

Coordinating Centers in Cancer Epidemiology

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Epidemiologic research commonly requires collaboration between several groups, which is challenging and costly. By managing administrative aspects and facilitating collaborative activities, coordinating centers are a tool that can offload administrative burden from investigators, freeing them up to focus on science. It is widely recognized that a good coordinating center (CC) is essential to the success of any multi-site collaborative project; yet, to date, little has been published on how to establish and run a successful CC.

A group based at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center is trying to change this by sparking discussion about the ingredients of a successful CC. In 2007, the Hutchinson Center awarded Center funds for CC activities for the Asia Cohort Consortium – a consortium of cohort-based studies in Pacific Rim economies, with approximately 50 active members representing the United States and countries across Asia. The mission of the Asia Cohort Consortium is to be a platform for cross-cohort collaborative projects and combined analysis, and to act as an incubator for new cohorts.

The CC supports these aims by focusing on collaboration development, operations management, statistical and data management, communications infrastructure and tool development. Key duties of the CC have included: producing documents including a policies & procedures manual to establish expectations, rights and responsibilities for all collaborators; guiding the development of study protocols; managing all Institutional Review Board documentation; and developing a collaborative portal for exchange and storage of information. Another key function has been to facilitate data harmonization so that data sets from more than 20 independent cohorts can be combined and analyzed as one meta-cohort.

The Asia Cohort Consortium has recently completed a very successful pilot project examining [body mass index and mortality in Asian populations](#), and continues to seek out funding opportunities to sustain CC activities. Lead author, Betsy Rolland recently received National Cancer Institute funding to continue investigating how different types of coordinating centers support multi-institutional cancer-epidemiology research projects and will draw on the experiences of other Hutchinson Center-based coordinating centers in order to help establish best practices for building and managing CCs to meet the needs of a given project.

[Rolland B, Smith BR, Potter, JD. 2011.](#) Coordinating centers in cancer epidemiology research: the Asia Cohort Consortium Coordinating Center. *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, Epub ahead of print, doi:10.1158/1055-9965.EPI-11-0391.