

What Do North American Campaign Sites Do?



Global Campaign
FOR Microbicides

The Global Campaign for Microbicides is a unifying umbrella for activism to build support among policymakers, opinion leaders, and the general public for increased investment in microbicides and other user-controlled HIV and STD prevention options. With the shared commitment and collective agenda of its 200 endorsing groups worldwide, of whom 55 serve as active Campaign partners, the Global Campaign amplifies the voices of advocates by equipping them with a growing body of free resources and materials, supporting their efforts through sub-grants and offering guidance for effective awareness-raising, media cultivation and lobbying strategies.

A key strategy of this collective effort is the support of active organizing “sites.” These sites are local NGO advocacy coalitions convened by one or two local family planning, gender equity and/or HIV/AIDS-focused NGOs willing to spearhead a local, collaborative microbicide advocacy effort. This grassroots organizing model, piloted in the US, is being adapted for use in Canada and the European Union. To date, we work with and support sites (affiliated coalitions hosted by local NGO partners) in Ireland, the UK, Spain, Scandinavia, India, Ghana, Thailand, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Canada, and nine US cities. We also work with regional networks in Africa and southeast Asia.

In the US, Canada and EU, the sites serve the dual purpose of (1) raising local awareness and providing public education about the need for HIV/STD prevention alternatives and (2) mobilizing constituent voices to raise policy-makers’ awareness and move them toward supporting increased governmental funding for microbicide research and development. In the US, for example, the advocates participating in grassroots sites are primarily focused on influencing the key members of the US Congress who have the greatest impact on governmental investment in microbicide research.

Global Campaign advocates in Africa, Asia and Latin America, on the other hand, focus less on mobilizing their own governments’ resources and more on promoting political commitment, demonstrating demand, and ensuring civil society involvement in the research and development process. Advocacy organizations in countries like India, South Africa, and Uganda are forming local networks to articulate policy needs relevant to their national situations. These networks are also invited to function as Global Campaign sites.

There are no hard and fast rules governing how GCM sites organize themselves or what they must accomplish. The capacity of each is shaped by the nature of its hosting or co-hosting organizations and the social, political and economic environment in which it develops. The GCM is interested in supporting Campaign sites in any activities that further the goals of:

- Building political support for increased investment in microbicide research and development.
- Creating a supportive policy environment for the timely development, testing, introduction and use of microbicides.
- Preparing NGOs and other civil society actors to take an active role in advocating on behalf of potential users, the public interest, and communities involved in clinical trials.

The GCM constitutes the “civil society” arm of the global microbicides movement and serves as an interface between the “scientific microbicide establishment” and the millions of citizens whose lives will be influenced by this enterprise – either as eventual users, trial participants, taxpayers, or individuals at risk of HIV/AIDS. Under its umbrella, activists, NGOs and residents of communities in which research is occurring are able to mobilize to accelerate microbicide development, assure widespread access and use and protect the needs and interests of potential users at each stage in the development process.

Typically, activities of North American Campaign sites have fallen into the following categories:

1. Educating local constituencies by:

- Offering in-service trainings, board/staff briefings or other on-site presentations. This outreach is vital to articulating the connection between microbicides advocacy and the priorities of the NGOs who are our potential allies.
- Providing articles, fact sheets, etc. on microbicides for placement in NGO newsletters or on web sites.
- Providing relevant fact sheets and other materials for distribution to their members.
- Asking them to sign on as NGO endorsers of the Global Campaign for Microbicides.

2. Raising public awareness by:

- Training participants to do public microbicide presentations (using training and materials provided by the GCM).
- Making presentations, providing materials and otherwise conducting outreach at NGO venues (see above), conferences, public meetings, "health fairs", etc.
- Soliciting media coverage by sending briefing packets and/or pitching story ideas to potentially receptive media contacts or by submitting an opinion column or letter to the editor on the topic to local print media.

3. Reaching out to policy makers:

GCM sites are frequently asked to help influence legislators (Ministers, Parliamentarians, Congress members, Senators, etc.), their staff, regulatory authorities and other policy makers by writing to them, contacting them and/or meeting with them to discuss issues on the GCM's public policy agenda. We *strongly* encourage you to work in close collaboration with the GCM staff in your region on these activities. The GCM staff can help you develop a microbicide advocacy strategy for your region and work with you to ensure that your efforts will advance that strategy and be timed to have maximum impact. Absent this central coordination, such efforts may be duplicative or may result in counter-productive message confusion, thus diminishing our credibility in this arena.

4. Integrating potential users' perspectives into research

We encourage sites operating in areas where microbicide trials are being done to involve local clinical trials staff and researchers in their activities. Advocates are also encouraged to keep their coalition partners and NGO endorsers updated on local trials by enlisting the researchers, if possible, to provide accessible status reports on the progress of the trial and offer insights into the intricacies of how trials are done. This activity stimulates local interest in microbicides, encourages participation in both the trial and its attendant Community Advisory Board and promotes awareness of the complexities of clinical research. It also generates productive feedback from potential users of these products and their communities to the researchers who are developing the products.

5. Internal organizing activities such as:

- Holding networking meetings with other local NGOs (the first few organizing meetings often include a briefing by a GCM staff organizer who provides both an update on microbicide development and an overview of the GCM and its goals).
- Creating a local microbicides listserv or other mechanism to keep coalition participants in contact with each other.
- Drafting a planning document or agreement to articulate a plan for working on this issue such as a "terms of reference" document, a work plan, a mission statement, a calendar of upcoming activities, etc.