SWISS TRANSPLANT COHORT STUDY

GUIDELINES AND OPERATIONAL RULES FOR SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS

I. Introduction

The Swiss Transplant Cohort Study (STCS) welcomes all types of research projects related to transplantation. All projects must be submitted to review by the Scientific Committee (SC) of the STCS. While every scientist is invited to submit research projects, proposals must involve at least one STCS investigator. The goal of the STCS is to foster studies involving more than one center. An STCS investigator is defined as either member of one of the STCS bodies or working groups. Projects that address important research questions in the area of organ transplantation, and projects strengthening the collaborative research within the STCS (e.g. involving all centers of a given program), national or international networks are more likely to be approved.

II. Submission of a research project

1. General principles

Any research project that plans to use data generated within the STCS has to be submitted to the Scientific Committee (SC) for approval prior to access to the data.

Open access is granted to data generated within the STCS by the own center and transplant program to the respective transplant program for internal use.

Any STCS research project shall comply with ethical principles and legislation. Ethical committee procedures according to HFG/ HFV have to be followed. Upon acceptance by the Scientific Committee, each STCS project must be submitted to the lead ethics committee and requires approval before the start of the project. To obtain access to data and samples, the approval has to be submitted to the SC chairman (sc.stcs@usz.ch).

Specific funding rules apply for the different types of projects. Project types may include:

- Nested projects that make use of preexisting STCS data/ infrastructure with or without samples
- Nested projects that make use of the STCS data/ infrastructure but require collection of additional data with or without samples.
- Investigational trials that make use of STCS data/ infrastructure
- Request for international collaboration

For international collaborations, nested projects planned as master's or doctoral theses and for monocentric studies a simplified evaluation procedure may apply.

2. Who can submit

Every scientist who wants to conduct a research project related to transplant recipients included in the STCS is welcome to submit a proposal to the SC, in accordance with the principles mentioned above. In case of two competing projects the SC will invite both parties to propose a joint project. If no agreement can be reached and both projects are of equal scientific value, researchers who are formally involved and actively participate in the STCS will be favored.

3. Deadline and addresses

Letters of intent can be submitted without deadlines, but there are four cut-off dates per year. Full proposals have to be submitted according to the STCS deadlines. Deadlines, cut-off dates and dates of SC meetings are published on the STCS webpage (www.stcs.ch).

All proposals need to be submitted electronically, by use of the STCS application template to the designated email address of the STCS for project submission: sc.stcs@usz.ch

4. Application procedure

The application procedure consists of two steps:

Letter of Intent (max. 2 pages)

Full Proposal

At each step, the SC will get back to the investigators in order to avoid unnecessary efforts if a project is not deemed to be worth pursuing or if coordination with other projects is necessary.

4.1. Letter of Intent

A letter of intent is required before submission of a full proposal and informs the SC about a plan for a scientific project. Letters of intent are to be sent electronically in word format to the SC Chairmans office (sc.stcs@usz.ch) who will send it to all members of the SC and to the Board of Representatives (BOR). They will give their feedback to the SC Chairman. The SC Chairman will provide a statement including the comments by the SC members and the BOR members, whether the project should be submitted as a full proposal, and which points need specific attention. Invitation to submit a full proposal does not imply acceptance of the full proposal.

If the project is submitted for an international collaboration or as a Master's or Doctoral thesis (cf. 5.1.), no letter of intent is necessary.

The letter of intent will include a short general description of the research question, the rationale, the needed resources and where funding will be applied for. Minimum requirements include:

- A short introduction with 1-5 key references
- The study objectives and methods
- The study design, list of participating centers, requirements for data/samples
- A preliminary budget and funding
- Max. 2 pages

4.2. Full Proposal

The detailed description of the study should concisely present all the information necessary to permit a complete assessment of the proposal. Proposals are to be submitted to sc.stcs@usz.ch using the STCS template form in word format (www.stcs.ch). In general, proposals should consist of 10 pages. The following information is required:

All investigators of each center involved have to be named in the proposal. Investigators must consent to take the role assigned in the project and to participate actively in the submitted proposal (including the responsibility for conducting the local site part, e.g. CRF). They must have seen and approved the proposal. Named investigators will be acknowledged accordingly at time of publication (cf. 8.1.).

The principle investigator (PI) is responsible for the submission and implementation of the project. Additionally, there must be a designated responsible investigator (RI) for each project. The RI must be an STCS investigator, ultimately responsible for administration, finances, scientific report. If the PI is an STCS investigator, he or she can act as RI as well.

A checklist for the submission of a full proposal is available on www.stcs.ch and must be attached to the proposal.

A full proposal consists of:

- Summary (structured, one page)
- Background
- Study Aims
- Study Design
- Lay summary (max 120 words) for publication on STCS website as well as for potential patient involvement
- Checklist
- Research Plan (max 10 pages)
    - Description of state of research in the field, mentioning the most important publications written by other authors.
    - For each applicant, elaboration on the research fields, referring to the most important publications.
    - Objectives and goal; methods of investigation; the available data; the data to be collected (if applicable); data analysis with sample size analysis or power analysis.
    - The exact type and amount of STCS samples needed.
    - Timetable and milestones of the project.

- Significance of the planned research for the scientific community and eventual potential users.
- Study budget: Expected costs; necessary infrastructure; manpower available; other funds applied for or already available.
- Dissemination plan, including transfer of results to patients (publication, theses, conferences, etc.).
- Other information: e.g. status of ethical approval
- References
- Attachments: Checklist; Covering letter; CVs, CRF (if applicable), informed consent (if applicable), written confirmation of each center involved.

4.3. Participation of centers

Study sites confirmation

The study center representative confirms the willingness to actively support the study locally. In particular, the study center representative agrees to fill in or ensure infrastructure for an external person to complete a CRF if applicable. Confirmation must be in writing (email ok) and attached to the full proposal.

5. Evaluation and decision process

The SC evaluates all submitted projects. There will be 2-4 SC meetings per calendar year. At least two SC meetings should be held two months before the respective SNSF submission deadlines. Deadlines for submission of full STCS proposals are at least six weeks before the SC meetings and published on the STCS website. Proposals are submitted to the Chairman of the SC. He will send each proposal to two members of the SC for review, as well as to a statistics expert for statistical review. The experts review the project and send a written structured comment to the Chairman of the SC within due delay. Experts should rate and comment on the scientific content, relevance and suitability of proposed methods and the budget of the projects and should identify eventual overlap with ongoing projects. All project proposals including reviews will be distributed electronically to all members of the SC timely before the SC meeting.

Projects will be presented at the SC meetings by the experts, followed by an open discussion of the SC panel. Review comments will be forwarded to the principle investigator within seven days from the SC meeting.

The PI will be routinely invited to the SC meeting to defend the proposal. If the PI or RI is a member of the SC, he/she can be present to support the proposal.

The following decisions can be taken:

Approval of project

Approval with minor revision

Revision

Rejection

The decision requires the approval of a simple majority of votes of the members of the SC attending the meeting.

Whenever new datasets or samples are needed, all directly involved transplant programs, represented by their SC member, must approve the project.

The SC Chairman may request a secret vote if the opinions among the members diverge considerably.

The EO may request reevaluation of the approval by the SC in the case of potential conflict of interest or problems between centers, or if the project is against the principal rules of the SNSF or of the STCS, or standards of good research.

The PI will be informed about the decision within one week following the SC meeting.

Applicants, who do not agree with the rejection of a project can appeal to the EO within one month. The EO and the Chairman of the SC will then take a final decision.

5.1. Simplified evaluation procedures

For international collaborations, Master's or Doctoral theses and monocentric studies simplified evaluation procedures may apply if the following conditions are met:

Request for international collaborations

If i) only clinical data are requested, (ii) no samples are used, (iii) in the case that a CRF is required, all members of the working group are in favour and commit to collect the data (no additional workload outside of a specific working group).

A full proposal is submitted to the SC Chair respecting the regular deadlines. He will send the proposal to the SC without previous expert review as part of the regular agenda. The SC will take a decision. The SC meeting has the final decision and can request a regular review process.

Master/ Doctoral thesis

Full proposals for master's or doctoral theses can be submitted regardless of the published deadlines on the condition that (i) the supervisor is an STCS investigator, (ii) no samples are used, (iii) if there is a working group, it has given consent, (iv) if data from more than one center is used, each center has to approve its use. If all conditions are fulfilled, then approval by presidential decision is possible. The chairman may require a decision by the board.

CRF are the thesis author's responsibility. The full proposal has to be labelled as Master's or doctoral thesis and submitted to the SC Chairman.

Monocentric studies

A letter of intent clearly labelled as monocentric study has to be submitted respecting the regular deadlines. After invitation to submit a full proposal, this can be submitted regardless of the published deadlines, (i) if the PI is an STCS investigator, (ii) if no samples are used and (iii) if there is a working group, it has given consent. Given all

conditions apply, then presidential decision is possible. The chairman may require a decision by the board.

5.2. Rules for revision

If a proposal **is accepted with minor revisions**, a point-to-point reply, and an amended protocol is sent to the Chairman of the SC, who will re-submit them to the reviewers. If the reviewers and the SC Chair approve of the revision, the PI is informed immediately, and the project can be initiated.

Investigators invited by the SC to submit a **revised protocol** must provide a detailed point-to-point reply in the respective section of the STCS submission form, mark all changes in the revised protocol and resubmit electronically. For resubmission, the published **full proposal deadlines apply**. Revised protocols are then made available to the experts and the SC for re-evaluation and final decision at the SC meeting following the chosen deadline.

6. Progress report

A progress report is due18 months after study initiation. It should contain:

- Quantitative figures if appropriate
- Information on use of funding (template available on www.stcs.ch)
- Information on data and sample requests
- Qualitative information on objectives achieved, if applicable (presentations, preparation of publications etc.)
- Explanation of delay in the initial time schedule including a revised time schedule if necessary (termination, manuscript, publication).

The progress report is due 18 months after receiving the approval letter.

7. Authorship and publication

7.1. General issues

Authorship requires a relevant contribution to the study and manuscript, according to international rules and must be in accordance with the 2013 recommendations of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (http://www.swiss-academies.ch/en/index/Schwerpunkte/Wissenschaftliche-Integritaet.html.) The STCS guidelines are based on the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) ("Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication"), last update in December 2018, and published online: http://www.icmje.org/.

Authorship in an STCS project includes active participation in the design and writing of the full proposal. The PI is responsible for a complete list of collaborators at time of

proposal submission and ensures that all co-authors have seen, revised and approved the proposal.

The last author is considered the senior author.

7.2. STCS Authorship rules

- **The order and names must be defined at the time of submission of a full proposal**
  - New authors are added only exceptionally
  - The addition has to be notified to the SC Chairman as soon as possible
- **One representative per center**
  - Except if several people from a given center are directly and actively involved in the specific project
- **First and last author** are **the initiators** of the project and clearly designated to in the full proposal
- **Order of other co-authors – points to consider**
  - Active involvement in the project of one center exceeding the involvement of the other centers
  - Priority may be given to the representative of a given center if there is a specific interest of that center in the topic of research
  - Otherwise by alphabetic order
- The wording to be used in all publications is **"XYZ, and the Swiss Transplant Cohort Study"**
  - Exceptions to this rule are considered upon request to the SC
- **Footnote members**
  - Names of people with a particularly intense involvement in the structure and activities must be listed in each manuscript as group co-authors of the paper and linked to the "STCS" so that they are identified in a Pubmed search. These names include:
    The active members of the EO
    The active SNSF co-investigators
    The active members of the BOR
    The active members of the SC
    The active heads of the local data center
    The central data management
    The current list of names is available through the SC Chaiman's offce (sc.stcs@usz.ch)

In case of disagreement regarding authorship or co-authorship, the matter will be referred to the SC Chairman, who will consult the EO, and if necessary, the BOR for a decision.

7.3. Publication

Prior to publication, it is mandatory that any manuscript and conference abstract using data originating from the STCS are submitted to the Chairman of the SC for formal approval. Refusal for publication can be given if rules of the STCS access to data and/or publication policies have not been adequately followed.

For all publications using data from the STCS adequate acknowledgement of all funding sources is mandatory and should be mentioned as follows:

The Swiss Transplant Cohort Study is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (http://www.snf.ch), Unimedsuisse (https://www.unimedsuisse.ch) and the Transplant Centers.

Investigators involved in international collaborative research using data of the STCS must ensure that the contribution of the STCS is appropriately reflected either by co-authorships or by listing the STCS in the study appendix. This has to be clearly established and mentioned at the time the full proposal is submitted (cf. 4.2.).

7.4. Open Access Policy

The SNSF requires that STCS publications are made available in an open access (OA) publication or database either by the green or gold road (www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open-access/).

7.5. Final report

Any accepted manuscript must be sent by e-mail by the project responsible to the Chair of the SC with the internal project number as well as a lay summary for online publication. In case no publication results of a project, a final report on the study findings and justification for non-publication has to be handed in.

All primary data plus program code have to transferred to the data center for storing (cf. 8.6.)

Sample procedures are regulated by separate guidelines issued by the laboratory working group. The “sample feed back questionnaire” must be sent to sc.stcs@usz.ch.

7.6. Sharing of data

Data resulting from an STCS project must be shared with other researchers upon request in a collaborative effort. After termination of the project the raw data have to be kept. The applicable procedure is determined by the data center.

Ratification of these guidelines

The initial version of the ‘Guidelines and Operational Rules for Scientific Projects’ has been approved by the members of the Scientific Committee on November 5th 2008.

A revised version has been approved 06.04.2011.

On December 4th, 2013, the authorship rules have been amended and approved by the Scientific Committee.

Revised and approved by EO, BOR and SC on 18.06.2014.

Amended, revised and approved by EO, BOR and SC on 13.11.2019.

Revised and approved by EO on 28.04.2021.