



Strengthening Site Partnerships

Through Trust, Transparency,
and Tailored Solutions

Merck's approach to site partnerships has evolved in response to two key drivers: the growing complexity of clinical trials and the need to foster meaningful, sustainable collaborations with sites. What began as a traditional sponsor-led relationship has transformed into a collaborative model centered on core principles—communication, flexibility, transparency, and shared values.

Through these partnerships, Merck reaffirms their commitment to bringing leading-edge science to patients with unmet medical needs. Sites have taken notice and Merck has been chosen by participating sites as the sponsor deserving of the 2025 Society for Clinical Research Sites (SCRS) **Eagle Award**, a demonstration of Merck's outstanding collaboration.

Oncology as a Catalyst for Change

Merck's rapidly expanding oncology pipeline sparked a turning point for the company's sponsor-site relationships. Trials in this space demand unique expertise, specialized staff, and highly advanced infrastructure. As the number of oncology studies grew, so did the demand to work more closely with different types of sites—from site networks to community clinics to large academic medical centers.

The growing complexity and competitive landscape prompted sponsors to rethink site collaboration. Merck recognized they had to listen closely, align priorities, and offer meaningful support to accelerate timelines, increase patient access, and reduce site burden. Oncology clinical trials marked by lengthy timelines and resource-intensive protocols served as a catalyst for change. Lessons learned in this space now inform how the company engages across therapeutic areas, with standardized tools and cross-study alignment reducing the administrative burden for sites involved in multiple programs.

Relationship-Focused Engagement at Scale

Building trust at scale requires more than process efficiency. It involves dedicated relationships. Merck works with 26,000 sites worldwide, a significant portion of which are site networks and academic medical centers. To balance breadth and depth:

- **Site Relationship Managers (SRMs)** serve as trusted partners, providing continuity, partnership, and a direct line to the sponsor, ensuring site voices are heard.
- **Clinical Operations Managers (COMs)** oversee contracts, budgets, informed consent forms, and regulatory submissions at the institutional level, reducing redundancy and keeping studies moving efficiently.
- **Clinical Research Associate Managers (CRAMs)** align with regions and institutions and gather information to anticipate site needs and tailor support.
- **Institutional Aligned CRAs** ensure continuity in monitoring oversight, centralizing drug returns, facility assessments, and work closely with the institution on unique issues.

Together, these roles form the backbone of Merck's relationship-first model, creating consistency for sites, driving operational excellence, and reinforcing the company's commitment to long-term collaboration.

Clinical Site Partnerships: An Advisory Model

Merck expanded its relationship model by creating the **Clinical Site Partnership program**, which functions like an advisory board. Structured forums bring together site leaders and Merck stakeholders for ongoing dialogue. Feedback is not only gathered but actively shared within Merck to inform protocol design, study start-up practices, and operational improvements.

This Advisory model builds on other engagement channels:

- **Annual Net Promoter Score and Site Feedback Surveys** to gauge broad sentiment and learn how we can better support sites as a sponsor.
- **Face-to-Face Institutional Meetings** that connect senior leaders at sponsor and site organizations.
- **Input in Protocol Development** to ensure studies are site- and patient-friendly before launch.

By elevating feedback into a continuous advisory framework, Merck demonstrates that sites are partners in shaping how clinical research is conducted.

Together, these roles form the backbone of Merck's relationship-first model, creating consistency for sites, driving operational excellence, and reinforcing the company's commitment to long-term collaboration.

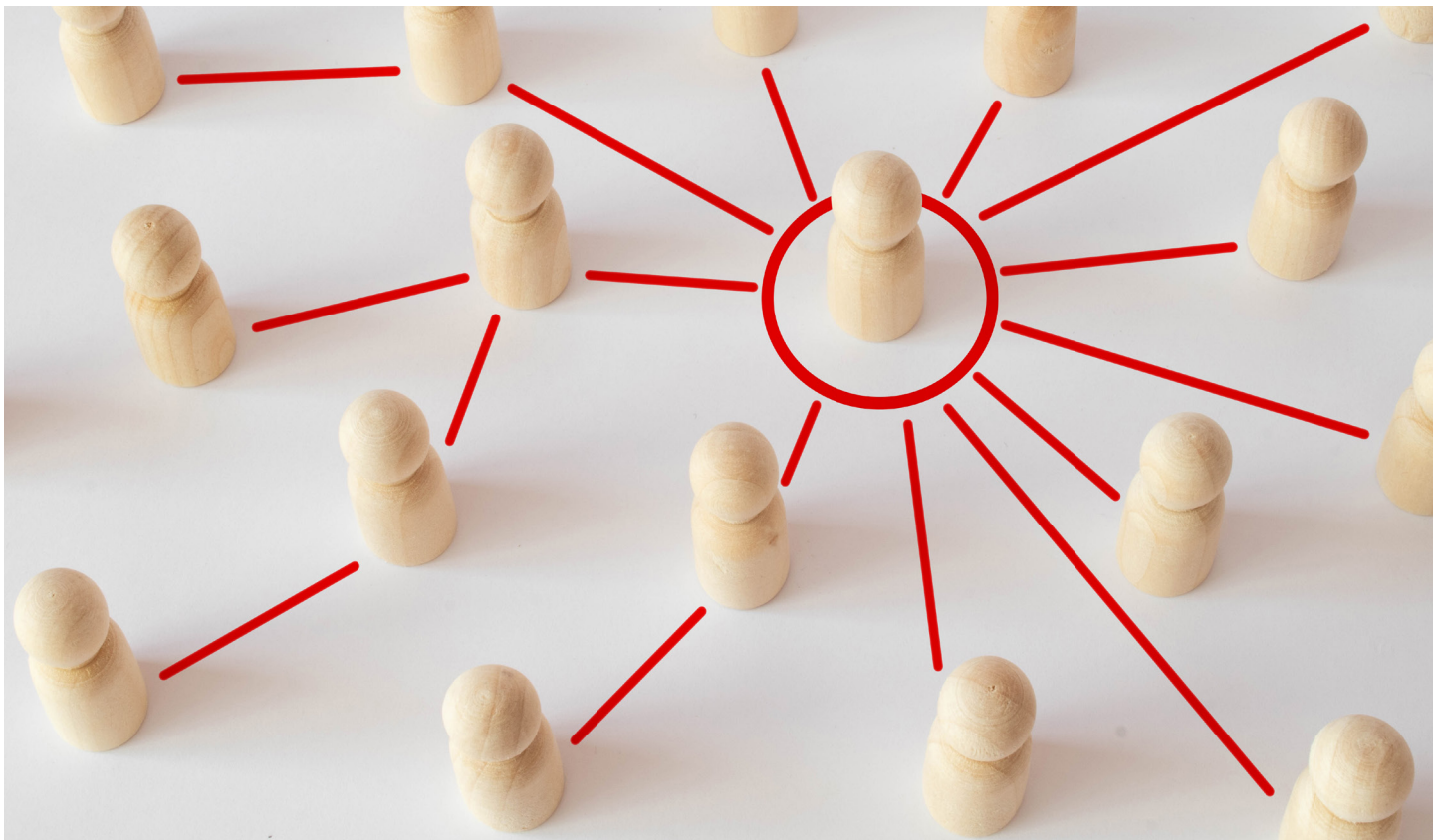
Supporting Sites and Patients

Sites have consistently expressed a preference for choice over obligation when it comes to new tools and technologies. To honor this, Merck's **Global Trial Optimization team** evaluates third-party solutions for scalability and global feasibility, providing sites with options rather than a single mandate. Merck's clinical operations teams then collaborate directly with sites to deploy tailored solutions.

Merck reinforces its relationship-first model with tangible support for site readiness and patient outreach through:

- **Training and Onboarding:** Free GCP and operations training for new sites, including guidance on quality oversight planning.
- **Site Staff Augmentation Services:** Additional support provided how and when sites need it most, including supplementing study coordinator activities, data entry, patient enrollment, and community outreach support.
- **Diversity Toolkits:** Designed to support outreach to underrepresented populations and broaden trial access.
- **Institutional Collaboration:** Regular check-ins at both the site and institution levels ensure engagement across stakeholders.

Sites can select tools that fit their workflows and infrastructure. Feedback from sites is shared with vendors, driving product improvements. This concierge-level service helps both experienced and emerging sites build capacity while supporting patients more effectively. It positions Merck as a sponsor that listens and adapts, reducing site administrative burdens instead of adding new ones.



Sharing Performance Metrics Transparently

Sites also want clarity on performance, not just their own but also how they compare to peers. Merck has embedded this transparency into its engagement model with:

- **Site Health Check Reports** reviewed with PIs and study coordinators, cover enrollment, query resolution times, data entry timelines, and protocol deviations. These are benchmarked against similar sites to provide context.
- **Institution-Level Reports** delivered quarterly, consolidate all of an institution's Merck studies to offer a big-picture view of site performance across the portfolio.

By sharing key performance indicators (KPIs) for trial success upfront and on a routine basis, the company ensures their site partners have a similar view of data that they do as a sponsor. Regular performance reviews provide actionable insights, empower sites to make improvements, and foster trust through shared accountability.

Collaborate Forward Takeaways

- **Partnership Evolution:** Merck has shifted to a collaborative approach, starting in oncology and now spanning across therapy areas.
- **Site Relationship Managers:** Dedicated SRMs build trust, keep communication open, and strengthen site confidence in Merck as a long-term partner.

- **Advisory Partnerships:** The Clinical Site Partnership program serves as an advisory group, providing feedback that shapes protocol design and study start-up.
- **Support for Sites:** Free training, staff augmentation, and regular check-ins help sites stay ready and maintain high quality.
- **Menu of Solutions:** Merck knows that one size doesn't fit all; they offer sites a range of tools and services, reinforcing their reputation as a sponsor that listens and adapts.
- **Performance Transparency:** Site Health Check and institutional reports share performance data, so sites know how they compare and where to improve

Merck's relationships with site partners power their purpose. They know when we listen, we learn; when we share, we build trust. Collaborative, sustainable partnerships strengthen research quality and accelerate access to new therapies through shared commitment and continuous improvement. Most of all, it enables Merck to get much-needed medicines efficiently to patients around the world.



The Collaborate Forward Team

A Multidisciplinary Team Dedicated to Industry Collaboration



Sean Soth

CEO, [Hi-Fidelity Group](#),
Senior Vice President,
Strategy & Global Business
Partnerships at SCRS



Marcus Maleck

Vice President, Business
Partnerships and Program
Innovation, [Hi-Fidelity Group](#),
Vice President, Global Business
Partnerships at SCRS



Brian Egan

Owner, [Brian Egan
Communications](#),
Project Lead, Collaborate
Forward

Let's keep moving forward. **Together.**

[Learn more](#) about Collaborate Forward
Have a story to share? [Share it here.](#)