From Reference Model to Working ISF

Getting Started with the CDISC ISF Reference Model



CDISC ISF Training and Outreach Webinar | October 27, 2026

45-minute presentation + 15-minute Q&A

Disclaimer

- This presentation supports adoption of the CDISC ISF Reference Model v1.0 (Provisional). The views and opinions expressed are those of the individual presenters and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CDISC, and should not be attributed to the companies the presenters work for nor the associations they are affiliated with.
- Provisional guidance is a practical starting point. It does not replace applicable regulations, ICH GCP, contractual obligations, or an organization's approved SOPs.
- Examples are illustrative. Sites should confirm study-specific filing decisions with their sponsors, CROs, and quality functions.
- No commercial system or vendor is endorsed. References to electronic ISF systems are generic.
- The presenters have no financial relationship or conflict of interest relevant to this presentation.

Meet the speakers

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Agenda

1	**Introduction**	ISF and TMF basics, reference models, the free tools, and key terms
2	**Setting up your ISF**	The 14 sections, the ISF Plan and ISF Index, and filing day to day
3	**What's next**	Where the standard is going, and where to start when you're ready
4	**Q&A**	Your questions (15 minutes)

Two quick polls

1) Your role: site, sponsor, CRO, vendor, or other? 2) Is your ISF mostly paper, electronic, hybrid, or does it vary by study?

PART 1

Introduction

ISF and TMF basics, reference models, the free tools, and key terms

First, what is an ISF?

Investigator Site File (ISF)

Your site's collection of records for a study.

It shows what happened at your site, and that it was done the right way.

Good Clinical Practice (GCP) requires your site to keep these records before, during, and after the study.

1

You may call it...

Regulatory binder, study binder, site file, eReg, eISF, or site TMF

2

Who looks at it

Your study team, monitors, auditors, and inspectors. Inspectors use it to confirm the trial was run properly and the results can be trusted.

3

What's inside

Protocol, consent forms, IRB approvals, delegation log, training records, and more

What is a TMF?

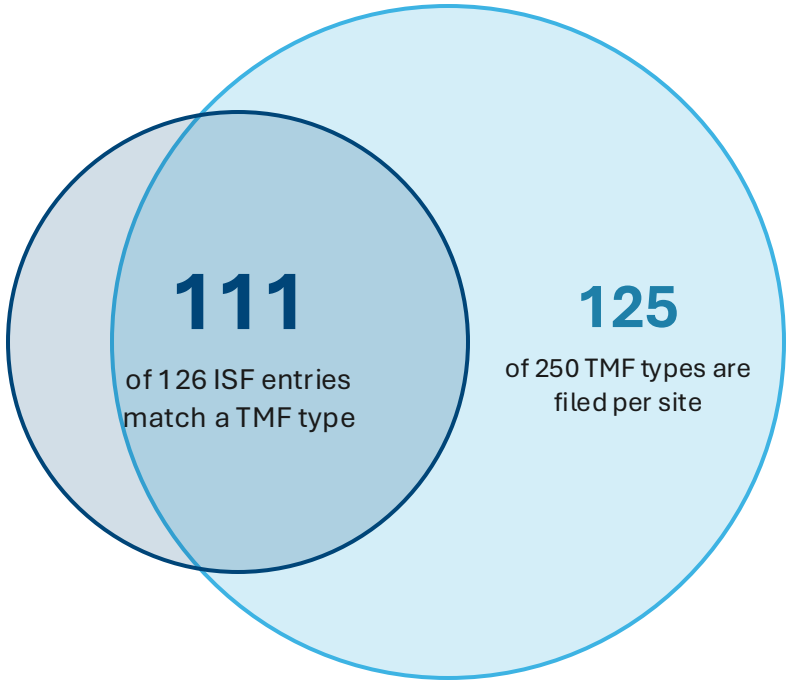
Trial Master File (TMF)

The sponsor's collection of records for the whole study, across every site.

Your CRA (site monitor) is usually the bridge: many records in your ISF are copied into the TMF.

	ISF	TMF
What it shows	What happened at your site	What happened across the study
Kept by	the site	the sponsor

Source: CDISC ISF RM User Guide v1.0, Section 1.5



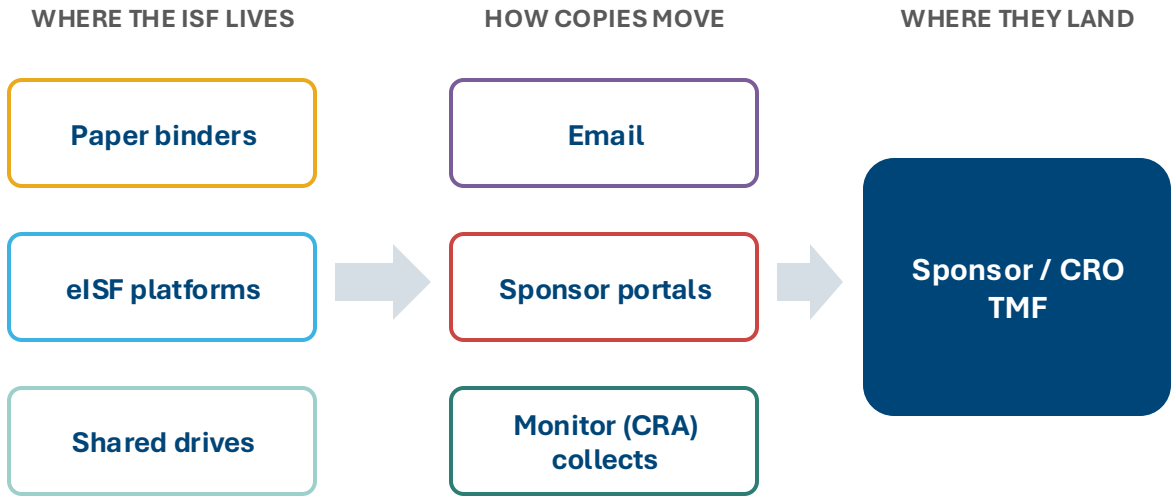
ISF reference model: 126 entries

TMF Reference Model: 250 document types

Sources: TMF Reference Model v3.3.1 (current version); ISF RM v1.0 (column K). Not to scale. The draft TMF Standard Model v1 tags 230 of its 571 record types for the ISF.

Today, every sponsor and study does it a little differently

- Site teams juggle several studies, sponsors, and systems at once
- Different sponsors ask for different binder setups
- Electronic systems each organize files their own way
- Many sites use a mix of paper and electronic records
- Filing rules get explained study by study
- Copies reach sponsors and CROs by email, portal, or the monitor, then get renamed and re-filed



What is a reference model?

A reference model is a shared map

A standard list of sections, subsections, and record names that everyone can use.

Sponsors had the same problem in 2009 and built a shared model. By 2022, 96% of people surveyed said their organization used it. Now it's sites' turn.

Think of a library: every library shelves books the same way, so you can find what you need anywhere. Each one still decides which books it holds.

Without a shared model

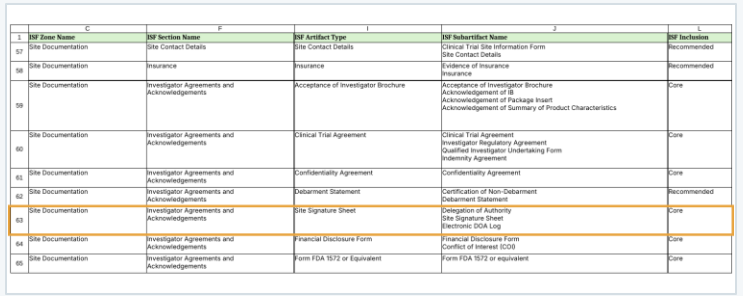
- Every sponsor sets it up differently
- The same record goes by different names
- "Where does this go?" asked again every study
- New staff relearn it per sponsor

With a shared model

- The same sections at every site
- The same name for the same record
- One answer you can reuse on every study
- One map, whether your ISF is paper, electronic, or both
- New staff learn it once

Three free tools

Created by CDISC, a non-profit standards organization (it also maintains the TMF Reference Model), with about 45 industry volunteers

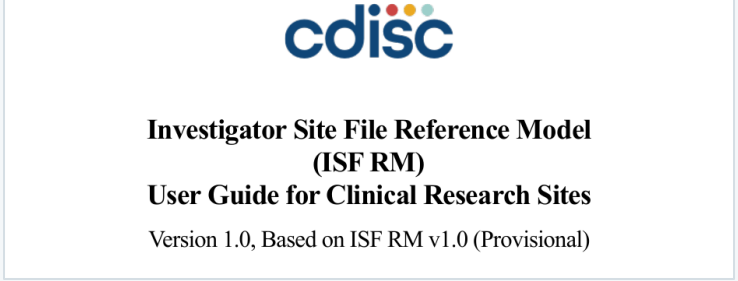


	C	F	I	J	L
1	ISF Zone Name	ISF Section Name	ISF Artifact Type	ISF Subartifact Name	ISF Inclusion
57	Site Documentation	Site Contact Details	Site Contact Details	Clinical Trial Site Information Form Site Contact Details	Recommended
58	Site Documentation	Insurance	Insurance	Evidence of Insurance Insurance	Recommended
59	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Acceptance of Investigator Brochure	Acceptance of Investigator Brochure Acknowledgement of IB Acknowledgement of Package Insert Acknowledgement of Summary of Product Characteristics	Core
60	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Clinical Trial Agreement	Clinical Trial Agreement Investigator Regulatory Agreement Qualified Investigator Undertaking Form Indemnity Agreement	Core
61	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Confidentiality Agreement	Confidentiality Agreement	Core
62	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Debarment Statement	Certification of Non-Debarment Debarment Statement	Recommended
63	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Site Signature Sheet	Delegation of Authority Site Signature Sheet Electronic DOA Log	Core
64	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Financial Disclosure Form	Financial Disclosure Form Conflict of Interest (COI)	Core
65	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Form FDA 1572 or Equivalent	Form FDA 1572 or equivalent	Core

THE MAP

ISF Reference Model

An Excel spreadsheet listing every ISF section, subsection, and record name



Investigator Site File Reference Model (ISF RM)
User Guide for Clinical Research Sites

Version 1.0, Based on ISF RM v1.0 (Provisional)

THE HOW-TO

User Guide

Written for site teams. Explains the model, how to set it up, and how to fill in the Plan Template



INVESTIGATOR SITE FILE (ISF) PLAN

[ENTER Site Name]

Protocol number or study identifier	*[ENTER]*
Date	*[ENTER ISF Plan date or state Date of Final Approval]*
Version	*[ENTER version number of the ISF Plan; e.g., 1.0, 2.0]*
ISF format	*[Select one: Paper/electronic (eISF)/hybrid]*

YOUR RULES

ISF Plan Template

A fill-in-the-blanks Word document for how your ISF will be maintained

From these, you create one more thing for each study: **your ISF Index, the table of contents for the ISF.**

The words you'll hear

ZONE a top-level category (14 in all)

07 Site Documentation

SECTION Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements

ARTIFACT a subsection, one standard place

Site Signature Sheet

SUBARTIFACT the specific records filed there

Delegation of Authority log

Also: Site Signature Sheet, Electronic DOA Log

ISF	Your investigator site file, paper or electronic (eISF)
TMF	The sponsor's trial file, their version of your ISF
ISF Index	Your ISF's table of contents, marked up for this study
ISF Plan	Your written rules for how this study's ISF is maintained
Core / Recommended	File if it exists and applies / file if created or received

Records, not documents: in line with ICH E6(R3), we say "record" for anything you file, paper or electronic.

Coming soon: some names may change when the ISF joins the TMF Standard Model, which uses "Record Groups" and "Record Types." Same idea.

One delegation log update, start to finish

The same five steps, today and with a shared model

1	2	3	4	5
SITE	**CRA VISIT**	**SPONSOR COPY**	**TMF CHECK**	**INSPECTION**
A new sub-investigator joins	**Monitor reviews the ISF**	**A copy goes to the TMF**	**Sponsor QC finds a gap**	**Who could consent on this date?**
TODAY Filed wherever this sponsor's setup says	**TODAY** Log, CV, and training are in 3 places	**TODAY** Renamed and re-filed by hand	**TODAY** A query goes back through the CRA	**TODAY** Each side searches its own files
WITH THE MODEL Filed under the Site Signature Sheet artifact in Zone 07, same place every study	**WITH THE MODEL** The ISF Index shows where each one lives	**WITH THE MODEL** Shared terms help match it to the TMF entry	**WITH THE MODEL** The ISF Plan sets who checks it, and how	**WITH THE MODEL** Corresponding names help each side find it

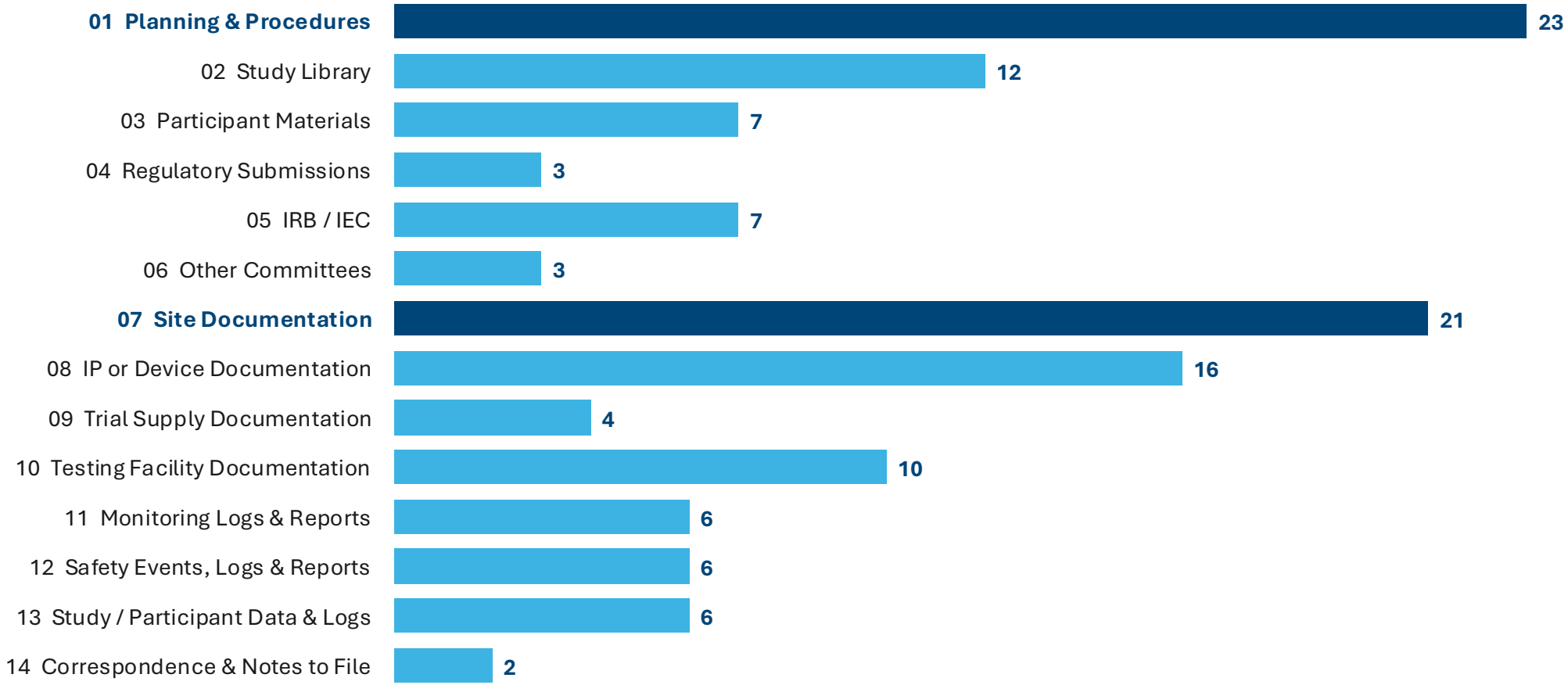
PART 2

Setting up your ISF

The 14 sections, the ISF Plan and ISF Index, and filing day to day

The 14 zones

126 entries in total. Most studies won't use them all. Your ISF Plan and ISF Index go first, in Zone 01.



How to read the ISF RM spreadsheet

The real spreadsheet (ISF Structure 1.0 tab, Zone 07 rows). The delegation log is the Site Signature Sheet row.

	C	F	I	J	L
1	**ISF Zone Name**	**ISF Section Name**	**ISF Artifact Type**	**ISF Subartifact Name**	**ISF Inclusion**
57	Site Documentation	Site Contact Details	Site Contact Details	Clinical Trial Site Information Form Site Contact Details	Recommended
58	Site Documentation	Insurance	Insurance	Evidence of Insurance Insurance	Recommended
59	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Acceptance of Investigator Brochure	Acceptance of Investigator Brochure Acknowledgement of IB Acknowledgement of Package Insert Acknowledgement of Summary of Product Characteristics	Core
60	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Clinical Trial Agreement	Clinical Trial Agreement Investigator Regulatory Agreement Qualified Investigator Undertaking Form Indemnity Agreement	Core
61	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Confidentiality Agreement	Confidentiality Agreement	Core
62	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Debarment Statement	Certification of Non-Debarment Debarment Statement	Recommended
63	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Site Signature Sheet	Delegation of Authority Site Signature Sheet Electronic DOA Log	Core
64	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Financial Disclosure Form	Financial Disclosure Form Conflict of Interest (COI)	Core
65	Site Documentation	Investigator Agreements and Acknowledgements	Form FDA 1572 or Equivalent	Form FDA 1572 or equivalent	Core

1 **Turn on the filters**
Data › Filter adds the arrows. Then work one Zone at a time.

2 **Skip column K**
It matches each subsection to the sponsor's file; you rarely need it

3 **Check column L**
Core or Recommended. Then decide what applies to your study.

Core vs. Recommended

Core 86 of 126 entries | **Recommended** 40

Core

- If you have it and it applies to your study, file it
- e.g., Protocol signature page
- e.g., Delegation log
- e.g., IRB or IEC decision

Recommended

- Not required, but if you create or receive it, file it
- Often depends on the sponsor or your institution
- e.g., Monitoring visit log
- e.g., Interim monitoring visit reports
- e.g., Site insurance records

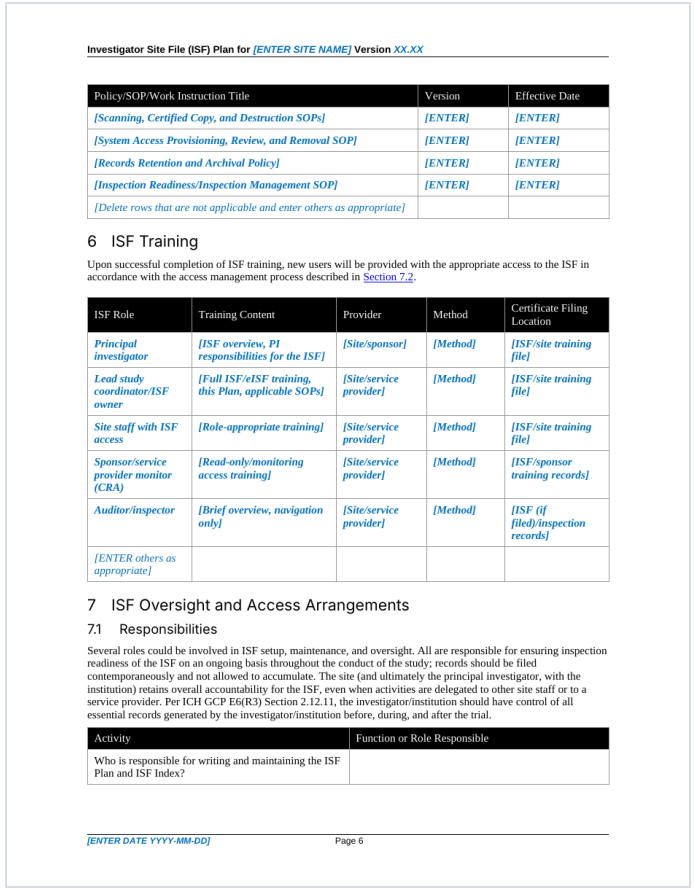
Doesn't apply to your study? Mark it Not Applicable in the ISF Index with a brief rationale (ISF Plan Template §8.1).

ISF Plan vs. ISF Index

	ISF Plan: the "how"	ISF Index: the "what"
Question	How will we maintain this ISF?	What goes in this ISF?
What it is	The written rules for this study's file	The table of contents for this study
Examples	Who files, who reviews, who has access, how long we keep it	Each subsection marked Applicable, Not Applicable, or Provided by Sponsor
Who uses it	Site team and anyone delegated	Filers, reviewers, monitors, auditors
Start from	ISF Plan Template (Word)	ISF RM spreadsheet (Excel), filtered by Zone

For the Site Signature Sheet: the Plan says who keeps it current; the Index says whether it applies and where its records are.

The ISF Plan Template



Investigator Site File (ISF) Plan for *[ENTER SITE NAME]* Version *XX.XX*

Policy/SOP/Work Instruction Title	Version	Effective Date
[Scanning, Certified Copy, and Destruction SOPs]	*[ENTER]*	*[ENTER]*
[System Access Provisioning, Review, and Removal SOP]	*[ENTER]*	*[ENTER]*
[Records Retention and Archival Policy]	*[ENTER]*	*[ENTER]*
[Inspection Readiness/Inspection Management SOP]	*[ENTER]*	*[ENTER]*
[Delete rows that are not applicable and enter others as appropriate]		

6 ISF Training

Upon successful completion of ISF training, new users will be provided with the appropriate access to the ISF in accordance with the access management process described in Section 7.2.

ISF Role	Training Content	Provider	Method	Certificate Filing Location
Principal investigator	*[ISF overview, PI responsibilities for the ISF]*	*[Site/sponsor]*	*[Method]*	*[ISF/site training file]*
Lead study coordinator/ISF owner	*[Full ISF/eISF training, this Plan, applicable SOPs]*	*[Site/service provider]*	*[Method]*	*[ISF/site training file]*
Site staff with ISF access	*[Role-appropriate training]*	*[Site/service provider]*	*[Method]*	*[ISF/site training file]*
Sponsor/service provider monitor (CRA)	*[Read-only/monitoring access training]*	*[Site/service provider]*	*[Method]*	*[ISF/sponsor training records]*
Auditor/inspector	*[Brief overview, navigation only]*	*[Site/service provider]*	*[Method]*	*[ISF (if filed)/inspection records]*
[ENTER others as appropriate]				

7 ISF Oversight and Access Arrangements

7.1 Responsibilities

Several roles could be involved in ISF setup, maintenance, and oversight. All are responsible for ensuring inspection readiness of the ISF on an ongoing basis throughout the conduct of the study; records should be filed contemporaneously and not allowed to accumulate. The site (and ultimately the principal investigator, with the institution) retains overall accountability for the ISF, even when activities are delegated to other site staff or to a service provider. Per ICH GCP E6(R3) Section 2.12.11, the investigator/institution should have control of all essential records generated by the investigator/institution before, during, and after the trial.

Activity	Function or Role Responsible
Who is responsible for writing and maintaining the ISF Plan and ISF Index?	

[ENTER DATE YYYY-MM-DD] Page 6

Page 6 of the real template

Govern — Cover page, sign-offs, your SOPs and training (§1–6)

Organize — Your ISF Index, what doesn't apply, records kept by others (§8)

Control access — Who does what, who sees what, originals and copies (§7, §8.2)

Review — How often you review or audit the ISF (§9)

Close & retain — Who keeps the records after the study, and for how long (§10–11)

Reference your SOPs instead of repeating them. The template is meant to be adapted, not copied.

Where does this record go?

A shortcut from the User Guide for common records. Zones 01, 02, 06, and 09–12 still hold their own records.

Is the record about a participant?	**Yes →**	**Zone 03 or 13** consent vs. data
No ↓		
Is it about the study drug or device?	**Yes →**	**Zone 08** drug / device
No ↓		
Is it to or from the IRB / ethics committee?	**Yes →**	**Zone 05** IRB / IEC
No ↓		
Is it to or from a regulator (e.g., FDA)?	**Yes →**	**Zone 04** regulatory
No ↓		
Is it about site staff, training, or agreements?	**Yes →**	**Zone 07** site records
No ↓		
Still unsure?	**→**	**Zone 14** + rationale in ISF Index

Worked example: consent records

Blank IRB-approved consent form
→ Zone 03 · Blank ICF subsection

ICF summary of changes
→ Zone 03 · Blank ICF subsection

IRB approval of the consent form
→ Zone 05 · IRB or IEC Decision subsection

Informed consent log
→ Zone 03 · Participant Log subsection

eConsent final data extract
→ Zone 03 · Source Data subsection (Recommended)

Kept by the sponsor somewhere else? Note where it lives in the ISF Index. Don't file a duplicate.

Naming your records

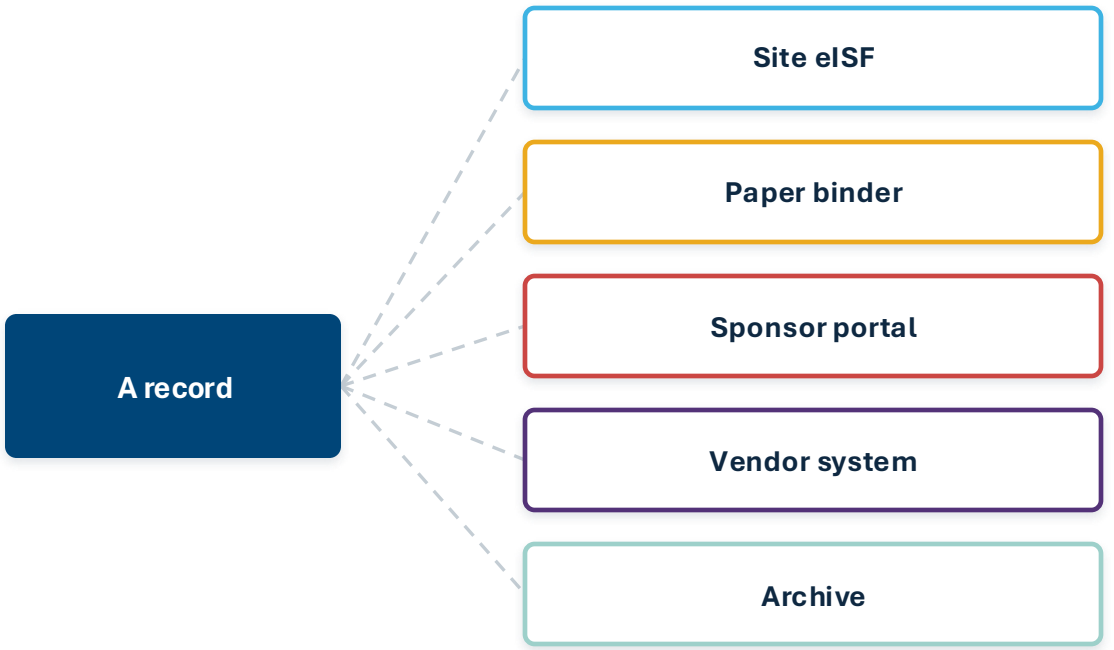
A suggested pattern from the User Guide (Section 3.1), not a requirement. Set your own convention in the ISF Plan.

Element	What it identifies	Example
StudyID	The sponsor's protocol or study number	ABC123
SiteID	Your site number for this study	S014
Zone	The ISF Zone the record is filed in	07
Artifact	The subsection, using the ISF RM name	SiteSignatureSheet
Subartifact	The specific type of record	DelegationOfAuthority
Version	Which version of the record this is	v03
Date	The record's date, as YYYY-MM-DD (same as the TMF Standard Model)	2026-10-15

Full name ABC123_S014_07_SiteSignatureSheet_DelegationOfAuthority_v03_2026-10-15

When your ISF is hybrid

- Decide which records stay at the site and which stay with the sponsor or vendors
- Write down records kept somewhere else (e.g., CVs held by HR, contracts held by legal)
- Decide how you handle paper originals, certified copies, and electronic records
- Decide who can see what: site staff, monitors, auditors, inspectors
- Keep one official copy. Only duplicate when you've written down why.



Trying it on one study

Days 1–5

Establish

- Select one active study
- Confirm format, systems, storage, owners
- Draft ISF Plan cover, roles, SOPs

Days 6–15

Map

- Create study ISF Index by Zone
- Identify gaps & duplicate locations
- Flag sponsor-provided records

Days 16–25

Operate

- File new records in real time using the ISF Index
- Train the team on real records
- Run a focused completeness / access review

Days 26–30

Stabilize

- Record decisions & exceptions
- Update ISF Plan and ISF Index
- Set recurring review cadence

PART 3

What’s next

Where the standard is going, and where to start when you’re ready

Where the standard is heading

Today: version 1.0

- Provisional, but ready to use now
- User Guide and ISF Plan Template available
- Built by ~45 industry volunteers

Next: part of the standard

- Joins the TMF Standard Model (v1 draft now in review)
- Your ISF stays site-focused
- Timing to be confirmed

Then: final

- Moves from provisional to final once it joins the standard
- Your feedback shapes what changes
- ISF names become CDISC Controlled Terminology that systems can read

How it fits current GCP (ICH E6(R3))

Paper or electronic, with the right controls

Paper, electronic, or a mix are all acceptable

Fit it to your study

You decide which records apply and write down why in your ISF Index

Under E6(R3)

Tell the sponsor who will keep your records after the study ends

How the mapping works

	Site Signature Sheet (where the delegation log goes)	Monitoring log
ISF reference model v1.0 (site)	Zone 07 Site Documentation › Site Signature Sheet (ISF_07.03.05)	Zone 11 Monitoring Logs and Reports › Monitoring Log (ISF_11.01.01)
TMF Reference Model v3.3.1 (sponsor, today)	05.02.18 Site Signature Sheet	05.04.04 Visit Log
TMF Standard Model v1 (draft)	Zone 5 Site Management › Accountability/Authority › Site Signature Sheet	Zone 5 Site Management › Investigator Site Monitoring › Site Visit Log
ICH E6(R3) Appendix C	C.3.1(e) Agreements	C.3.1(r) Monitoring records
Record date (draft)	Latest signature date	Latest entry date

Site Signature Sheet keeps its name in all three. The monitoring log is renamed, and column K links them today.

Site feedback shaped version 1.0

114

public review comments. 42 led to changes, and 27 more were identified for future consideration.

A few changes that came from site reviewers

- The ISF Index (your table of contents) moved to the very front
- “Diaries” renamed Participant Reported Outcome Data, to match what sites use
- Insurance and interim monitoring visit reports moved to Recommended, since many sites never receive them
- Correspondence subsections added for regulators, IRBs, and other committees

Still being considered: the name “Delegation Log” and a “Core, if applicable” label. Definitions for every subsection are coming in training materials.

Feedback is still open at tmf-isf@lists.cdisc.org.

Where each group can start

Stakeholder	What to do now
Sites	Download the materials and try the 30-day plan on one study when you're ready. A well-organized paper ISF or a simple eISF works fine.
eISF vendors	Explain how your system supports the ISF reference model: access, version control, change history, and export
Sponsors & CROs	Tell sites which records you provide and where they live
CDISC & community	Keep the feedback coming: tmf-isf@lists.cdisc.org

Materials and feedback

Download

- ISF Reference Model v1.0 (Provisional) in Excel
- User Guide for Clinical Research Sites
- ISF Plan Template in Word
- Plain-language glossary (last slide)
- cdisc.org/tmf › TMF Resources › Investigator Site File - ISF (next slide)

Give feedback

- Email tmf-isf@lists.cdisc.org
- Your message goes to several people who helped build the ISF RM and use it every day
- Questions, barriers, and change requests are all welcome
- Your feedback shapes the next version

Stay connected

- Get TMF and ISF news: sign up at cdisc.org/stay-informed and tick “TMF Updates”
- Join the TMF general meetings: register on the same page to get invites
- Volunteer to help shape the next version: cdisc.org/volunteer/tmf/form

Where to find the ISF reference model

1 Go to www.cdisc.org/tmf

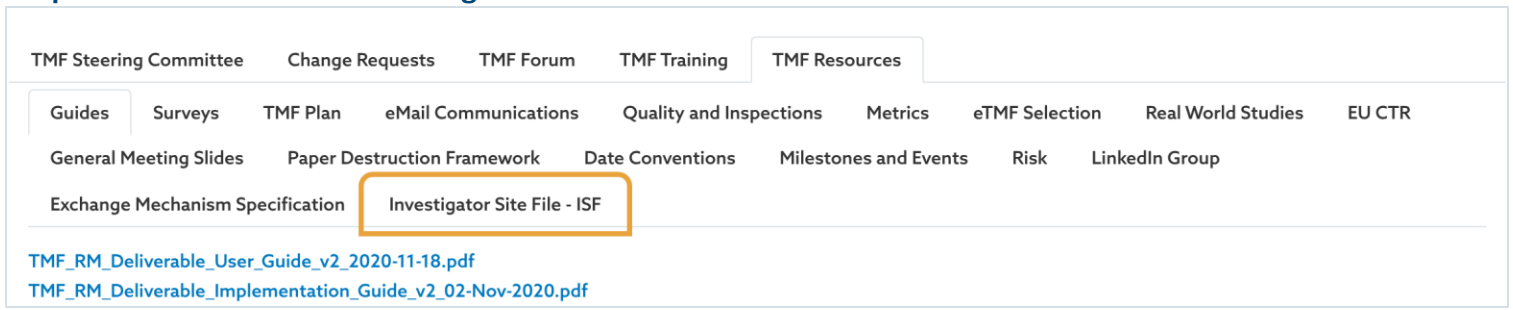
2 Scroll down to the tabs and click TMF Resources

3 Click Investigator Site File - ISF

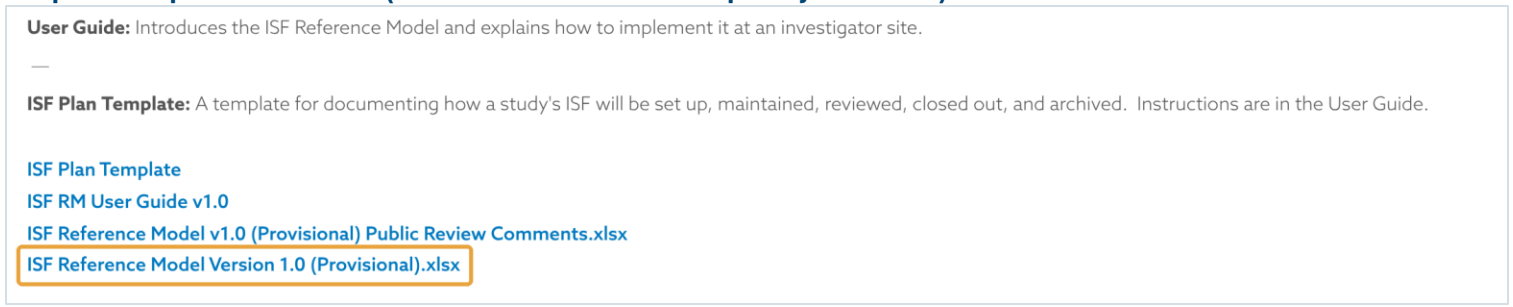
4 Download ISF Reference Model Version 1.0 (Provisional).xlsx

The User Guide and ISF Plan Template are linked just above it. All free.

Steps 2–3: TMF Resources › Investigator Site File - ISF



Step 4: the spreadsheet link (User Guide and Plan Template just above)



Q&A

Questions about the model, the tools, or getting started? All welcome.

Getting started

- Begin when a study is already underway?
- Too many Zones? What if most don't apply?

Ownership & records

- We keep CVs, SOPs, and contracts centrally. Now what?
- Who owns the ISF Plan and ISF Index?

Tools & exceptions

- Do we have to file every Core record?
- What should we ask our eISF vendor?

Something to think about: Which record in your ISF is hardest to find today?

15 min

Appendix: plain-language glossary

ISF: Investigator Site File, the site's study records (often called the regulatory binder)

eISF: An electronic ISF

TMF: Trial Master File, the sponsor's study records

ISF Reference Model (ISF RM): CDISC's standard sections and names for ISF records, provided as an Excel spreadsheet

Zone: One of 14 top-level sections of the ISF

Section: A group of related subsections inside a Zone

Artifact: A subsection of a zone; the standard place for one type of record

Subartifact: A specific record filed in a subsection

Core: If the record exists and applies to the study, file it

Recommended: Not required, but if created or received, file it

ISF Index: The study-specific table of contents, built from the spreadsheet

ISF Plan: The study's written rules for creating, keeping, reviewing, and archiving the ISF

Not Applicable: A subsection that doesn't apply to this study; record a brief reason

Provided by Sponsor: A record the sponsor supplies or keeps; note where it lives

Official copy: The one place the true record is kept (the reference model says "authoritative source")

Certified copy: A copy confirmed to match the original, with that confirmation documented

Note to File: A written note explaining a gap, a decision, or where something lives (Zone 14)

Delegation log: Who the PI has delegated study tasks to (filed under the Site Signature Sheet artifact)

Service provider: Any vendor supporting the trial, e.g., CRO, central lab, eISF vendor

ICH E6(R3): The current international Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guideline, January 2025