Interoperability Matters Information Sharing Workgroup: Charter

Last updated: April 2025

Purpose

The Sequoia Project Interoperability Matters Information Sharing Workgroup (ISWG), formerly the Information Blocking (IB) workgroup, is charged with providing input to The Sequoia Project and the interoperability community on public and private sector implementation of U.S. federal government laws, regulations, guidance and enforcement for information blocking as defined in the 21st Century Cures legislation. The Workgroup will examine the practical implications of proposed and final information blocking rules issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, focusing on implementation, approaches to compliance, and considerations for enforcement. It shall address the broad needs of public and private sector stakeholders while remaining focused on implementation-level and operational aspects of information blocking rules and related activities. In addition, the Workgroup will develop guidance materials to support stakeholders to understand and comply with the regulations.

The ISWG will operate under the authority and guidance of The Sequoia Project Interoperability Matters Steering Committee. It will also actively seek input from a wide range of stakeholders and subject matter experts, when appropriate. The Workgroup will be organized and operated in a manner that is compliant with applicable antitrust laws and its deliberations will be confined to topics that are consistent with these legal requirements.

Background and Workgroup Progress 2019-2024

The IB Workgroup began in 2019 to inform rule making and industry preparations for compliance with implementation of the Information Blocking prohibitions in the 21st Century Cures Act. Federal regulatory activities included consideration of workgroup recommendations. The Sequoia Project also developed training and educational materials including hosting bootcamps for Actors.

In 2021, the IB Workgroup made significant strides in guiding industry consensus on information blocking regulations and offering input to the federal government on their implementation. The Workgroup met five times and established three Subgroups focused on Health Information Networks (HINs)/Health Information Exchanges (HIEs), Healthcare Providers, and Health IT Developers. These Subgroups met nine times, including joint sessions for Providers and Developers, and produced valuable outputs, including issues and findings shared with the full Workgroup, the Leadership Council, and Public Forums. The Workgroup also provided input into a Sequoia comment letter to the Office for Civil Rights, held discussions with the Office of the Inspector General on enforcement concerns, and submitted two sets of Frequently Asked Questions to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC).

In 2022, the IB Workgroup shifted its focus to produce actionable deliverables by transitioning from Subgroups to task-based groups, each focused on specific, time-bound objectives. Members were encouraged to actively engage in these Task Groups, contributing expertise and assisting with the drafting of deliverables. The full Workgroup continued to meet quarterly, providing a forum for education, discussion, and updates on regulatory developments and Task Group progress. The Workgroup released a suite of deliverables in August 2022 that shared good practices, outlined implementation considerations, identified outstanding policy issues, and illustrated the challenges of mapping Electronic Health Information within a health system.

In 2023, the group rebranded as the Information Sharing Workgroup (ISWG) to reflect the landscape, while still addressing guidance and enforcement for information blocking. The ISWG began discussions on developing an implementation resource guide and identifying potential deliverables. The ISWG also focused on regulatory issues, particularly with respect to enforcement and the interaction between rules promulgated by ONC, OIG, and OCR.

In February 2024, a poll was sent to the Workgroup members to prioritize topics for development of further implementation guidance, including the use of exceptions, education for clinicians and staff, and interacting with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) during investigations. The poll also invited members to volunteer for a task group dedicated to this effort. The task group convened in early April to further refine the deliverables and clarify the workgroup's purpose. Members decided to create a toolkit with publicly available materials to assist IB Actors in determining when and how to apply the IB Rule exceptions. After discussing and narrowing down a list of proposed deliverables, the group ultimately focused on three key components for the Information Sharing Toolkit; General IB Rule Compliance Tools; Infeasibility, Fees, and Licensing Exceptions Tools; and Contracting, Notice, and Education Tools.

2024 Outputs:

The Information Sharing Toolkit was released to the public in November 2024, with a supplemental educational webinar on how to use the toolkit in January 2025. Toolkit materials included:

- Information Sharing Toolkit Summary
- Sample Information Sharing Compliance Project Tool (Microsoft Word and Excel Versions)
- Sample Information Sharing Policy (for HIPAA-regulated entities)
- Information Blocking Rule (IBR) Workflow for IBR Exceptions

Strategic Goal

The ISWG will continue to pursue its goal of convening and educating stakeholders, with a focus on implementation of new and existing regulatory provisions and strategies for engaging with enforcement agencies.

Specific deliverables will be determined by the group based on consensus priorities and in consideration of possible alignment with other workgroups. In addition, the ISWG will review and provide input on relevant regulatory proposals from ONC, OIG, and OCR.

Key Deliverables

For each year the task group participants will develop a defined workplan for deliverable development and share with the Interoperability Matters Steering Committee. For 2025, the Workgroup plans to focus on two areas: how Actors can prepare for enforcement and a survey of emerging state-level enforcement activities.

Other Task Groups and deliverables may be defined by the Task Group Co-Chairs and/or the Leadership Council in coordination with Interoperability Matters staff and Sequoia leadership.

Sequoia staff and/or Workgroup co-chairs will work with the Steering Committee to ensure that deliverables are of high quality and meet the needs of the interoperability community.

Proposed Roadmap

The full Workgroup will meet at least quarterly, with an in-person meeting to coincide with the Sequoia annual meeting. The Workgroup may charter time-limited Task Groups to work on specific deliverables in between meetings. In general, deliverables will be developed over the course of a calendar year.

Workgroup Composition

Full Information Sharing Workgroup: The full ISWG is composed of a diverse group of stakeholders selected based on identified needs by Sequoia Project Staff and Workgroup Co-Chairs. These members represent healthcare provider organizations, health IT developers, health information networks and health information exchanges, consumers, payers, public health, associations and organizations representing the health IT community, federal government representatives, and other subject matter experts.

Task Groups: Members of the full ISWG will volunteer to participate in one or more Task Groups. Task Group sizes will, ideally, be limited to 10-15 members that actively participate and contribute to deliverable production. Members who are not actively contributing to their assigned Task Group tasks may be asked to reconsider their participation in the Task Group and possibly the full Workgroup, to ensure continued progress and engagement

In addition, to ensure that the Workgroup and Task Groups are of a manageable size but can draw on the broadest and deepest perspectives, the Co-Chairs and Sequoia staff may hold one or more webinars/telephone conference calls, establish collaboration tools, and use online survey tools to gather input beyond Workgroup members.

Workgroup Responsibilities & Operating Principles

As part of a Workgroup for The Sequoia Project's Interoperability Matters Cooperative, the Workgroup members

will fulfill the following responsibilities and operate in a manner that is collaborative, respectful, and seeks consensus.

- Maintain personal involvement in Workgroup and Task Group meetings and related activities;

- Respect any confidential discussion held in the Workgroup and Task Groups;

- Contribute to the development of Task Group deliverables by providing substantive feedback, subject matter expertise, and drafting assistance;

- Share progress with the Steering Committee and through public forums;

- Accept assignments and tasks between meetings; and

- Support dissemination of deliverables by, as appropriate: adopting work products in their own organizations; identifying venues to share work products (e.g., conferences, blogs, podcasts, policy briefs, social media posts); and participating in Sequoia education events.

Decision-Making and Relationship to Interoperability Matters and The Sequoia Project

The Workgroup will aim to reach consensus, where possible, and will capture differing views. Regardless of whether there is consensus, the Workgroup will ensure that diverse stakeholder views are heard. Areas of agreement will be identified and divergent views captured. Where consensus is not reached, the group will move issues forward using approaches such as identifying a range of issues raised within the Workgroup and considering recommendations for further study to move towards consensus.

Workgroup Leadership and Staffing

The Sequoia Project Staff assist in facilitating the full Information Sharing Workgroup and the smaller Task Groups. Sequoia staff and leadership will select Co-Chairs for the full Workgroup. Leadership of Task Groups will be on a volunteer basis with input from the full Workgroup Co-Chairs.

Co-Chair duties include:

- Leading and facilitating Workgroup efforts, including the development, review, and maintenance of Task Group deliverables;

- Facilitating Workgroup and Task Group meetings in a manner that ensures that all members are actively contributing to the Workgroup's efforts;

- Enabling balanced opportunities for all members to contribute to the discussions in an equitable manner;

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- Conducting the work in a manner that is efficient, in accordance with the work plan; and
- Meeting with Sequoia staff prior to each Workgroup and Task Group meeting to prepare the agenda and discussion topics.

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