

Fostering connections among national public health institutes (NPHI) is a core tenet of IANPHI's mission. IANPHI supports these linkages in a number of ways. One strategy is peer-to-peer visits, in which leaders and staff from one NPHI visit each other to share experiences, lessons learned, and wisdom about building or strengthening NPHIs.

BENEFITS OF A PEER-TO-PEER VISIT

Many peer-to-peer visits involve connections between developing NPHIs and those that are well-established. Such visits help the developing NPHI clarify how to move forward efficiently. They are also beneficial to the host institution. Staff from the host institution learn about NPHIs in other countries. During discussions with the visitors, they often find themselves reflecting on their own institutions and gaining insights and ideas about issues they are facing. Peer-to-peer visits may also occur between established NPHIs, for example, to exchange ideas about ways to address specific challenges.

PLANNING FOR A PEER-TO-PEER VISIT

INITIATING PLANS

The idea of a peer-to-peer visit often arises during discussions about how other countries have moved forward with NPHI creation, developing a legal framework, or another fundamental issue. The initial discussions often involve NPHI leadership and members of the IANPHI Secretariat, or they grow out of discussions among NPHIs, often during the IANPHI Annual Meeting or other situations where leaders of NPHIs interact.

CLARIFY DESIRED OUTCOMES AND IDENTIFY A GOOD MATCH

A first step in planning for a peer-to-peer visit is to clarify the desired outcomes. This helps identify a good match for the visit and informs the agenda.

In identifying an NPHI that can serve as a good match for the NPHI requesting a visit, considerations include:

- Which NPHIs have experiences relevant to the goals of the visit?
- Are likely participants from the two NPHIs comfortable enough working in a common language to be able to talk about issues that may be nuanced or sensitive?
- Are there logistical considerations, for example, related to travel restrictions, in a particular country?

EXAMPLES OF IANPHI-SUPPORTED PEER-TO-PEER VISITS

- ZAMBIA AND MALAWI TO MOZAMBIQUE (2015) Understand processes for NPHI establishment and how the NPHI functions in collaboration with the Ministry of Health
- PAKISTAN TO THE NETHERLANDS (2017) Learn how to expand from an infectious disease institute into a more comprehensive NPHI
- BURKINA FASO TO FRANCE & BELGIUM (2019) Seek leadership and management guidance following merging of several institutions to establish an NPHI



Burkina Faso's peer-to-peer visits in France and Belgium in 2019

DEVELOP DETAILED GOALS AND AN AGENDA FOR THE VISIT

Once the NPHI pair is confirmed, a shared understanding and goals for the visit are essential for determining the agenda and selecting the participants. This includes defining expectations on possible follow-up after the visit. A one-time visit will be structured differently than a first visit to establish a long-term relationship and will have different outcomes. Being clear up front helps ensure the agenda and activities are optimal and the goals of the visit are met.

The agenda is often finalized through a negotiation between the participating NPHIs, which results in more clarity about opportunities provided by the visit. While a detailed agenda is important, it is good for both groups to be flexible during the visit, as critical issues often surface that are important to explore in more depth, sometimes with people not originally scheduled to meet with the visitors.

An example agenda for a peer-to-peer visit from a developing to a more developed NPHI is included in the box below. Depending on the needs, key features may include:

- Presentations by both NPHIs about their institutes, how they were developed, their major activities, current challenges and opportunities, work with subnational levels, etc.
- Tours of the NPHI or selected areas (for example, the emergency operations center or specific laboratories)
- Sessions on key issues of particular interest or concern (for example, emergency response and workforce development are common topics)
- Breakout or small-group sessions, for topics that are of particular interest to subgroups of participants

If the visiting team includes leadership, private meetings between the leaders of the two NPHIs can be very valuable, allowing for frank discussions about the challenges faced by leadership. Meals and breaks are opportune times for people from both NPHIs to get to know each other. Some of the most productive and sometimes long-term relationships evolve from informal meetings.

EXAMPLE AGENDA FOR A VISIT BY A DEVELOPING NPHI TO A WELL-ESTABLISHED NPHI

DAY 1 MORNING

- Meeting with leadership of the host NPHI
- NPHI presentations and discussions (these may include a broad audience from the host NPHI)
- Tours

DAY 1 AFTERNOON

- Sessions on NPHI leadership, management, and structure. Possible topics include:
 - NPHI development and legal frameworks
 - Human resources
 - Financial management
 - External communications

DAY 2 MORNING

- Sessions related to NPHI core functions. Possible topics include:
 - Surveillance
 - Emergency and outbreak response
 - Public health observatories
 - Laboratory functions

DAY 2 AFTERNOON

- Small group sessions
 - The visiting delegation might split into subgroups, to allow more in-depth discussion of additional topics, such as information technology or environmental health
- Private meeting between the NPHI leaders

DAY 3 MORNING

- Additional sessions on topics that arose during earlier discussions
- Wrap-up sessions summarizing what has been learned and future plans

IDENTIFY PARTICIPANTS

The size of the visiting delegation is often a compromise between the number of people who would like to go, the number that can be accommodated by the NPHI being visited, and the resources available to support the trip, including those of the host institution. It requires a balance between including a wide range of individuals and having a small enough group that they can engage fully with the activities. The delegation should be comprised of individuals who will be able to use their experience and new expertise to lead the next steps of NPHI development.

If ministerial, cabinet-level, or legislative action is needed to formalize a new NPHI, it may be appropriate to include high-level participants from the Ministry or legislature. The potential benefits of including these individuals must be weighed with potential complications, for example, whether significant changes to the meeting purpose or logistics will be required to accommodate political concerns or protocols related to visits by cabinet officials or national legislators. Inclusion of representatives of WHO or other groups outside of the NPHI for all or part of the visit may also be helpful.

Similarly, careful selection of participants from the NPHI being visited is critical. Participants should be selected not only for their technical skills, but also for their ability to communicate well and to tailor their presentations and discussions to the needs of the visitors.

FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

It is helpful to have a main point of contact in each of the involved organizations to ensure all arrangements are in place and information is shared. Before the trip, it is helpful to exchange relevant background materials, including legislation, organigrams, strategic and management plans, and historical overviews. This exchange may occur through phone calls, webinars, and emails. If possible, it is good to share biographies, and perhaps pictures, of participants from both NPHIs in advance. Sharing information about the interests of the individuals in the visiting delegation will help in setting up side meetings among people who share specific interests. People who will be providing presentations should be given guidance to help them tailor their talks appropriately. In general, talks should be focused and short enough that sufficient time is available for questions and discussions. It could be helpful to share presentations in advance, if they are available.

Rooms, audiovisual support, plans for meals, and other logistics and travel arrangements should be finalized well in advance. Visa processing for some countries can take a long time; therefore, applications should be initiated as quickly as possible.

DURING THE VISIT

The beginning of the visit can set the tone for what is to come. It is recommended that the host NPHI ensure that the visiting delegation is warmly welcomed as soon as they arrive. Prior to technical presentations and discussions, it can be useful to review the agenda together to identify

any gaps or areas that are less critical, and to ensure all logistical issues are taken care of.

It can be helpful to have one person from the NPHI that is being visited serve as lead host/coordinator. This person typically attends all or nearly all of the sessions, to provide continuity and context. For example, different parts of an NPHI may use different terms or constructs to refer to the same organization or activity, which can be confusing for visitors. As the visit proceeds, a person who stays with the delegation can help the participants build on what they have already learned, ensure that questions are directed at the people who can answer them, and arrange additional meetings as unanticipated questions and issues arise.

A wrap-up session is also helpful, to allow each group to express their gratitude, discuss what they have learned and how they intend to use the shared information, as well as identify any further planned information sharing or joint follow-up activities. Photo documentation of the visit may be utilized to share information about the visit with others who did not participate in the visit and to IANPHI. The longer-term impact of the visit can also be facilitated by packaging together and exchanging hard copy and electronic documents and agreements before the departure of the visitors.

AFTER THE VISIT

Both NPHIs should share the knowledge and information gained with relevant parties, such as NPHI staff who did not participate in the visit. It may be useful for the visiting NPHI to create a short report, perhaps a month after the visit, describing highlights of the visit and what follow-up has occurred. The visit experience and lessons learned may be relevant to the broader IANPHI community, for example, via a feature in the IANPHI Insider newsletter. This can inform future peer-to-peer visits among members.

IF YOUR NPHI IS INTERESTED IN ENGAGING IN OR HOSTING A PEER-TO-PEER VISIT

If you believe that a peer-to-peer visit could help your NPHI advance, contact IANPHI at info@ianphi.org for further information and exploration.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information about previous peer to peer visits between IANPHI members may be found at:

- <https://ianphi.org/about/peer-to-peer.html>

News stories about two peer-to-peer visits can be found at:

- <https://ianphi.org/news/2019/burkina-faso-peer-visit.html>
- <https://ianphi.org/news/2017/collaborating-vision-transformation-national-institute-health-is-lamabad.html>