Setting standards in metrics management

The Metrics Champion Consortium aims to improve data collection and reporting and to make the process more cost-effective. Janna M Perkinson explains its structure and goals

The Metrics Champion Consortium (MCC) is an open, multidisciplinary, non-profit-making organisation that develops, manages and promotes worldwide industry standards to measure the performance of biotechnology and pharmaceutical service providers. It was born out of an advisory panel of biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies assembled by Covance Central Laboratory Services in 2004, in an attempt to alleviate the organisational inefficiencies and eliminate the expense and time associated with customised metric requests.

The MCC has since evolved into an independent consortium of sponsor and service provider member companies that strive to establish and promote a standard set of industry-wide performance metrics within the clinical trial arena. "The goal of the consortium is simple," says Guy Mascaro, president of MCC. "We want to improve the quality and efficiency of data collection and reporting, while at the same time reducing costs for industry members and their service providers."

As well as a board of directors and an Industry Advisory Board, the MCC includes steering committees and work groups. "The steering committees are responsible for the development and communication of metrics standards and benchmarks to the industry, as well as a metrics version-control process, and the recruitment and management of work group participants," explains Brian Schrock, chairman of the board of directors, "whereas the work groups are responsible for the 'meat' of the metrics – for the development of new metrics, including definitions, formulas and examples, units of measure, proposed frequency, and benefit statements."

The MCC recently introduced its Central Laboratory Performance Metrics (CLPM) for industry adoption, and is in the process of organising a performance metrics initiative in the area of electrocardiogram (ECG) core laboratory services. In 2007, the MCC will support initiatives in the areas of Contract Research Organisation (CRO) and imaging services.

Mission

"Our mission is to develop and support service provider performance metrics within the

Figure 1: Benefits of MCC membership

Benefits	Corporate sponsor	Corporate member	Associate member	Work group participant	Non-member
Opportunity to participate as a member of the MCC board of directors	●				
Opportunity to participate as a member of a metrics initiative steering committee	●				
Access to the separate MCC board of directors and metrics initiative steering committee areas of the website	●				
MCC Industry Advisory Board (IAB): corporate sponsors are entitled to have one representative on the IAB, which provides advice to the MCC board of directors on strategic direction	●				
Right to submit changes for consideration to the metrics control review process	●	●			
Right to be registered on the MCC website as participating in the MCC	●	●			
Access to MCC members-only area, including current MCC performance metrics and steering committee minutes for each metrics initiative	●	●	●		
Access to background and historical documentation of current MCC performance metrics	●	●	●		
Access to MCC educational and training material	●	●	●		
Reduced rates for MCC/IIR events	●	●	●		
Ability to request membership in a specific work group related to your area of interest	●	●	●		
Access to MCC work group work space, including work group-specific 'in development' performance metrics; documentation on the metrics; work group communications and meeting minutes				●	

biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry, with the intent to jointly encourage performance improvement, effectiveness, efficiency and appropriate levels of controls, as well as to reduce the costs for biotechnology and pharmaceutical sponsors and their service providers," says Mr Mascaro.

"By working as a consortium, each member contributes its personal experiences and needs toward the overall good of the industry and the development and successful adoption of standardised service provider performance metrics." He notes that the MCC works with other professional groups to encourage "maximum sharing of information with minimal duplication of efforts" and "to ensure that the interests of any individual organisation are not promoted over the overall goals of the consortium."

Released in early 2006, the CLPM was the first set of standardised service provider performance metrics developed for and introduced to the industry by the MCC. "Among our future endeavours," says Julia Amo, a member of the MCC board of directors, "is the implementation of a change-management process where CLPM will be re-evaluated – fine-tuned, rather – based on industry observations and feedback."

Members are also being recruited to participate in the development of a set of ECG performance metrics and by early 2007, recruitment will have begun for participants in the development of a set of CRO performance metrics. "We are working to ensure that a defined set of service provider performance metrics is developed for every key service area in the industry," says Mr Mascaro, "and that industry members become active participants in the metrics creation and change-management process."

Misconceptions

"There has been some concern that our service provider performance metrics will be rigid or inflexible, or that they will reduce or eliminate creativity," Mr Mascaro says, "when in fact, these metrics are being developed as a foundation to be implemented whenever applicable or wherever appropriate." Not all metrics in a given 'set' have to be used: sponsors and service providers can choose which ones will be of most benefit to them. "Our metrics are designed to change behaviours, to generate open dialogue and help identify opportunities for improvement. We want to increase learning as well as monitor process performance, to ensure sound business operations and management for sponsors and service providers alike."

Figure 2: MCC contribution structure

Company size (by number of employees)	Corporate sponsorship	Corporate membership	Associate membership
> 1,000	First year $35K, annual $10K	First year $10K, annual $10K	n/a
500-999	First year $15K, annual $5K	First year $5K, annual $5K	n/a
< 500	First year, $10K, annual $3K	First year $3K, annual $3K	n/a
Academic or non-profit-making company			First year $3K, annual $3K

Some industry service providers have expressed concern that data generated from the implementation of the MCC service provider performance metrics will be used punitively. "Although this may happen in isolated situations," says Mr Mascaro, "it is not the goal or focus of our metrics. Rather, we want to encourage open dialogue between sponsors and service providers in the development of these metrics, working toward the common goals of performance improvement, effectiveness, and efficiency, as well as appropriate levels of control."

Membership

The MCC is a non-profit-making organisation that relies on corporate sponsors and members to ensure its progress, and a certain level of funding is required for the administration of MCC functions. "Membership is open to all companies," says Ms Amo. There are currently three options for MCC membership: corporate sponsor, corporate member and associate member (see Figure 1). "Depending on your level of membership, the benefits of joining the MCC include opportunities for participation in the work groups, greater power to influence the MCC's future direction, the development and revision of standardised service provider performance metrics, and opportunities toward building and expanding partnerships between service providers and sponsors."

"We appreciate the continued support of our membership, both in terms of personnel and financial resources," says Mr Schrock, "and we rely on the advice of our board of directors, our Industry Advisory Board and our initiative-specific steering committees to ensure that our members' strategic priorities are addressed." Membership fees are determined by company size and level of membership desired (see Figure 2).

Any excess revenues generated will remain with the consortium and future member dues will be adjusted accordingly, says Mr Schrock. Membership funds pay for website development and maintenance, staff to perform core operational duties, communication expenses, supplies, limited travel expenses and insurance. All members have access to annual financial reports, accounting for all revenues and expenses.

"Our members have been impressed with the return they've seen on their investment in membership," says Mr Mascaro. "They have reported experiencing an establishment of open dialogue, a clearer definition of priorities, a combined investment in process improvement and a shared return on investment – including efficiency and cost reduction."

"We encourage industry-wide involvement in our future endeavours," says Mr Schrock, "for a balanced representation and participation in the development of the ECG and CRO Performance Metrics." Corporate or associate memberships are available to academic and not-for-profit institutions. "Or consider becoming a corporate sponsor, so you can participate in our work groups and contribute at a higher level by joining our steering committees, board of directors or Industry Advisory Board," he suggests.

Ms Amo adds: "You can also assist our goals by encouraging your partnering companies, technology providers, clinical laboratories, and service providers to contribute to the continued progress of our initiative. By working together, we can continue to achieve our strategic goals."

For more information on the MCC and membership opportunities visit www.metricschampion.org.

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