

# Sister Renal Centers Program

ISN SRC Application Guidelines

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## 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND NOMENCLATURE

The ISN Sister Centers Program nurtures a partnership between centers from low-resource countries (LICs, LMICs and UMICs) and other organizations from High Income Countries (HICs) by supplying a framework and list of benefits.

### SOME DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS:

**Pair applications:** The Emerging Center (EC) is the center from a low-resource country. The Supporting Center (SC) is the experienced training center usually from a high-income country (as per the World Bank List of Economies).

**Trio applications:** In a trio application; the EC is the new addition to the recently graduated SRC partnership. The previously called EC becomes the SC and the formerly Supporting Center now acts as the Mentor Center (MC) in the new trio partnership.

<b>Emerging Center (EC)</b>	The center from a low-resource country in need of training
<b>Supporting Center (SC)</b>	The experienced training center usually from a high-income country
<b>Mentoring Center (MC)</b>	In a trio application, the Emerging Center is the new addition to the recently graduated SRC partnership. The previously called EC becomes the SC and the former SC acts as the Mentor Center in the new trio partnership
<b>SRC Program</b>	Sister Renal Centers Program
<b>STC Program</b>	Sister Transplant Centers Program

## 2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The EC has to be from a low-resource country: LIC, LMIC, UMIC as per the list of the World Bank of Economies [here](#) in excel format.

Both centers should have at least one ISN full member, the liaison officer of each center must be an ISN full member in due standing.

The SRC program aims at enhancing the clinical practice of nephrology at emerging centers through a variety of training exchanges between SC (and/or MC) and EC. Both centers need to clearly state what their goals are and how they are planning to achieve them.

Priority consideration will be given to partnerships showing a real commitment to develop capacity in renal pathology (e.g. training of health care workers, capacity to perform renal biopsy and pathological diagnosis).

Priority will also be given to partnerships within the same region or close to each other geographically.

The application file must include a clear description of the measurable outcomes that are aimed at, as well as an overview of the various measures that will be undertaken in the context of the ISN SRC Program. ISN also expects a detailed action plan and budget proposal, and a clear description of how the collaboration will develop the services of the emerging center and positively reflect the supporting center.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF THE ISN SRC PROGRAM

The ISN SRC Program nurtures a partnership between two centers by supplying a framework and list of benefits depending on their status level (C, B or A) within the program. It is a highly competitive program and therefore only the most promising and sustainable partnerships get a chance to move to the next levels. The number of positions at each level depends on the available budget, but as one move into the program structure there are less and less seats available.

#### Every Level has a status:

- ***Level C is the first stage within the program.*** Sister partnerships jointly enter the program at level C for a period of two years. They receive basic annual funds from ISN to help develop and support training links. These centers are eligible for an upgrade to a level B position if the final progress reports are satisfactory and if they effectively apply by filling in all requested documents
- ***Level B is the second stage within the program.*** Sister centers which have shown significant progress in level C can move to level B after two years. Unsuccessful pairs/trios will have to drop out of the program. Same for the links who do not submit any application.
- ***Honorary C (HC).*** However, some failed upgrade requests from C to B may become HC level. This is decided at the Chairman's discretion based on the quality of the application to level B and the partnership potential. HC levels have one additional chance to apply for an upgrade. The sister pairs at honorary levels must re-apply after one year to the Level B. If they are not successful they drop out of the program. Although no funding is attached to HC category, honorary pairs continue to benefit from access to the ISN publications and priority consideration when applying to the Fellowship, CME, Educational Ambassadors and Clinical Research Programs.
- ***Level A is the final stage.*** Level B centers can apply competitively for an upgrade to Level A after two years. These upgrades are reserved for those few partnerships whose emerging sister centers show the most promising development towards centers of excellence in their region. The same rules apply for those who do not apply or are considered as unsuccessful: they will have to quit the program.
- ***Honorary B (HB).*** However, some failed upgrade requests from B to A may become HB level. This is decided at the Chair's discretion based on the quality of the application to level A and the partnership potential. HB levels have one additional chance to apply for an upgrade. The sister pairs at honorary levels must re-apply after one year to the A. If they are not successful, they drop out of the program. Although no funding is attached to HB category, honorary pairs continue to benefit from access to the ISN publications and priority

consideration when applying to the Fellowship, CME, Educational Ambassadors and Clinical Research Programs.

- ***Graduate.*** After 2 years at level A and upon submission and approval of a comprehensive report describing the achievements over the past 6 years across all levels of the SRC Program, the centers graduate from the program and the ECs become local “centers of excellence” to support the development of nephrology at a local/regional level. Although they do not receive funding anymore, they keep their ISN benefits (including access to ISN publications and ISN academy and priority consideration for travel grants and participation in other ISN Programs) for 2 years. They are also eligible to compete for the Schrier award which rewards the graduated pair or trio of the ISN SRC and ISN-TTS Sister Transplant Centers (STC) Programs, with the most impressive achievements.

## WHAT’S NEXT AFTER LEVEL A?

Successful SRC graduating pairs are encouraged to consider establishing an **SRC trio** to further enhance training and experience within the region of the original EC.

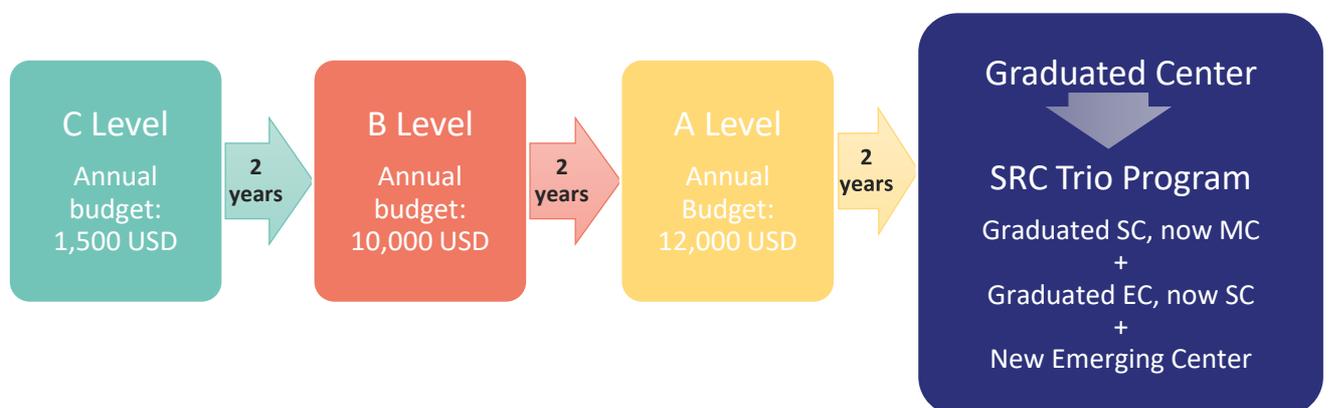
The ISN SRC trio program allows graduating EC/SC pairs to remain involved in the program and for the EC to diffuse their know-how to other centers in their region.

In this system, the recently graduated EC would form a new pair with another local renal center and would work with the original SC to support the EC in a SRC Trio.

The graduated SC (which would act as a Mentor Center - MC) in fact would support the newly formed SRC pair by providing guidance and any other possible means of support. For instance, if the pair upgrades and receives a budget this would also partly be the responsibility of the MC since visits would be conducted between them and both the centers in the same region – i.e. a funded expert from the UK would visit both centers in the same visit or ensure that personnel from one center are present at the other to benefit from training.

The applications from these trios are reviewed in the same competitive process as all other applicants and be subject to the consideration of balanced regional distribution.

In addition, the graduated A level centers will still be enjoying their benefits (see section 7)



## 4. APPLICATION PROCESS

The application forms can be found on the online platform: <http://src.theisn.org>

One needs to sign up in order to access the forms.

**The deadline to apply is on 1<sup>st</sup> October each year.** The application platform usually opens 2 months before the deadline (i.e. usually around August).

## 5. HOW TO SUBMIT A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION?

A few important reminders:

- Education vs research activities  
The **primary role of the Sister Centers Program is to support education, it is not primarily to support research.** Some limited epidemiology or clinical research may be included as part of the process, but basic research will not be supported.
- Educational grant  
The SRC grant intends to support educational activities only, and no staff salaries in any circumstances. Capital and consumable costs won't be covered neither.
- Virtual equipment and subscriptions  
In order to adapt to the travel restrictions brought by COVID-19, 10% of the budget is allowed to be used for virtual equipment for Emerging Centers only. Virtual equipment and subscriptions allowed include computers, projectors, zoom subscriptions, internet connections, etc. Please note that it does not include medical equipment.
- Events and Abstracts  
10% of your SRC grant can be used to attend nephrology conference and events (eg WCN, ASN, ...) and submit abstracts.

The SRC Program is unlikely to support applications from well-developed centers in developing countries, due to the overwhelming demand to support less developed centers.

The following forms need to be submitted:

1. **Application form** should include a detailed description of the EC needs, the objectives and measurable outcomes. One should think about some measurable indicators: what will the pair/trio achieve? What will be a good outcome of the Sister Center partnership? For instance:

Objective	Example of Measurable
establish a transplant unit	number of transplants performed
establish a PD program	number of PD patients established
	...

The SRC Committee will give priority consideration in the application review to partnerships demonstrating their dedication to capacity building in renal pathology. The SRC Committee considers that Renal Pathology is an integral part of the development of the clinical practice of nephrology in an Emerging Center.

Below are some examples of attainable objectives that could be developed progressively:

- A first step could be to begin with mounting the renal biopsy procedure and standard light microscopy.
- A second step could be to expand to immunofluorescence and possibly special histology staining.
- A third step could be to send to a referral center selected cases for EM and have training and interaction with the ISN Renal Pathology Working Group to be able to assist with learning about EM lesions and integrating for best diagnosis.

The SRC Committee will evaluate the success of applications based on the level of progress to meet the original objectives.

2. ***Annual budget proposals (Y1/Y2)*** should include a realistic overview of all the activities planned in the next 2 years (there is one form per year) and provide an estimate of a budget breakdown per activities. Whenever possible the centers should supplement the SRC grant with their own means – eg SRC pays airfare and local center endeavor to cover ground costs (accommodation, ...)

The submitted budget should be in accordance to the allocated ISN grant, i.e. the budget proposal should be consistent with the corresponding levels. One should not ask for more or less. Below are the amounts corresponding to each level:

- Level C => 1,500 USD
- Level B => 10,000 USD
- Level A => 12,000 USD

The form should not include activities that will be supported with exterior sources of funding. These can be mentioned in the reports.

As a reminder, the ISN SRC grant will **not** cover:

- Capital costs
- Consumable costs
- Equipment (other than virtual equipment for the EC)
- Salaries
- Basic research activities
- Membership fees (ISN, IPNA, ASN, etc.)

Below are a few examples of activities:

- Visits & training exchanges between the centers;
- Senior scholarship visits from the SC to EC;
- Provisioning of educational materials for the EC (videos, documents, publications, etc.) and translation in local languages;

- Establishment of programs (e.g. PD, renal pathology, transplant);
- Local and regional CMEs;
- Participation in training courses (in-person or online);
- Community-orientation activities at the EC (e.g. donor awareness);
- Relay of knowledge through regional, national and international meetings and publication;
- Webinars, online conferences or weekly meetings;
- Organization of workshops;
- Participation in events like WCN (10% maximum of SRC budget for registration and abstracts);
- WKD activities.

Please note that you are responsible for making your own travel arrangements. All Covid-related regulations and restrictions must be strictly adhered to when traveling. Be advised that these rules may change on short notice, so keep abreast of the latest information before you go.

**The SRC budget must be spent in the current year (by the end of December)** and unclaimed budget will not be added to the budget of the next program year, except for extenuating circumstances at the Chair's discretion (and late organization is not an extenuating circumstance!)

**Extra funding via the ISN Programs**

The ISN offers other very exciting Programs: The Fellowship, the Educational Ambassador, the CME, the Clinical Research and the Mentorship Programs. SRC participants are warmly encouraged to make use of them to fund some additional SRC activities. All SRC participants receive priority consideration when applying to these programs and this would allow them to use the SRC money for other educational activities. For instance, the Fellowship Program could fund some short-term visits (2-6 months) from the EC to the SC/MC. Visit the ISN website for more information: <https://www.theisn.org/in-action/grants/>

The SRC Committee will review the annual budget requests based on the educational merit and benefit for the EC. If necessary, they will seek the advice of the relevant ISN Regional Board to evaluate the appropriateness and relevance of the proposed activities. The budget requests may be discussed with the pair if further explanations/modifications are needed or approved.

3. **Activities & Budget Report** (for the past 2 years) - *only for upgrade applications!*  
Levels C and B centers are required to submit a final report at the end of the 2-year partnership. This report constitutes the basis for reviewing the pairs and trio's achievements and granting priorities or upgrades at a later stage as well as releasing further funding. Progress, achievements and challenges must be clearly articulate as the scoring parameters for upgrades are greatly influenced by previous activities and results.

Pictures are also welcome (but not in the format in a power point or pdf files as we can't use them. We prefer to receive .jpg files with short description in the file name).

## 6. SCORING PROCESS AND TIMING

Applications must be in line with the SRC Program objectives, i.e. enhance the clinical practice of nephrology at emerging centers through a variety of educational activities and training exchanges between the EC and SC (or MC).

The Review Committee will evaluate the needs of the EC and the potential to address them through the collaboration with the SC. They will look at the level of activity and commitment between the Sister Centers and assess the appropriate use of the funding in a way that will benefit the community at large.

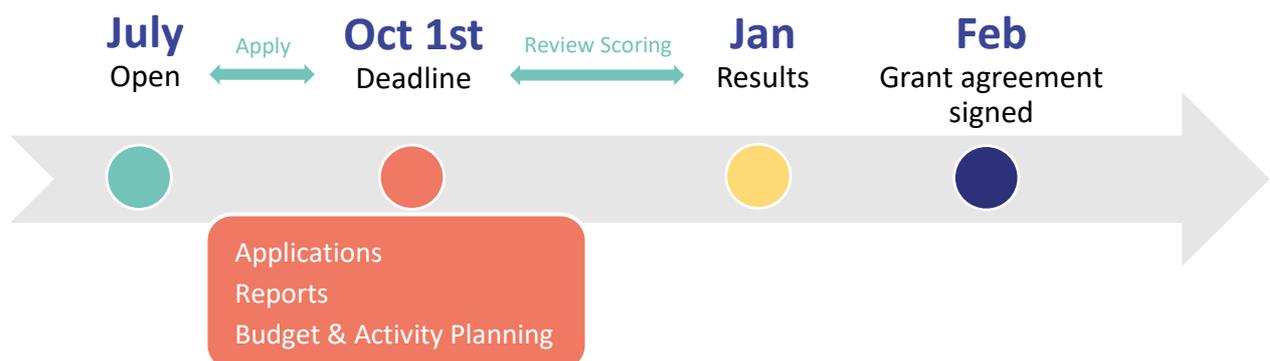
The following aspects will be taken into account:

- Main objective relevance and proposed measurable outcomes
- Motivation and future plan for development
- Planned activities: exchanges and capacity-building projects
  - Visits & Virtual Interaction: Multidisciplinary training exchanges between the EC and the SC/MC, senior scholarship visits from the SC/MC to the EC...
  - Capacity-Building Projects: development of new skills like PD at the EC, Local and regional CMEs, provision of educational materials at the EC, attendance on training courses whilst on training attachments at the SC/MC, ...
- Previous participation by the institutions and/or liaison officers in any existing ISN Programs (including Sister Centers Program).
- The SRC Committee will also give priority consideration to partnerships showing a real commitment to develop capacity in renal pathology.
- The SRC Committee gives priority consideration to partnerships with regional proximity for reasons like similar culture and languages, similar resource settings and budget optimization (to reduce the geographic distance for the flights).

As far as upgrades are concerned, the unsuccessful pairs/trios will drop out of the program or may become HC/HB centers (for those applying from B to A) depending on the quality level of their application. The SRC Committee may decide to extend the duration of the SRC level of an individual pair/trio for longer than 2 years under exceptional circumstances at the committee's decision.

The pairs/trios eligible for upgrading to the next level who do not submit any application will automatically drop out of the Program.

Below is an overview of the usual timing of an application session:



## 7. BENEFITS

Enrolling in the SRC Programs gives access to some significant benefits:

### FINANCIAL BENEFITS

The ISN supports the participation of a pair/trio within the SRC program with a total grant of 47,000 USD spread over 6 years and broken down as follows:

Level C	1,500 USD per annum
Level B	10,000 USD per annum
Level A	12,000 USD per annum

There is no funding at HC/HB level.

### IN-KIND BENEFITS

The successful SRC pairs/trios will also receive the following:

- **Certificates (for levels A, B, C and graduated pairs/trio's)** are issued to the EC, SC (and MC) when they are first accepted into the Program (as well as with each upgrade to a higher level). The certificate is valid for two years or for as long as the center pair/trio is active in the same level. Graduated A levels also receive a certificate.
- **ISN journals subscription (for levels A, B, HB, C, HC and graduated pairs from the last 2 years)** The EC will receive online access to the following publications:
  - *Kidney International*
  - *KI Supplements*
  - *Kidney International Reports*

We would like to stress that the journals are to be made freely accessible to all those for whom the journals are intended (physicians, student etc.) and that they are to be kept in a place accessible to all; the journals are not being granted for the benefit of only one or two selected individuals.

The password and ID are communicated upon joining the program; these remain the same for every following year that is spent in the program. The Journal will be sent to the attention of the liaison officer who is responsible for ensuring that the journals are shared and accessible.

*It is possible to receive paper copies at no cost upon specific request*

- **ISN Academy (for levels A, B, HB, C, HC and graduated from the last 2 years)**

Each year, the SRC pair or trio will receive 5 passes for the ISN Academy (to be shared between the EC and SC), which is a new and interactive e-learning platform and mobile app providing equal access to the latest knowledge in nephrology, where and when you need it. With up-to-date and interactive resources, it opens doors to a unique mix of presentations, cases, articles, webinars, guidelines and more.

- **Priority access to ISN Programs (for levels A, B, HB, C, HC and graduated from the last 2 years)**

The grants related to successful applications to ISN Programs will be on top of the budget already received through the SRC program. Please be aware that an application is not guaranteed a successful outcome since the criteria of the Programs prevail and they remain competitive in nature. Priority consideration will be given in the review process of the following programs:

- [Clinical Research Program and Scientific Writing Course](#) supports research and education initiatives involving nephrologists, health workers, and local authorities in low and middle-income countries.
- [Educational Ambassador Program](#) offers financial support for a specific hands-on training by an expert for up to four weeks to advance new initiatives, skills or services.
- [Fellowship Program](#) gives physicians from disadvantaged parts of the world the opportunity to pursue essential nephrology training abroad to advance kidney care in their home region. In the unfortunate event that the SRC is unsuccessful at upgrading to the next level, it will not affect if a fellow from the EC has been accepted in the ISN Fellowship Program to train at the SC.
- [Emerging Leaders Program](#) provides early-career professionals in integrated kidney care the opportunity to work with international experts in the field to become qualified for a leadership role in the advancement of global kidney care.
- [CME Program](#) supports faculty to present talks and workshops at regional nephrology-related meetings, bringing expert speakers together from around the world to share knowledge and experience in clinical care and research. The CMEs are to be organized in conjunction between the EC and the SC usually as part of an ISN SRC Program event.
- The new ISN [Mentorship Program](#) is a nice option for those who would like to benefit from some guidance from a dedicated mentor on a specific subject. The framework for regular interaction (skype, email, phone calls) is encouraged and a plan is set up between mentor and mentee.

- **Priority for travel/virtual grants to WCN and ISN Frontiers**

- Pairs and trios at level A, B, HB, C, HC and graduated from the last 2 years are given priority points towards travel/virtual grant applications for WCN and ISN Frontiers.
- The grants are reserved for ISN members in good standing and for the benefit of physicians and scientists who are residents of low- and middle-income countries. The final decision is based on other several scoring criteria which include successful

abstract(s) submission, age, and current and/or past participants in ISN Programs. Note that the maximum number of grants that any individual may receive in a lifetime is limited to 3.

- In the event that we receive numerous applications from the same SRC partnership, you will be asked to choose a maximum of 2 applicants to be considered for the grants. This will ensure equitable access to different participants around the world.
- For both WCN and Frontiers, SRC participants should directly apply to the events' organizers via the official relevant website. The amount of the grant may change depending on the WCN/Frontiers organization. The official WCN/Frontiers grant will be made available at the congress; the actual arrangements and confirmations are announced via a personal letter and depend on the WCN/Frontiers organization.
- Invitation to compete for the Schrier award (after graduation) by presenting the collective achievements throughout their SRC partnership. The Schrier award session is hosted at the World Congress of Nephrology every year.
  - Mrs. and Professor Schrier have made a very generous donation to the ISN – **The Schrier fund** which is dedicated to supporting ISN's substantial [outreach and capacity building programs](#) in emerging countries. All A-level centers that have graduated since the previous WCN are invited to participate and display their ongoing achievements throughout their participation in the ISN SRC or ISN-TTS STC Program.
  - A jury composed of the ISN Sister Renal Centers Program chair and deputy chair, the ISN-TTS Sister Transplant Centers Program co-chairs, the ISN Programs Chair and Robert Schrier (if available) selects the most deserving winner. The award is of 2,500 USD.

All the above benefits remain applicable 2 years after graduation from the Program – apart from the Schrier award for which one can only compete once.

## 8. REPORTING PROCESS

### INTERMEDIARY REPORTS

In order for the SRC Committee to evaluate the progress of the SRC participants, the impact of the Program and assess the appropriate use of the funding, the centers are required to submit a report at the end of the 2-year partnership. The report constitutes the basis for reviewing pairs and trio's achievements and granting priorities or upgrades at a later stage as well as releasing further funding. Progress, achievements and challenges must be clearly articulate as the scoring parameters for upgrades are greatly influenced by previous activities and results. An analysis of what has been achieved and how the status of the EC has progressed would indeed be a very helpful insight to the

SRC Committee. These reports will be very short (maximum 1,000 words) and will address the following items:

- Names of persons involved
- Budget breakdown for each activity and brief description (visits & projects)
- Confirmation of forthcoming activities (incl. names, dates, required budget)
- Motivation and Plan for development
- Impact Assessment

Pictures are also welcome (but please do not enclose them in a power point or pdf file as we can't use them. We prefer to receive .jpg files with short description in the file name).

## LEVEL A - FINAL SRC REPORT

Levels A finishing their second year of partnership will be requested to provide a comprehensive report with details on their original goal when they enrolled in the SRC Program, how much progress they have achieved, the measures they carried out and respective outcomes, the challenges they were faced with, their expenses at A-level... This is the final mandatory step for them in the Program. Reports will need to be submitted between early December and early January at the latest. The pairs/trios will formally graduate from the Program upon approval of this report by the SRC Chairman.

## 9. GRANTS & PAYMENTS

### Important note:

The fund disbursement procedure has recently been adapted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of sending the full amount of the SRC grant in early February for each level, we are now proceeding with reimbursements or smaller advance payments (e.g. 30% of the grant amount). Do not hesitate to contact the ISN HQ if you have any questions about this new procedure.

As a reminder, the amounts of the grants are as follows:

Level C	1,500 USD per annum
Level B	10,000 USD per annum
Level A	12,000 USD per annum

SRC partnerships will receive a grant agreement in which you guarantee to use the funds allocated to you in the sole goal of advancing nephrology in the EC's region. The grant agreement will need to be signed by the SC or MC.

Regarding advance payments, it is the SC or MC who distributes the money according to the incurred expenses. It is of paramount importance to indicate the bank details of the SC or MC of the partnership link in the annual budget form.

Advance payment recipients must provide the name and full contact details of the finance coordinator or grants officer of their institution. SRC advance payment recipients are also responsible for liaising with the finance coordinator or grant officers of their institution and ensuring that they are aware of the status of ISN Sister Renal grants and payments. ISN will provide a payment confirmation after the payment has been paid. Advance payment recipients should transmit this document to the finance office.

Therefore, in order to receive their payment, the SC/MCs need to take the following actions:

- sign the grant agreement with the terms and conditions of accepting the ISN advance payment
- submit a payment request with full contact and bank details as well as a duly signed W8 (for all except US institutions) or W9 form (for USA institutions only)

Without the signed agreement and payment documents, ISN cannot release the funds!

The following points are also important:

- The advance payments will have to be **justified and approved** by the Chair of the SRC Committee.
- The advance payments will **preferably be sent to the SC or MC for SRC pairs** (unless explicitly requested and approved by the SRC Program Chair that the money can be sent to the Emerging Center).
- **The SRC budget must be spent in the current year (by the end of December)** and unclaimed budget will not be added to the budget of the next program year, except for extenuating circumstances at the Chair's discretion (and late organization is not an extenuating circumstance!)
- Initial plans may be subject to change due to visa issues, acts of god, personal and health situations, etc. **Changes to the initial plan** and alternative suggestions for the use of funding (of an educational nature) can be accommodated **only under exceptional circumstances** at the chair's discretion and as long as the HQ staff is duly informed!
- **Surplus funds**: pairs who have some surplus as per the October accounting report (due to activities costing less than foreseen or other justifiable reasons) may re-allocate the funds towards journal subscriptions, textbooks, registration/attendance to CMEs and congresses, or any other items of educational merit as long as these are paid for in the same program year and submitted for approval.
- It is of crucial importance to **keep a record of all expenses** in order to detail them in the SRC reports

The financial support (budget) and services (in-kind donations) provided by ISN are only intended to provide a framework among the centers and to reinforce the goodwill that stems from the SC. ISN's funding is not intended to form the sole basis of what should ideally be a long lasting and fruitful collaboration among the centers. The grant funds must only be used for the educational activities agreed upon jointly by the Sister Renal Centers and carried out at the initiative of either the EC or SC in the context of the SRC Program and cannot be used for the private benefit of any institution. ISN's support cannot carry all expenses linked to the development of an EC and the joint activities undertaken among centers.

## 10. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### CAN I APPLY FOR A SECOND SRC WITH A DIFFERENT CENTER?

Applications for a second SRC are accepted but chances of success are lower given the high number of applications received. Priority is likely to be given to centers that have not yet received funding.

### I CANNOT ACCESS THE ONLINE PLATFORM WITH MY ISN CREDENTIALS

This is because both platforms and accounts are not linked. You should therefore use another password to login onto the SRC Application Platform.

### WHAT TO DO IF I NEED A VISA LETTER?

If necessary, it is highly recommended that the traveller(s) make arrangements for a **visa** procurement as soon as possible since this often takes several months and is in some unfortunate cases declined. Please be aware that the **ISN Global Operations Center staff** can provide an official letter for the embassy/consulate if necessary; please provide the first and last name, place and date of birth, country of origin and passport number and expiry date for the preparation of this letter.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF AN INCIDENT OCCURS DURING MY TRAVEL OR MY STAY ABROAD?

Please note that upon an individual's acceptance to travel and volunteer on behalf of ISN they acknowledge and accept that the International Society of Nephrology (ISN) cannot be held liable for any consequences related to travelling or staying abroad, including those related to Covid-19. All relevant Covid safety measures must be strictly adhered to while travelling. The responsibility for procuring health/accident and travel insurances remains with the traveller; they or their relatives cannot hold the Society (ISN) responsible in the event of untoward events or experiences happen.

## 11. CONTACT

For more information and assistance, please contact [src@theisn.org](mailto:src@theisn.org)

### **ISN Global Operations Center**

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