

A brief introduction to twinning

What is twinning?

Twinning is a formal, substantive collaboration between two organizations seeking to achieve a common goal. Twinning encourages civil society organizations to collaborate and to form partnerships with like-minded organizations in other countries or regions and provides a platform for the exchange of knowledge and strengthening of capacity.

Twinning is not a new concept. Many cities around the world have engaged in twinning for decades. In more recent years, organizations working in the fields of international development and HIV have joined forces through twinning projects.

ICAD and twinning: A long history

ICAD has extensive experience with promoting and supporting organizations interested in twinning. Nearly 20 years ago, ICAD wrote one of the first guides to twinning¹, and over a period of several years, helped to coordinate twinning programs that allowed organizations across the globe to work with Canadian organizations. As a result, ICAD has disseminated lessons learned from twinning in various formats, including publications² and webinars, in addition to publishing an evaluation framework specific to twinning³.

In many countries, organizations working in the fields of gender, nutrition, food security, SRHR and HIV interact with each other on many different levels. Some examples of this interaction are:

- one organization referring clients to another organization;
- organizations participating in a formal or informal network or coalition;
- people from one organization talking to people from other organizations at national, regional and international conferences;
- one organization contacting another for specific information or for a copy of a resource;
- a mentor organization imparting knowledge or skills to a younger, smaller or newly-formed organization;
- two (or more) organizations working together on a particular project; or,
- exchanges of personnel between organizations to improve knowledge or skills.

These interactions can be formal or informal. They can be one-time or they can last for an extended period of time. They are critical to the success of the work these organizations do because they enable vital information to be exchanged and they create opportunities to work together.

¹ ICAD. [Beyond our Borders: A Guide to Twinning for HIV/AIDS Organizations](#) (1999).

² ICAD. [The Benefits of International Twinning Projects for HIV/AIDS Programming in Canada and for Canadian Organizations](#) (2003).

³ ICAD. [Evaluation Framework for International Partnerships and Twinning Projects](#) (2002).

Twinning occupies a particular place on this continuum of interactions. While organizations might be linked together (such as through membership in a network or coalition), they are not necessarily “twinning”.

Ideally, twinning should be two-way, as the name suggests. In other words, both organizations should benefit from the collaboration and learn from each other. This can include a mentorship exchange between peer organizations that work in similar or related fields, but who have different levels of experience.

As described in the definition provided earlier, the collaboration should be substantive and formalized.

Formal means that there is an agreement or contract, verbal or written.

Substantive means that the interaction is significant and that it lasts for a period of time (i.e., it is not just a one-time interaction, such as a telephone call asking for information).

Collaboration means that the two organizations work together on a specific project or to exchange information or skills.

Benefits of Twinning

Organizations that have experience with twinning have reported the following benefits.

Capacity building. Twinning can help strengthen the organizations involved through a transfer of skills and knowledge. This, in turn, can lead to improved policy analysis and service delivery.

Identification of best practices. Twinning provides opportunities to identify policies, techniques and interventions that have worked and to spread the word about them. This helps organizations avoid re-inventing the wheel.

Increased programme effectiveness. Where the twinning involves collaboration on a specific initiative, it usually results in stronger and more effective programmes.

Developing new approaches. Twinning can help organizations develop new programs and adapt existing interventions based on the skills, knowledge and experience they gain from their twinning partner.

Broadening of our horizons. Twinning can help us to become less insular and more outward looking; to break down barriers; to understand new cultures; and to learn about how the epidemic is affecting other parts of the world.

Expanding our reach. Twinning provides opportunities for organizations to work more closely with communities and populations in their own context—for example, African diaspora in Canada—and to develop more culturally-relevant programming.

Relationship building. Twinning can help build stronger relationships among organizations working in inter-related fields such as gender, nutrition, food security, SRHR and HIV. These relationships become important when an organization has a need and can turn to the partner organization for assistance, or when opportunities arise for organizations to work together to address a specific issue.

Networking. Twinning can contribute to greater networking through the snowball effect, where both organizations involved in the twinning project are exposed to each other’s existing networks.

Solidarity. Twinning helps to create a feeling of belonging to a larger community, a worldwide family. As well, organizations involved in twinning are often inspired by the work of their partners. This, in turn, can help to empower people to fight for their rights and for adequate services related to gender, nutrition, food security, SRHR and HIV in their communities.

International experience. For many organizations, twinning provides a first opportunity to work with international partners, or to expand on existing international work.

Building of a global movement. Twinning can play an important role in building an inclusive, culturally relevant and successful global movement to respond to the fields of gender, nutrition, food security, SRHR and HIV. This is important because these issues will only be adequately addressed through effective linkages across sectors and regions.

Forms of Twinning

Twinning can take many different forms. Activities within a twinning project generally fall into four main categories: training exchanges, information exchanges, technical exchanges and collaborations on specific initiatives. Each category is described below. Please note that twinning projects often involve more than one form of twinning.

Training exchanges. These involve one or more persons from one organization visiting the partner organization for a period of time to learn or impart information and skills. Training exchanges can involve internships, on-site training or study tours.

- Internships provide people with the opportunity to work in another organization to gain practical experience and exposure to the different ways in which that organization structures and carries out its work. Internships can be one-way (people from one organization visit the partner organization) or two-way (the two organizations exchange personnel, either at the same time or at different times). The training can be part of the host organization's regular training or it can be specifically tailored to the needs of the visiting persons. The internship can be short-term (e.g., 2-3 weeks) or longer-term (e.g., six months). In some internships, the visiting persons will temporarily fill positions in the host organization.
- On-site training occurs when a person from one organization who is experienced in a specific aspect of work (related to gender, nutrition, food security, SRHR or HIV) is invited to provide training to the partner organization's staff, board members, or volunteers at the locale of the partner organization.
- Study tours involve the visiting person or persons touring several local organizations working in the fields of gender, nutrition, food security, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) or HIV (including the host organization) for the purpose of providing or receiving training.

Information exchanges. These are similar to training exchanges in that they involve people from one organization visiting the partner organization, but the visits are limited to an exchange of information and do not involve formal training. As with the training exchanges, information exchanges can be one-way or two-way and can involve study tours.

Technical exchanges. These involve people from one organization travelling to the partner organization to help implement a specific programme or activity. The visiting persons may temporarily fill positions in the host organization (similar to internships).

Collaboration on specific initiatives. This involves two organizations agreeing to work together to establish a particular programme or to address an issue that affects them both.