Introduction

Congratulations! You are about to embark on a wonderful experience, the opportunity to lead an ONS Special Interest Group. Whether your SIG is large or small, or somewhere in between, leading your SIG and getting more involved with ONS will provide new opportunities and lots of fun!

This guide is designed to assist new SIG coordinators in becoming more comfortable and successful in their roles. Since ONS already has a formalized job description (see details in first section), the actual duties of the SIG Coordinator will not be covered. However, there are many details and helpful hints that are not explained or written down formally from ONS. This guide includes the personal experiences of current and past coordinators (which may be different from yours) in the hope that you will learn from our experiences.

The original SIG Coordinator Guide was written by Seth Eisenberg, who was the 2006-2008 Chemotherapy SIG Coordinator, as well as the 2008-2009 SIG Council Chairperson. It was initially updated by the 2008-2009 SIG Leadership Transition Resources Workgroup, with input from the 2008-2009 SIG Council.

It is our hope that this document will be updated at the end of each calendar year by current SIG coordinators. After updating, the SIG Leadership Transition Resources Workgroup recommends that the revised guide be sent electronically to the new coordinators and coordinator-elects before the ONS Congress, and posted to the SIG Council Virtual Community.

In addition to reviewing this guide and the ONS electronic resources, you should also participate in the ONS SIG Leadership Workshop. This workshop takes place during the ONS Leadership Weekend in July in Pittsburgh, PA.

Your SIG’s ex-officio and past coordinators may be willing to mentor you in your new role. Don’t hesitate to ask them for help. Sometimes past leaders may be reluctant to share uninvited advice due to a concern that they may be stifling your leadership plans. If this is the case and you welcome their guidance, reassure your SIG past leaders that you welcome their mentoring and that it will help you to become a stronger leader.

I. ONS Resources

A. ONS Staff

Your circle of friends at ONS is relatively small, and knowing who to contact will save you time. Carol Demarco will be your primary contact for most things SIG-related. You can usually go to her first, and she is quick to respond.

Carol DeMarco, Membership/Leadership Specialist
cdemarco@ons.org
412-859-6230
Other very important people (as of this date) include:

Brian Theil, CAE, Director of Membership & Component Relations
btheil@ons.org
412-859-6244

Diane Scheuring, MBA, CAE, CVA, CMP, Manager of Member Services
dscheuring@ons.org
412-859-6256

Jenny Shinsky (virtual community and technology)
JShinsky@ons.org
412-859-6320

You can also reach any of the ONS Membership & Component Relations Department staff and others at ONS through the ONS toll free number of **866-257-4ONS**.

B. ONS Organization
You should be somewhat familiar with general ONS “rules” and “guidelines”, and at the very least, know where to find the wealth of information they have to offer. Some of the reference materials are not easy to find in a hurry, so you may want to download them and store them in folders on your computer. Review the ONS mission, vision core values and by-laws here [http://www.ons.org/about](http://www.ons.org/about)

C. ONS Electronic SIG Resources
There are two main sites for electronic resources regarding your leadership role within the SIG.

The SIG Virtual Community


Here you will find all of ONS’s electronic resources needed for managing your SIG. In addition to being able to locate your SIG and other SIGs from this webpage, you can access vital information that you will need to know. Take time to review these materials before your first Congress as the SIG leader. You will also want to inform others who help you manage your SIG about the information on this site. For example, your SIG’s virtual community coordinator should know that the Virtual Community Operations Manuel can be found on this site. Also, tell your newsletter team of the wealth of information here about the newsletter, including a guide, transmittal form, publishing schedule, and writing style guide. As a SIG coordinator, it is your job to keep your SIG informed and functional.

Here are some of our favorites....

SIG Policy and Procedure Manual
Powerpoint presentation from the past SIG coordinators workshops
SIG Archives and Records Management Guidelines
SIG Proposed Record Keeping/Archives Scheme
SIG Coordinator Calendar
ONS Project Team Application
SIG Strategic Plan Template
SIG Annual Report Form
SIG Election Information
Step-by-Step Guide for Publishing a SIG Newsletter
Oncology Publishing Division Style Guide
SIG Online Newsletter Transmittal Sheet
SIG Newsletter Publication Schedule
SIG Newsletter Best Article Award Form
Virtual Community Operations Manual

II. Get Organized!

One thing we have learned above everything else is the need to be organized. If this comes naturally to you, then you’re already ahead of the game. Over your 2 year term, you will accumulate a huge amount of email and attachments, and a few paper-based documents. Decide how you would like to set up your systems. Since being the SIG Coordinator is NOT your full-time paying job, you’ll usually have to work it into your normal day job (or during your time off). Many of the suggestions in this document are designed to help you find things or remember things. Here is what has worked for some. If this does not work for you feel free to adapt or ignore these recommendations.

A. Email
Set up folders within Outlook (or whatever email client you will be using). You’ll want folders for various ONS and SIG-related activities. It is recommended to save almost everything because you never know when you’ll need to go back and re-read something that an ONS staff or SIG member will have sent you. Folders can be set up for general ONS information, and specific sub-folders for SIG-related topics. And if you’re adept at using Microsoft Outlook, you may decide to create email rules that automatically moves mail from specific senders to specific folders. The advantage is that it makes it easier to find mail from someone, and it helps prevent important email from getting buried with other email or lost in your spam filter.

You will also want to make sure your Outlook Contacts (or email address book) has all of the important email addresses. This prevents you from having to reply to a message that has nothing to do with your subject, or cutting and pasting addresses from old emails. (As an aside, you’ll want to try to keep your subjects pertinent to your discussion, which makes it easier to locate later.) You may also want to create Distribution Lists so that if you email a group of key individuals, (e.g., your editor, co-editor and website administrator) they will always be included. Instructions to create Distribution lists can be found in the Microsoft Office Help system or online.
If using Outlook, flag important email for future “follow-up.” You can also set due-dates for when to follow up. This will assist in getting back to someone regarding a question, or just making sure things don’t slip through the cracks—which can easily happen. This feature can be a life-saver.

**B. Document Folders**

Create folders on your computer for storing attachments (e.g., PDFs or Word documents). It may not be practical to keep all of your attached files still connected to their original emails because the email subject line may not accurately reflect the document(s), and having too many large attachments could actually crash your email system. As an example, create folders for the following document types:

- General ONS
- Coordinator-specific
- Newsletter
- Reports
- Survey results
- Congress activities
- Communiqués
- Conference call minutes
- Projects (e.g., practice survey)

There are a number of things you will need to include in your required Annual Reports, and saving them in your folders will be useful. Important information for these reports includes (but is not limited to):

- Quarterly statistics (shows SIG growth or decline)
- A record of SIG members who have participated in ONS-related activities, such as being published, presenting at Congress of IOL, etc.
- Number of communiqués you have sent for the prior year

**C. Use a calendar**

If you use Outlook, you’ll find that the calendar is a perfect way to schedule deadlines. Outlook allows for setting reminders which will alert you to important deadlines (e.g., “SIG Annual Report is due in 4 weeks,” or “follow up with Editor”). If you don’t use Outlook, consider creating a calendar in Word (or some other program). Unfortunately, this method will not provide you with reminders.

**III. Allocate time**

Your ONS position is voluntary. More than likely, you will have a regular job that takes the bulk of your time. The SIG is able to function without daily input from the Coordinator, so it may be easy to put your SIG responsibilities on the back burner while dealing with the hectic day to day realities of your life. **Don’t do it!**

Plan to take a few minutes each day just to “see where things are.” If you are not able to set aside a little time each day, plan to allocate time on a weekly basis. Certain responsibilities will
require more time. Budget for it the same way you would budget for a large purchase. Keeping your finger on the pulse of the SIG will prevent you from having to perform CPR after neglecting your responsibilities for several weeks at a time. Some days (or weeks) there will be little to do, or little to follow up on. And at times, you will need to spend an hour or two working on a SIG-related issue, such as drafting Communiqués (see below), or completing reports. (It’s a bit like gardening: you’re better off pulling a couple of weeds each week instead of having to plow your yard every month.)

IV. Communicate

No matter if your SIG is big or small; your leadership group will most likely be small. The good news is that you won’t need to communicate with large numbers of nurses or ONS staff, (aside from sending general Communiqués to the SIG membership). Keep your Coordinator-elect, Editor, Co-editor, Virtual Community Administrator, Ex-Officio, and all others who help you to manage your SIG informed. They will provide guidance, opinions and moral support. You may also have nurses involved with workgroups or projects. Keeping those nurses up to date with regular emails will help make them feel a part of the SIG, and will prevent problems before they might occur. Regular email also keeps up momentum, which can easily slip away as people get busy with other aspects of their life.

A. Email

Email can sometimes be a curse, but it is extremely useful in touching base with your resources. Your email recipients can respond to you when they have time (unlike a phone call). And there is no worry about time zone issues. Even if you are not computer savvy, you will want to make email your new best friend.

At some point you will receive email from the SIG members. You are listed as a contact person for the SIG. This does not mean you are the expert in all things SIG, but it personalizes the membership by showing there is indeed someone in charge of the SIG who cares about the SIG and its members and is willing to spend 5 minutes responding to that nurse’s query. Networking and building relationships is your job! Again, don’t worry if you do not have the answer. You can invite the SIG member to post their question to your SIG’s Virtual Community. You have contacts within your SIG, facility or community that may be able to help answer questions on occasion, or you may simply refer the nurse to a publication. If you receive the same or similar question more than once it may be a good topic to address in an upcoming newsletter, communiqué, or virtual community posting.

B. Conference Calls

ONS requires that you have conference calls with your leadership team. These take a bit of coordinating to accomplish, as your leadership team will undoubtedly come from different time zones. Schedule them on your calendar so that you don’t realize at the end of the year that you didn’t have any. Prepare a short agenda, and once your date/time has been agreed upon, email Carol Demarco who will send you the information for arranging the call. Try to limit your conference call to an hour or less. Start on time to be respectful of your colleagues’ time. If people join the call late, you can provide them with a brief summary of a few sentences, and
tell them where you are currently at on the agenda. Stick to the agenda. You may find that the conference call participants may get off schedule. Try to stick to the agenda. If a new topic comes up that needs more discussion, you may want to advise that, if time permits the discussion can be resumed after the agenda business has been completed, or ask for agreement for follow-up through email or another call.

Be sure to take minutes and then email all recipients (and Carol) a copy of those minutes. You may also consider posting the conference call minutes to your SIG Virtual Community.

C. Communiqués

A SIG communiqué is probably the sharpest tool you have in your toolbox. You can send as many of them as you want; they are usually approved rapidly by ONS.

Once your communiqué is written you need to send it to the Membership/Leadership Specialist as an email attachment. If your SIG is more than 250 members allow 10 working days from the date submitted to ONS until it is sent by ONS to the SIG members.

Only SIG members who “subscribe” will receive communiqués. Like credit card offers, people will ignore them if you send too many. So make each one count! Keep them brief and succinct. Example includes reminding members about the annual meeting at Congress, SIG elections, or updates on projects.

From a Coordinator’s point of view, communiqués are more effective than the newsletters for the following reasons:

- The newsletter is only published 3-4 times a year
- There is a lag-time between submitting the newsletter and actual publication on the virtual community
- Not every SIG member “finds” the Newsletter on the virtual community or reads their email
- Newsletters are limited to 4,000 words and your editor might not have room for you

D. Newsletter

Maintaining frequent communication with your newsletter editor is paramount. Each newsletter needs to be approved by you before it can be submitted to ONS. Know when the due dates are (SIG Newsletter Publication Schedule is available on the SIG Virtual Community http://sig.vc.ons.org/). If you don’t hear from your editor about the next newsletter’s progress at least a month before the next deadline, find out how it’s going. This way you can help round up submissions prior to deadline if there is a problem. You will also need to review and respond back to the editor in a timely manner once the draft has been sent to you. Although your role does not require any editing, you must be comfortable with the content of the articles. If you are not comfortable with an article, discuss your concerns with the editor. Be sure that either you or the editor also discusses the concerns with the author. Objectively present the reasons for not including the article in the newsletter. You do have final authority.
regarding content. Remember, your newsletter represents your SIG. If it looks good, the SIG looks good. Surveys repeatedly show that members value the newsletter very highly.

Here are a few things to know about Newsletters:

SIGs are required to publish three or four newsletters each year.
A limit of 4,000 words.
Your editor is responsible for making sure the newsletter is completed and submitted on time. Since there are other SIGs with their own newsletters, ONS expects us to be on time. Make sure you know where your editor is with the next Newsletter.
If your editor is falling behind or not responding to email, call him or her. If there is a major crisis, you’re going to want to know about it well in advance, rather than the day before it is due to be submitted.

E. SIG Virtual Community
While maintaining the SIG Virtual Community (VC) is not your responsibility, you should visit it on a regular basis. After all, what’s on that page (or missing from it) reflects on the SIG (and you!). ONS will at times post things on the VC. Make it a point to go there at least weekly! You will also want to keep a close eye on the SIG discussion groups. Up until the end of 2007, ONS had the main ListServ and the SIGs had their own discussion groups. Beginning in 2008, nurses have to post their questions and issues within the SIG Virtual Communities. Bookmark this page on your computer so you can get to it quickly. You will want to check the discussions on a regular basis. Common themes may be an indication of an area you will want the SIG to focus upon. You may also want to participate in the discussions. There is validity to a communication tool when the coordinator participates in the discussions. Your role carries credibility. It also lets people know who you are, and makes you approachable (rather than just a name on a website).

V. The SIG Council
In response to concerns voiced by all of the SIGs, the ONS Board created the SIG Council in 2006. In 2010 the SIG Council was reformatted and there are currently 7 SIG ex-officio’s who are members of the Council and 1 Board liaison. The Council members represent an assigned group of the SIGs and meet every other month (conference calls/face-to-face meeting). Your SIG Council representative should be in contact with you before their calls/meetings to identify any issues or update you on any information.

VI. Running Your SIG Meetings
You will need to prepare in advance for the SIG meetings held each year at Congress. Some SIGs may have additional meetings at other ONS conferences, such as Institutes of Learning, the Advanced Practice Nursing, and the Cancer Nursing Research. Someone from the conference planning committee will let you know if your SIG is going to be invited to a conference, other than Congress.
All handouts (agenda, minutes, etc.) will need to be submitted to ONS in advance so that copies can be made. Beginning in 2008, the SIG meetings were integrated into the Congress educational content, which enabled nurses to get CNE credit for attendance. Food and drink, however, is not offered.

You will need to come up with educational content. Work with ONS if you are not sure what to present. The meeting will still need to incorporate a “business meeting” into the 90 minute time slot. You will need to upload content that may include request for audiovisual materials, biosketch, financial disclosure, objectives, outline, and powerpoint presentation by ONS specified deadlines. Here is the password protected website to upload your information and files

https://onsopcontent.ons.org/SpeakerUpload/

Here is the link for the 2009 Congress instructions

https://onsopcontent.ons.org/SpeakerUpload/Instructions/con09/con09SUStinstructions.pdf

ONS does not provide any financial support for SIG coordinators to attend Congress.

If you’re not experienced with running meetings, here are some pointers:
- Ask nurses to silence or turn off their cell phones
- Makes sure you have a volunteer to take minutes
- Stick to your agenda
- Keep the meeting on track (it’s easy to get side-tracked and run out of time)
- Be polite and professional, but firm! YOU need to lead the meeting to prevent it from becoming a free-for-all with a dozen mini-conversations
- Make note of off-topic discussions (You may wish to continue these discussions after the meeting or explore them in another venue)
- Get names and email addresses of anyone who volunteers
- Don’t let one or two individuals dominate discussion (some people may be intimidated by overly vociferous nurses)
- Allow everyone a chance to speak (with in time constraints)
- Repeat questions or comments if there isn’t a microphone for available
- Attempt to keep side-discussions to a minimum
VII. SIG Congress Posters

SIGs are encouraged to display a poster at Congress. This is a great opportunity to share with colleagues information about your SIG and to recruit new members. Each Congress may offer a different venue for the SIG posters, (2009, SIG Leaders were encouraged to be available at their posters during scheduled poster sessions; 2011, SIG had their posters displayed within the hallways of the convention center).

SIG Posters do not have a standard format. You are encouraged to display whatever you feel best represents the message that you want to share about your SIG. Some SIG posters have highlighted recent accomplishments, introduced their SIG leaders, displayed a United States map with details on where their SIG members live, recruited for projects, advertised upcoming SIG-related events and products, facilitated communication, shared photos of SIG members and activities, and encouraged membership.

SIG posters may be home-made or professionally printed. However, there is currently a limit of $50 reimbursement available for SIG posters. Note that this may change and you should consult with the ONS staff before you spend money for a poster if you are anticipating reimbursement. A professionally printed large poster usually costs more than a hundred dollars. Don't rule out a home-made poster. Use your imagination to create a visually inviting poster. SIG posters are a great way to share your SIG message with colleagues at Congress.

You may want to place some of your SIG business cards on your poster so that SIG members and potential members can contact you after Congress. Also remember to have your business cards handy when you present your SIG poster.

You may want to recruit a person or a team to take care of the Congress poster. If no one volunteers, you may want to consider doing it yourself.

VIII. Prepare for leadership succession

Your role as coordinator is for two years. As soon as you take over this position you should begin looking for your successor and also for individuals who might be willing to assume the roles of newsletter editor(s), web administrator(s) and work group leader(s). It is always better to have a plan rather than having to scramble at the last moment to fill vacancies. Keep in close contact with individuals who have been involved in some way with your SIG and ask if they might be willing to take a leadership role. If this plan does not work, you can also ask ONS for help in finding candidates. It is always best to have someone who knows about your SIG to be running it!

IX. Give thanks and praise to your team!

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Best wishes for a successful term as SIG coordinator! As your experiences grow while being a SIG coordinator, please consider adding your recommendations to this guide so that others may have a smoother transition to this new role.

(rev. 6/15/11)