical Activities.
4. To promote close interaction with OFFLU partners to encourage sharing and analysis of data within the OFFLU network and to share this with the wider scientific community including WHO. Seeking expansion of genomic databases for animal influenza viruses. This will include the review of existing genomic/genetic databases and advice on shortfalls/gaps.
5. To report regularly to SC and EC on activities.
6. To regularly review genetic databases that contain influenza virus genetic sequences and shall regularly report to the EC on services provided by sequence databases and new sequence deposition.
7. To support OFFLU Technical Activities and projects including co-ordination of OFFLU's contributions to the WHO VCM process, being flexible to provide support to the delivery of strategic programmes in timeframes required for such delivery.
8. To assist in identifying gaps and areas of duplication in research activities.
9. To prepare scientific reports on behalf of OFFLU including research data for peer-reviewed publication, presentations at scientific meetings or conferences.
10. To manage technical projects, designing and devising experimental strategies. Such projects may include managing scientific, operational and technical aspects of OFFLU's contribution to influenza sequencing and characterization initiatives.

B. Membership

1. OFFLU Scientists are technical officers with expertise and skills relevant to supporting the activities of OFFLU.
2. OFFLU Scientists are funded by either of the parent organizations (FAO or OIE) to carry out specific scientific duties related to animal influenza in support of OFFLU activities. They may be employed directly by FAO, OIE, or both organizations, employed indirectly at work station, or they may be out-stationed with one of the OFFLU partners and funded indirectly through a contract with the local organization.
3. As staff members of the parent organizations, OFFLU scientists will be selected and appointed according to the parent organization's processes and practices and assigned to OFFLU work.
4. Where an OFFLU scientist is contracted through a collaborating institution the selection and appointment processes of that agency will also apply.

C. Mode of Operation

1. OFFLU scientists will receive their line management primarily from the OFFLU focal points in the parent organizations.
2. OFFLU scientists will work closely and in a coordinated manner with other designated OFFLU Scientists.
3. OFFLU scientists will liaise on a regular basis with the OFFLU EC and provide annual written reports on OFFLU technical activities.
4. OFFLU Scientists shall regularly update the EC and OIE and FAO focal point officers on their activities. The EC, and OIE and FAO focal point officers will be consulted on any new activities to be undertaken by the OFFLU Scientists before the activity starts.
5. OFFLU scientists will maintain extensive interaction and networking with internal and external co-collaborators.
6. OFFLU Scientists shall provide relevant technical information to the OFFLU Secretariat for the annual OFFLU report.
7. Where indicated by the EC and the WHO Liaison, maintain linkages with technical counterparts working at WHO on the animal-human interface.

IX. Terms of Reference and Guidelines for OFFLU Technical Activities

A. Purpose and Responsibilities

Technical issues that are relevant to OFFLU are addressed within specific OFFLU 'Technical Activities'.

B. Membership

1. Technical Activities are initiated in response to identified needs by the EC, which will propose a named OFFLU Technical Activity with a specific purpose, a nominated leader and some proposed core experts to the SC and to OIE and FAO.
2. Each Technical Activity is led by an acknowledged expert who is an active scientist with relevant expertise. Following consultation with the leader of the Technical Activity, the EC will propose the full list of experts that will address the technical issue for OFFLU SC approval.
3. Membership of OFFLU Technical Activities will be from the OFFLU open list of experts and contributors and will provide independent technical support to OFFLU by responding to technical issues and questions relevant to the objectives of the OFFLU network.
4. Experts addressing these technical topics shall include - but not be exclusive to - expertise from OIE and FAO Reference Centers or other identified relevant Institutions. Participation shall also not be restricted to laboratory experts. Where relevant, experts from other fields and from the public health sector could be included.
5. Participation in Technical Activities shall be open and balanced and include geographical representation relevant to the issue under consideration.
6. Where the topic is relevant to the animal-human interface, representatives from WHO, or suitably qualified public health scientists shall be invited.
7. Participation in Technical Activities from commercial organisations may sometimes be beneficial. Such involvement must be carefully considered by the EC so that it does not give rise to a conflict of interest, does not lead to commercial bias in the outputs of the activity, and is aligned with parent organization policies.

C. Mode of Operation

1. The OFFLU SC shall approve all Technical Activities, including tasks, management, leadership and membership and tasks of the group, and will be advised in this by the EC.
2. The supervision of the work of all Technical Activities will be led by the OIE or FAO focal point officers. The OFFLU secretariat, in coordination with the OFFLU scientist(s) will assist OIE and/or FAO focal point officer(s) in this task, when needed. The EC shall monitor progress of all Technical Activities.

3. Where an issue has relevance to the work of an OIE Specialist Commission, the Commission is informed by the OIE focal point officer.
 4. Where relevant the Technical Activity shall have specific objectives and measurable outputs to a timeframe. Outputs may take the form of advice, recommendations, opinion or reports or scientific materials. OFFLU encourages publication of the outputs of technical activities.
 5. Discussion within the Technical Activity should remain independent. Outputs should be science-based and free from commercial or political influences. It is the responsibility of the members to ensure that this is observed. If there are concerns that commercial interests are influencing the discussion or that participants are gaining an unfair commercial advantage, the EC should be informed immediately by the Technical Activity Leader, the OIE or FAO coordinator or any member with concerns. Members of some technical activities may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and/or a declaration of interests.
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