

From Transactional to Transformational

How Sanofi is redefining site partnerships

Collaboration has always been central to clinical research—but true partnership requires more than good intentions. It demands a shift in mindset, a commitment to mutual respect, and the humility to listen and adapt. That's exactly what Sanofi is doing.

As part of our **Collaborate Forward** initiative, we're speaking with clinical research stakeholders across the industry—sponsors, sites, CROs, and vendors—to identify the principles that create meaningful collaboration. We've heard again and again that transparency, trust, and flexibility are what turn transactional engagements into strategic partnerships.

Recently, we spoke with team members at **Sanofi**, where a cultural transformation is underway. Their teams are working to **listen early and often**, streamline complex processes, and approach site negotiations from a perspective built on shared

goals for the benefit of patients. The result? A more balanced, responsive relationship with clinical sites.

Project Culture: Listening Early, Acting Thoughtfully

At Sanofi, the shift in culture isn't superficial—it's structural. Leadership across the organization has aligned around a simple but powerful principle: **Sites are partners, not vendors.**

This is more than a slogan. It means engaging sites much earlier in the clinical trial process—when there's still time to act on their feedback and make meaningful changes. Whether it's protocol design, technology integration, or budget planning, Sanofi's teams are intentionally involving sites before decisions are set in stone.

By doing so, they avoid downstream delays that often arise from assumptions made without site input. With so many sites in their global network, even incremental efficiencies can have a large-scale impact.

Just as we have heard in other Collaborate Forward conversations, Sanofi is treating communication and culture not as afterthoughts but as key strategic levers.

Process & Systems: Simplifying the Start-Up Landscape

Listening doesn't stop at protocol design. It continues into process evaluation. Sanofi is reevaluating its internal technologies and workflows to ensure they're truly delivering value—to both the company and the sites.

A few standout improvements include:

- **Streamlining Contract Language:** Sanofi recently revisited the language in Exhibit A of their Master Clinical Trial Agreements (MCTAs), identifying ways to simplify and remove site burden. When MCTAs are in place early, study start-up becomes a matter of manageable amendments—faster, clearer, and more consistent.
- **Providing Choice and Flexibility in Technology:** Recognizing that sites are often overwhelmed by the demands of overlapping tech systems, Sanofi doesn't force a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, they offer a menu of vendor and technology choices, giving sites the autonomy to work in ways that suit their capabilities.
- **Navigational Support:** Sites receive dynamic PDF toolkits—"site navigators"—that clearly outline available resources and who to contact, making onboarding smoother and reducing time spent searching for answers.

Crucially, these changes are driven by feedback—not guesswork. When a budget or process becomes a sticking point more than twice, Sanofi encourages teams to **pick up the phone**. A personal conversation often resolves what dozens of emails cannot.

People & Connection: Site Voice at the Center

What sets Sanofi apart is how **intentionally** they create channels for site feedback—and how seriously they take that input.

Their Site Councils bring together key opinion leaders, high-performing sites, and diverse research organizations to offer regular, structured feedback. This proactive dialogue reduces the need for constant questionnaires and gives Sanofi richer, more actionable insights.

More importantly, the feedback loop doesn't end once input is gathered. Sanofi reports back to sites:

- When feedback has driven change, they say so.
- When regulatory boundaries or internal systems prevent a request from being implemented, they **explain why**.

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Internally, Sanofi also shares site insights across departments. One example: they've established internal

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benchmarks on site payments to ensure teams honor MCTA terms. This demonstrates how the site feedback has a direct impact on internal operations.

Sanofi's efforts show that investing in **People & Connection**—with empathy and clarity—leads to deeper, more productive relationships.

Progress: Faster Start-Up, Smarter Decisions

With improved systems, clearer contracts, and transparent communication, Sanofi is seeing real progress:

- Sites with active MCTAs are able to start up more quickly, improving activation timelines across the board.
- When only a few sites express interest in a protocol, Sanofi uses that feedback as a prompt to **reevaluate and adapt**, rather than push forward with a misaligned plan.
- Their data systems can now identify top-performing sites while staying flexible enough to factor in nuanced, local intelligence.

Ultimately, Sanofi's cultural and operational shifts are enabling more responsive, collaborative decision-making—and helping trials get off the ground faster.

Collaborate Forward Takeaways

Sanofi's story offers valuable insights for any organization looking to build better site relationships and improve study start-up:

- **Engage early.** Feedback is most useful when there's still time to act on it. Build site input into early feasibility and protocol development.
- **Simplify wherever possible.** From budgets to MCTAs to technology, reduce friction points that add time and confusion.
- **Offer flexibility.** Sites vary widely in capacity and structure—empower them with options, not mandates.
- **Close the feedback loop.** If something can't be implemented, explain why. Trust is built on clarity, not just consensus.
- **Listen like you mean it.** Create formal and informal spaces where sites can share insights—and make sure those insights drive change.



Shifting Culture, Strengthening Partnership

Sanofi's approach reflects a broader trend we've seen throughout the **Collaborate Forward** conversations: when sponsors lead with humility, curiosity, and a commitment to fairness, sites respond in kind.

By listening early, providing real opportunities for input, and negotiating from a shared perspective, Sanofi is proving that a culture shift isn't just possible—it's practical.

Collaboration isn't a checkbox—it's a continuous commitment. And when it's done well, it accelerates progress not just for companies, but for the patients we all serve.

Let's keep moving forward. Together.

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