

# Introducing the International Resource Center:

## A Resource to Enhance Academic Health Centers' International Operations

Ryan D. Brutger, MA

### THE NEED FOR AN INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

Academic health centers are increasingly engaged in international operations, projects, and programs. The scope of their global endeavors spans the three essential functions of academic health centers: education, research, and patient care. As they develop global programs, academic health centers are promoting health and well being locally, regionally, and worldwide while at the same time building significant economic, infrastructure, and workforce capacities.

To support the effectiveness of academic health centers as they build their national and international operations, the Association of Academic Health Centers (AAHC) and its international partner AAHCI are working to provide guidance and resources to enhance the management, support, and development of academic health centers' global activities.

In the Fall of 2010, AAHC and AAHCI formed a collaborative partnership with the National Association of College and University Business Officers, the Consortium of Universities for Global Health, High Street Partners, and supporting business partners.\* Working together, the group is developing the International Resource Center (IRC) — a website designed to assist academic health center, university, and college stakeholders engaged in international operations, projects, or programs. The IRC will be a resource for academic health centers, providing guidance on a range of issues from building an institution-wide international support system to managing the regulatory, financial, and security risks of research projects managed by a single investigator.



Association of Academic Health Centers®  
*Leading institutions that serve society*

\* Cigna, Huron Consulting Group, March, Inc., Wachovia/  
Wells Fargo Bank, Whiteford Taylor & Preston.

## ONE-STOP WEB RESOURCE FOR ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The IRC is unique in that it provides a consolidated “one-stop-shop” to research and compare strategies for managing global operations. In designing the IRC, AAHC, AAHCI, and its partners focused on developing a user-friendly portal with a wide array of information to assist institutions that are either establishing their first international program or already have a well-established and diverse international presence.

Developed with the input of more than twenty universities and academic health centers, the IRC specifically addresses job responsibilities and concerns of senior leaders and their staff across the academic health center, including but not limited to administrative and fiscal officers, legal and compliance specialists, and human resource, risk management, and research leaders. For example, a human resource specialist, legal counsel, or compliance officer will be able to easily access guidelines and resources about employment, benefits, and tax information relevant to hiring a foreign employee, contracting abroad, or sending a U.S. employee to a foreign country. Indeed, the IRC addresses the concerns of a wide range of stakeholders impacted by international operations and provides a forum for institutions to learn from their peers.

The IRC is designed to advance the operation and management of existing and expanding international programs. It also equally ensures that those institutions engaged in initial or new international projects can learn from the shared knowledge of their peers, without having to re-invent protocols and guidelines that have already proven successful at other colleges, universities, and academic health centers.

The IRC provides guidance and resources on a range of topics that include:

- Institutional Policies and Procedures to Manage International Activity
- Employee and Student Safety and Emergency Preparedness
- Purchasing Goods and Services Abroad
- Complying with Corporate and Reporting Laws Abroad

- Leasing, Purchasing, and Insuring Facilities and Property Abroad
- Hiring Host Country Legal Counsel
- Registering for Legal Status Abroad
- Partnering with Another Institution
- Opening, Maintaining, and Closing Bank Accounts Abroad
- Compensating Human Subjects for Research Conducted Abroad
- Terminating Employees Abroad
- Hiring Expatriate Employees and Foreign Employees Abroad

## UTILIZING THE IRC: SIMPLIFYING THE PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

The following sections provide a brief overview of some of the content areas covered by the IRC. These are just a few of the many issues that will be available on the website, and represent a surface-level review of the guidelines, practices, and resources that will be available.

### Getting Started

For academic health centers that conduct international activities, or are considering doing so, the engagement of senior leadership plays an important role in determining the strategic objectives of international programs. Senior leadership involvement in developing the objectives and scope of international programs can help identify where international activities fit in the broader strategic plan of the academic health center and university. This priority-setting is important when determining the magnitude and nature of resources that will be committed to developing and maintaining international programs.

To facilitate their expanding international portfolios, many senior leaders of academic health centers, universities, and colleges are developing coordinated international program management and support systems. These systems vary from one institution to another, ranging from consolidated centers or institutions to loose conglomerations of contact points throughout the institution. Regardless of the design of the management and support system, having a network or

organizational structure with consistent points of contact, program evaluation procedures, and systems designed to identify and track the establishment and development of international operations is critical to the efficient management of an international portfolio.

### Initiating International Partnerships

Many academic health center leaders have found that forming partnerships with a school, government, or other entity in a foreign country is an effective way to pursue operations abroad. Depending upon the legal requirements for doing business in a country, forming partnerships can simplify the process of hiring local employees and, in some cases, may allow the institution to avoid the often complex process of registering for legal status in a foreign country. The specific advantages and disadvantages of forming partnerships depend upon the particular goals and challenges of the given project.

There are a number of common challenges and areas of concerns that require attention when forming international collaborations. One of the most challenging and important steps in building a successful partnership is applying due diligence when choosing a foreign partner. It is essential that all partners are fully aware of with whom they are working, the reputation of the partner(s), and the risks and liability associated with the partnership. Because many collaborations are developed through personal relationships, often initiated by faculty, the framing of the relationship takes place without full consideration of the legal, financial, and administrative responsibilities for the initiative. In many situations, potential challenges can be avoided through proper due diligence, such as establishing clear guidelines and understandings of the expectations and responsibilities of the partnership. Early consultation between senior leaders and those

**“Many academic health center leaders have found that forming partnerships with a school, government, or other entity in a foreign country is an effective way to pursue operations abroad.”**

spearheading the formation of a partnership can ease the process by preemptively addressing potential areas of concern.

### Assessing Risk Management

As academic health centers expand their presence and operations abroad, they also increase their risk profile. Risks associated with conducting international operations may take many forms and be derived from multiple factors, such as the physical security of students and employees abroad, increased liability for property in foreign countries, or even the potential negative impact on the institution’s reputation of having its name associated with an international program.

Regardless of the nature of the international program, it is important to assess the presence and probability of risks and manage them accordingly. For example, when managing security risks of students, faculty, and employees abroad, InterAction, an alliance of U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations, suggests in their *Minimum Operating Security Standards* that, “security plans should be reasonably related to the organization’s mission, mandate, commitments, and mode of operation ...”<sup>1</sup> These factors depend on the country of operation, knowledge and experience of personnel abroad, the nature of the operation, and a host of other factors that should be identified and analyzed prior to and throughout the administration of international programs.

### Accessing Country-Specific Information

The IRC also provides a consolidated portal with links to information on local practices, regulatory requirements, and essential information for doing business abroad. The country and region-specific resource section includes information and links about:

- General Country Information
- Embassy Information
- Entry and Exit Requirements
- Employee Hiring and Termination Resources
- Crime and Safety
- Legal Information
- Banking Requirements
- Procurement Information
- Corporate Tax and Reporting Information

## MANAGING INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS: ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTERS AND THE IRC

Whether considering how to establish the goals and infrastructure of international programs, conducting due diligence on potential partners, managing risk for global programs, or investigating country-specific regulations, academic health centers will find the IRC to be a resource for critical information on managing international operations. The unique focus of the IRC is to provide guidance on issues particularly relevant to academic health centers, universities, and colleges. This focus makes the IRC an invaluable tool that will facilitate the efficient development and management of, and on-going support for, academic health centers' international activities.

*The IRC is scheduled to be launched in the summer of 2011 and will be linked to the AAHC and AAHCI websites.*

## BUILDING A GLOBAL ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER COMMUNITY

The AAHC and AAHCI are committed to helping academic health centers achieve their mission of advancing and applying knowledge to improve health and well being. By providing leadership and guidance to foster new opportunities for international collaboration, the IRC represents one of the many ways in which the AAHC and AAHCI are facilitating growth of a global community of academic health centers and supporting the development of efficient management strategies for international operations. International networks and collaboration are also fostered through regional meetings, the AAHC's annual *International Forum*, and the formation of the *AAHC Global Programs Network*. These programs assist academic health centers in sharing practices, enhancing operations, and promoting international education, research, and patient-care partnerships around the world.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> InterAction. 2006. Suggested Guidance for Implementing InterAction's Minimum Operating Security Standards. [http://www.interaction.org/sites/default/files/MOSS\\_Implementation\\_May\\_2006.pdf](http://www.interaction.org/sites/default/files/MOSS_Implementation_May_2006.pdf) (Accessed Feb. 23, 2011).



Association of Academic Health Centers®  
*Leading institutions that serve society*

### VISION

To advance health and well-being through the vigorous leadership of academic health centers.

### MISSION

To mobilize and enhance the strengths and resources of the academic health center enterprise in health professions education, patient care, and research.

1400 Sixteenth Street, NW, Suite 720  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.265.9600  
202.265.7514 fax  
[www.aahcdc.org](http://www.aahcdc.org)

*For more information, contact the Association of Academic Health Centers, 202-265-9600*