



# Trust, Not Just Tools

## How Fortrea is Streamlining Study Start-Up Through Stronger Site Relationships

In clinical research, operational improvements often begin with tools, templates, and timelines. However, at **Fortrea**, the driving force behind smoother study start-up is something more fundamental: **relationships**.

Through a deliberate shift in culture, structure, and leadership mindset, Fortrea is creating more trusted, responsive connections with investigative sites. The result is not only improved communication and faster resolution of challenges, but a system where feedback flows more easily, small wins add up, and site voices are central to how trials are designed and delivered.

This Collaborate Forward feature highlights Fortrea's transformation, grounded in the belief that when sites feel heard, supported, and connected, progress comes more efficiently and effectively.

### **Project Culture: Shifting From Transactional to Trusted**

Historically, sites have often hesitated to raise concerns during study start-up. Whether due to concerns about appearing difficult or the lack of a clear contact, small issues frequently went unaddressed until they became larger problems.

Fortrea recognized this challenge and responded by establishing more consistent communication pathways. With dedicated roles and a streamlined approach to engagement, sites now have a clear channel through which they can raise issues early and work collaboratively to resolve them.

This marks a significant cultural shift. Leadership—particularly CEO **Tom Pike** and Senior Vice President **Mike Clay**—have emphasized the importance of site partnerships across all levels of the company. Teams are encouraged not only to listen to sites, but to actively seek out their feedback.

A particularly valuable improvement has come from working with large site networks, which often lack a central point of contact. Fortrea addressed this by assigning dedicated liaisons, consolidating information flow, and providing coordinated support across those networks. This has enabled

more timely, consistent communication across multiple locations.

Fortrea has also embedded site feedback into its culture. Through **Site Advisory Boards (SABs)** and organization-wide **Net Promoter Score (NPS)** surveys, the company ensures that site perspectives are consistently captured and valued.

## Process and Systems: Turning Feedback Into Action

Fortrea's emphasis on feedback extends beyond external communication. Internally, the company has built structures to ensure site insights are consistently shared and acted upon.

Information gathered through site relationships is distributed across the organization through memos and newsletters. One such insight—relating to blinded drug administration—highlighted a concern about the potential for unblinding when different formulations were administered in a ward setting. Because the issue was surfaced through proactive communication, the team was able to resolve it quickly and make broader adjustments.

On a regular basis, Fortrea's clinical teams meet with line managers to review site feedback, identify trends, and implement improvements. These internal feedback loops ensure that site input is not siloed but used to inform operational decisions.

Externally, Fortrea's **Site Advisory Boards** are used to gather targeted insights across broad or therapeutic area-specific topics. In addition, the **twice-annual NPS surveys** sent to every participating site provide quantitative data that is shared company-wide. Fortrea also closes the loop by reporting back to sites on actions taken as a result of their feedback.

Looking forward, Fortrea is building a **Site Readiness Hub**—a centralized platform that provides a comprehensive overview of each site's capabilities, experience, and operational preferences. This tool will allow site navigators, project managers, and clinical research staff to access real-time site information and tailor support accordingly.

## People and Connection: Empowered Teams, Trusted Partnerships

Strong processes are only as effective as the people behind them. At Fortrea, **individual connections** are central to the organization's collaborative approach.

Relationships built through site visits, regular conversations, and proactive outreach have delivered measurable improvements. In one example, a site expressed the need for a second iPad to conduct more detailed patient assessments. Fortrea helped the site secure the additional device, resulting in improved efficiency and reduced delays in patient

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processing. It was a simple solution—but one that only happened because the relationship and open communication were already in place.

Fortrea has introduced key roles to support this approach:

- A **Site Navigator** works directly with sites through the start-up phase, helping to guide them from feasibility through activation.
- In engagements with large site networks, a **central liaison** coordinates across clinical, legal, financial, and operational contacts to ensure smooth communication and alignment.
- Fortrea teams also bring **site concerns directly to sponsors**, particularly when dealing with new partners or challenging therapeutic areas. These conversations help sponsors better understand the site landscape and prepare accordingly.

Importantly, this people-first approach is supported at the highest levels of leadership. The CEO and executive team actively encourage staff to build and maintain site relationships, reinforcing the message that **site input drives better outcomes**.

## Progress: From Quick Wins to Lasting Change

The results of Fortrea's relationship-focused model are both broad and specific.

At the macro level, close partnerships help Fortrea identify staffing changes or operational disruptions in advance. When a site coordinator is preparing to leave, for instance, Fortrea is often informed early, allowing for proactive engagement and continuity planning—even if a replacement has not yet been confirmed.

At the micro level, small improvements—like securing needed technology or clarifying a workflow—contribute to faster, more efficient study execution.

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## Collaborate Forward Takeaways

Fortrea's work demonstrates that thoughtful, consistent site engagement creates long-term value. A few core lessons include:

- **Establish clear communication paths.** Give sites a consistent contact they can trust and rely on for timely support.
- **Integrate site insights internally.** Make feedback part of operational strategy, not just relationship management.
- **Close the loop with sites.** Let them know how their feedback is being used and what changes are being made.
- **Invest in relationship roles.** Site Navigators and centralized liaisons improve alignment and reduce delays.
- **Empower leadership to listen.** Support from senior leaders ensures that feedback becomes action.

## Listening First, Moving Faster

Fortrea's journey reinforces a key insight from the **Collaborate Forward** series: in clinical research, trust accelerates progress.

By building clear communication channels, supporting

personal relationships, and embedding site feedback into both culture and operations, Fortrea is showing what it means to be a true partner to investigative sites.

Because when collaboration is rooted in respect and responsiveness, study start-up becomes not only faster, but better for all involved.

Let us continue to collaborate forward.

## Contributions from Fortrea:

- **Martin Collins**, Director, Global Site Identification
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