



MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

STRATEGIC PLAN

October 2025

Overview

The Meaningful Engagement Committee (MEC) was created to strengthen how ICORD researchers and knowledge users (e.g., people with lived experience of spinal cord injury, community partners, health providers) work together to advance relevant and impactful research.

Purpose

Create a connected environment where researchers and knowledge users co-create, share, and implement knowledge that matters.

Mission

Lead, support, and evaluate initiatives that build engagement skills, relationships, and practices across ICORD's research and training ecosystem.

Strategic Goals

1. Strengthen Relationships and Networks
2. Build Capacity for Engagement
3. Promote and Sustain Engagement Practices

Approach

The MEC's work is principled, relational, and iterative, emphasizing shared decision-making, trust, inclusivity, and co-learning. Engagement is treated not as a one-time activity but as an ongoing process requiring reflexivity and commitment.

Structure

Management Team: Provides leadership, oversight, and accountability. Includes representatives from partner organizations, ICORD trainees, principal investigators from key research areas, ICORD Research Liaison, and co-chairs.

Learning Community: An open, inclusive network of researchers, trainees, people with lived experience, and partner organizations who help identify priorities and contribute to MEC initiatives.

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Introduction

The Meaningful Engagement Committee (MEC) of the International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries (ICORD) was established to foster meaningful engagement between researchers and knowledge users across the ICORD community.

This strategic plan outlines the committee's priorities and approach over the next year, providing a roadmap to advance engagement practices that are collaborative, principled, and impactful.

Our Origin Story

For over a decade, ICORD's members have made dedicated efforts to advance meaningful engagement in spinal cord injury (SCI) research. To meet the growing demand for more inclusive and impactful research, ICORD's Director, Dr. Brian Kwon, created the dedicated role of Associate Director of Meaningful Engagement. This key position, now held by Dr. Heather Gainforth, is a core foundation of ICORD's leadership.

With ICORD's support, Dr. Heather Gainforth and ICORD's Managing Director Dr. Nancy Thorogood established the MEC, a group dedicated to fostering meaningful engagement within ICORD and SCI research. The MEC was formally established in October 2024 at the ICORD SCI Research Partnership Workshop held in Kelowna and attended by over 90 researchers, trainees, community members and organizations, staff, and/or health care providers, from across the province.



Our Purpose

Foster a connected environment where researchers and knowledge users work together to create, share, and implement knowledge that matters.

Our Mission

Lead, support, and evaluate initiatives that connect researchers and knowledge users, by building engagement skills, relationships, and collaborative practices across ICORD research and training environment.

Our Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Strengthen relationships and networks between researchers and knowledge users.

- Create opportunities for connection, collaboration, and community building across ICORD.

Goal 2: Build capacity for meaningful engagement.

- Enhance knowledge, develop skills, and foster a culture of mutual respect and shared learning.

Goal 3: Promote and sustain meaningful engagement practices.

- Provide recognition, resources, and support that enable research teams to embed engagement across the research process.

Roles & Responsibilities

The MEC is guided by a principled, relational, and iterative approach to advancing meaningful engagement in SCI research at ICORD. Rooted in principles of engagement, our work emphasizes shared decision-making, mutual respect, and co-learning. We believe that engagement is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires time, trust, and reflexivity. Across all initiatives, the MEC prioritizes relationship-building, inclusive leadership, and the co-creation of initiatives that are relevant, responsive, and grounded in lived experience of SCI.

Within the MEC is a Management Team that serves the learning community by guiding the strategic direction, coordination, and evaluation of initiatives that advance meaningful engagement within ICORD. The Management Team is accountable to the broader Learning Community within the MEC, and works to ensure that engagement efforts are collaborative, responsive, and inclusive.

ICORD's Meaningful Engagement Committee

Learning Community

"open and inclusive network of individuals interested in engaging with ICORD and ICORD researchers"

Members: People with lived experience of SCI, ICORD Principal Investigators and trainees, representatives of SCI organizations, representatives from organizations that support SCI research (e.g., PARC, Praxis, SCI BC)

Management Team

"serves the learning community by guiding the strategic direction, coordination, and evaluation of initiatives that advance meaningful engagement within ICORD"

Co-Chairs: Nancy Thorogood & Heather Gainforth

Members: SCI BC (Chris McBride), Praxis (John Chernesky), Andrea Bundon, Brett Hilton, & Femke Hoekstra

Trainees: Alanna Shwed (UBC-O), Laurence Poirier (UBC-V), & Nikolai Lesack (UBC-V)

Management Team

Responsibilities

- Providing leadership and strategic oversight for meaningful engagement initiatives at ICORD.
- Responding to and prioritizing initiatives identified by the Learning Community.
- Supporting the co-development, implementation, and evaluation of engagement-related tools, resources, and activities.
- Ensuring representation across campuses, research disciplines, and partner organizations.
- Appointing committee members and supporting succession planning through renewable 2- or 3-year terms.
- Applying for and stewarding funding to support engagement initiatives.
- Membership and committee structure.

Committee Structure

The MEC Management Team co-chairs are appointed by the ICORD Director. One chair will be the ICORD Associate Director of Meaningful Engagement, and one chair will be the Managing Director of ICORD. In addition to the two co-chairs, the Management Team will include:

- ICORD trainees (with representation from both campuses).
- ICORD PIs representing key research areas: prevention, preclinical, clinical, rehabilitation, and community.
- ICORD Research Liaison.
- Representatives from ICORD's partners including SCI BC, Praxis Spinal Cord Institute, and PARC.

Learning Community

The Learning Community is an open and inclusive network of individuals interested in engaging with ICORD and ICORD researchers. The Learning Community helps identify engagement priorities and may contribute to initiatives through voluntary participation in MEC initiatives. Members may include:

- People with lived and living experience of SCI.
- ICORD principal investigators and trainees.
- Representatives from SCI-focused organizations and research support organizations.
- Anyone interested in meaningful engagement in ICORD research.

Goals, Approaches, & Strategies

Each of the MEC's strategic goals are outlined below. For each goal, approaches and strategies are identified from the ICORD SCI Partnership Workshop report. These listed approaches and strategies will be prioritized by the MEC during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Strategic Goal 1

Strengthen relationships and networks between researchers and knowledge users.

Approach

Facilitate meaningful connection through relational, informal, and structured engagement opportunities.

Strategy

- Host formal events to share partnered projects (e.g., Café Scientifique).
- Host annual online Learning Community meeting.
- Host informal social events (e.g., coffee groups, BBQs).
- Promote opportunities for ICORD researchers to volunteer or engage in SCI community and sport activities.

Strategic Goal 2

Build capacity for meaningful engagement.

Approach 1

Develop and share resources that support inclusive partnerships.

Strategy

- Develop a MEC website to house research partnership resources.

Approach 2

Build foundational knowledge and skills.

Strategy

- Deliver and share trainings on research engagement methods and strategies.
- Host in-person and online events to share knowledge and practices for research partnerships.

Strategic Goal 3

Promote and sustain meaningful engagement practices.

Approach 1

Communicate consistently and celebrate efforts.

Strategy

- Develop a mailing list for outreach.
- Share a quarterly update to inform the Learning Community about MEC efforts.

Approach 2

Recognize and reward meaningful engagement.

Strategy

- Engagement recognition at ICORD's Annual Research Meeting.

Approach 3

Monitor, evaluate, and promote partnership impact across ICORD.

Strategy

- Discuss partnership impact within ICORD Annual Report.

Approach 4

Build capacity for partnership evaluation and reflection.

Strategy

- Evaluate MEC initiatives.

Glossary

Knowledge Users: Individuals or groups that will use or benefit from the research. These groups are different than research participants and include but are not limited to persons with lived experience of SCI, policymakers, health and/or service providers, other researchers, professional organizations, funders, and industry partners. The partnership should carefully consider who the right research user(s) is/are for its project.

Meaningful Engagement: Contributing to and influencing a personal and socially meaningful research, dissemination, and/or implementation goal and feeling a sense of responsibility to others (e.g., the research team, organizations, people with lived experience of SCI, etc.).

Partners or Partnership: Researchers and knowledge users meaningfully engaging throughout the research process.

Principles: Fundamental norms, rules, or beliefs that represent what is desirable and positive for a person, group, organization, or community, and help it in determining the rightfulness or wrongfulness of its actions. Principles are more basic than policy and objectives and are meant to govern both.

Research: The systematic study of a topic to understand and/or discover information about the topic.

Researcher: A person whose job it is to carry out research activities.

Research Process: Multiple phases in a research project. Phases include but are not limited to planning, conducting, disseminating, and applying the research.