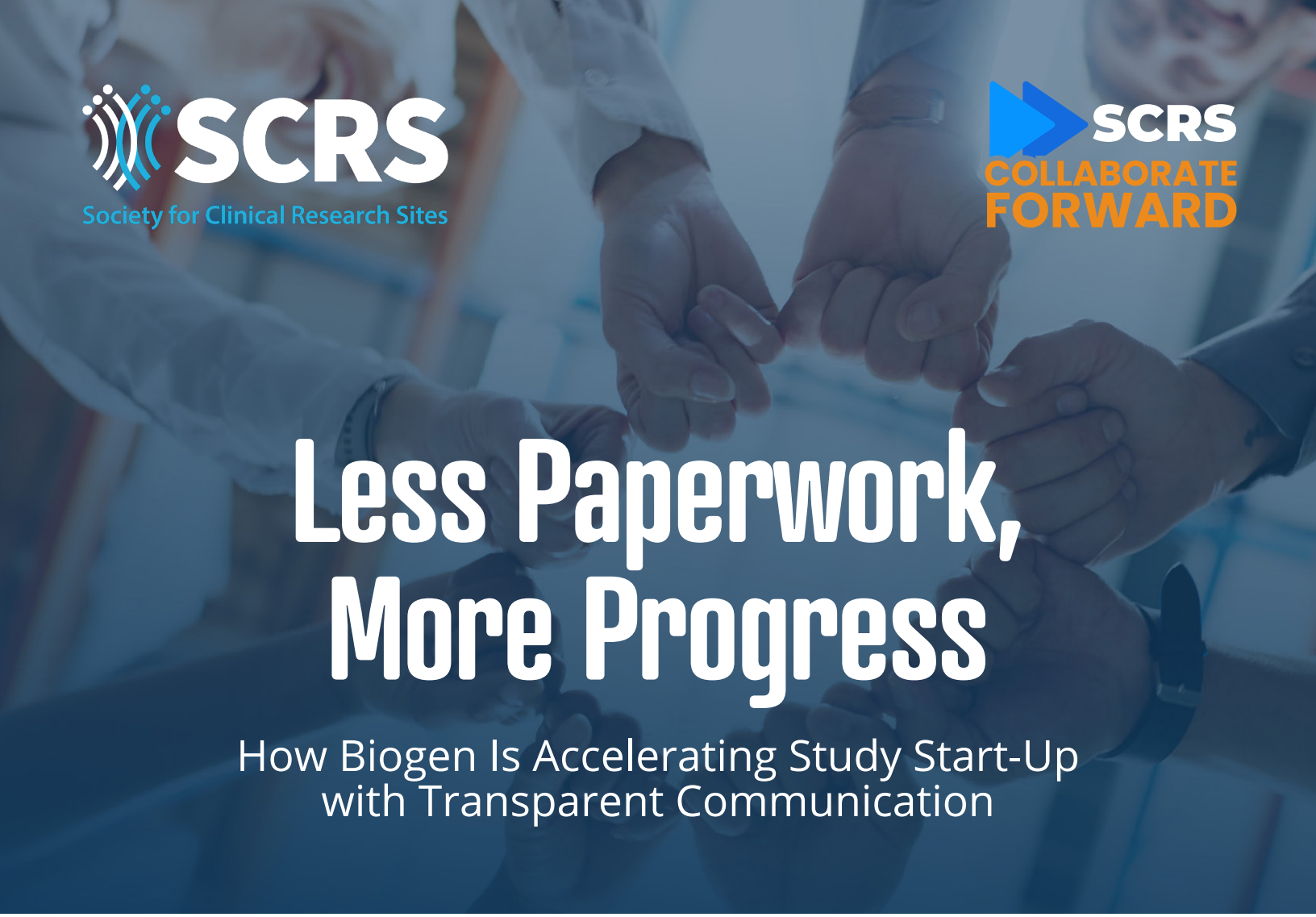

Less Paperwork, More Progress

How Biogen Is Accelerating Study Start-Up with Transparent Communication

Clinical research thrives on collaboration—but too often, inefficiencies, siloed systems, and reactive processes slow things down. That's why **Collaborate Forward** exists: to spotlight real-world examples of how clinical research stakeholders—sites, CROs, sponsors, and tech partners—can work better together.

Through a series of conversations across the industry, we're identifying key pillars of effective collaboration: **Project Culture, People & Connection, Process & Systems**, and **Progress**. Each interview brings us closer to a playbook of best practices that reduce administrative burden, improve relationships, and accelerate study start-up.

In our recent conversation with Emilio Neto, Global Head of Country & Site Operations and Kristy Brackett, Director of Site Contracts, Budgets and Financial Transparency from **Biogen**, one central theme emerged: they're tackling delays and inefficiencies head-on by communicating clearly and predictably with their sites. The result? Stronger partnerships, faster start-up, and meaningful progress.

Project Culture: Reducing Administrative Waste with Team-Based Collaboration

At the heart of Biogen's approach is a cross-functional team committed to making site engagement smoother. Emilio Neto leads a group of roughly 60 people across roles—Clinical Research Associates, Clinical Country Site Leads, and other internal stakeholders—all focused on collaborating effectively with clinical trial sites.

But this isn't an isolated function. Emilio's team connects with others across the company, including contracting specialists like Kristy Brackett work closely together with sites when contract terms are unclear or issues arise. This alignment reduces internal delays and eliminates back-and-forth that often frustrates sites and slows momentum.

With so many sites across the globe engaged in their studies, Biogen recognizes that small improvements in communication and coordination can drive outsized impact.

Process & Systems: Transparent Communication as a Strategic Lever

Biogen's process improvements stem from a simple insight: the more predictably and transparently you communicate with sites, the more smoothly everything runs.

They don't just ask for site data—they ask for site preferences. Whether a site prefers communication by phone or email, Biogen uses that information to create a system that's responsive and considerate. This input flows into an AI-powered database that helps them determine which sites are easy to work with, which ones show high potential, and which are likely to become top performers.

This model draws on three data pillars:

- Operations: including delivery timelines, protocol deviations, and time to data entry
- Quality: such as audit flags, past performance, and legacy of improvement
- Local intelligence: capturing insights from country-level site leads and site interactions

By aggregating and analyzing this information, Biogen is able to prioritize high-performing sites and support others more effectively.

In contracting, this transparency is also helping to simplify negotiations. Kristy and her team can tailor language, prioritize cash flow conversations early, and streamline the financial appendix with clear, helpful guidance. Their aim? To help sites navigate the Clinical Trial Agreement (CTA) without needing a legal dictionary.

People & Connection: Centering Sites in the Relationship

Perhaps the most striking part of Biogen's approach is how deeply they value **site relationships**—and how they nurture those connections with intentionality.

This isn't just a departmental initiative—it's **leadership-endorsed.** Site centricity is a clear organizational priority. From their perspective, sites have responded positively, not only engaging with Biogen's way of working but also showing interest in learning about the sponsor's internal constraints and requirements.

Biogen puts effort into maintaining that two-way relationship:

- **Annual Feedback Reporting:** After a 2023 site survey, Biogen created an annual feedback report for participating sites. The report included what Biogen implemented based on the feedback—and critically, what they couldn't implement yet and why. This transparency fosters trust and shows sites they're being heard.
- **Town Hall Events:** Biogen hosts collaborative, town hall-style events that include site staff, internal stakeholders, and even patients. These forums help align priorities and bring real-world patient experiences into the conversation.
- **Leadership Site Visits:** Biogen leadership makes a point of visiting sites during travel. These in-person connections help strengthen relationships and emphasize that sites are more than vendors—they're valued partners.

Progress: Accelerating Study Start-Up by Reusing Relationships

Biogen's efforts aren't just creating good will—they're delivering real results.

Sites are increasingly prioritizing Biogen-sponsored studies, in part because of the clear, consistent way Biogen communicates. When issues do arise, sites know they can escalate quickly and get clarity. As a result, Biogen is seeing increased reuse of sites across studies—an important efficiency lever for future start-up timelines.

There are still challenges—especially around establishing baseline language at the beginning of contract negotiations and interpreting KPIs in a way that accommodates site potential, not just current performance. But overall, Biogen's collaborative model is helping them move faster, with fewer administrative hurdles and stronger site engagement.

Collaborate Forward Takeaways

Biogen's experience offers practical insights for other stakeholders aiming to streamline study start-up and improve cross-functional collaboration:

- Make site communication predictable, not reactive. Let sites know what to expect, who to contact, and when. Eliminate surprises and unnecessary "chasing."
- Ask for preferences, not just data. Understanding how a site prefers to work can help your systems serve them better—and avoid delays.
- Use insights to inform strategy. Feed learnings from your site-facing teams back into other functions like protocol design and contracting.
- Close the feedback loop. When you survey sites or ask for feedback, show them how you acted on it—and explain what's still in progress.
- Invest in relationships. Whether it's visiting a site in person or simplifying a contract clause, small actions build long-term trust.

Biogen's efforts aren't just creating good will—they're delivering real results.

Moving from Connection to Acceleration

Biogen's model is proof that collaborative, site-centered practices don't just make people feel better—they work better. Their investment in transparent communication, smarter processes, and strong relationships is helping reduce waste and delays in study start-up, while also laying a foundation for better long-term partnerships.

As we continue to build the Collaborate Forward playbook, Biogen offers a compelling example of what's possible when sponsors think beyond systems and timelines—and focus on people.

Because when collaboration is done right, everyone moves faster.

The Collaborate Forward Team

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Let's keep moving forward. Together.

Learn more about Collaborate Forward
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