

# 1. Peer learning in partnerships - Toolbox



## Plan for peer learning in your project and steering groups

The objective of peer-learning in ICLD networks (including team visits) and partnerships is the **transfer of knowledge, skills and experience from one local government to another**, and vice versa, mainly through **international visits**. These visits are at the heart of your partnership, and network, and should be well planned and contain elements that encourage peer learning, friendly benchmarking to inspire democratic development, or other forms of peer support such as mentoring, site/study visits, peer visits, peer assessments and work shadowing.

### When planning international visits remember to:

- Be clear about what you expect to learn from each other during a visit.
- Be clear about the methods you will adopt and how you will engage with each other in the learning process.
- Be clear how your visit will contribute to your project's objectives.
- Always pay attention to intercultural, political, and logistical challenges.
- Allow time aside for yourself to reflect on what you are learning.
- Ensure that the learning gains of individuals are communicated back home.

## Peer learning methods

Peer learning is a continuous process and should be encouraged at all stages of your partnership from project design to project results and dissemination. To do this, ICLD suggests the following:

- Conduct peer assessments
- Conduct thematic study and site visits
- Conduct peer visits
- Organise work shadowing
- Organise peer learning workshops

*Please contact ICLD at any time for additional support regarding peer learning in your partnership.*

## General tips

### Reflections questions

Before each peer learning international visit reflect over the following questions:

- What stage in the change process are you currently in within your ICLD project? What knowledge gaps are you trying to fill during this visit?
- What do you need help with from your partner during this visit??
- Do you have a strategy to select 'the right' peers to engage with/involve in the visit?
- Do you have a strategy to ensure peers are fully engaged and invested in the visit?
- Are you clear about what learning gains you expect between peers?
- Do you have a communication, evaluating and reporting mechanism to capture and build support for (and around) the peer learning gains?
- Will individual peer learners 'share forward'? Have you 'shared forward' as an individual learner?

### Set common learning objectives

**Learning objectives** are statements that define the expected goal of an activity in terms of demonstrable skills or knowledge. It may be useful for you to **set learning objectives for your project and steering group international visits**. It is very common to start planning an event by setting time boundaries, and then moving on to deciding on which experts to invite and what content they shall present. For a **more impactful visit**, try instead to shift the perspective to the visiting peers. **How will the visit be useful for them?** Formulate intended take-away as proper learning objectives, using a **stem phrase + the ABC formula**.

**Stem phrase:** "*After an international visit, ... are able to ...*"

**A** stand for **Audience**. The first and most important task is to adopt the perspective of the learner. **B** stands for **Behaviour**. What behaviours shall the participant be able to activate as a result of an international visit? Use observable action verbs, such as "define, identify, explain, exemplify, discuss, categorize, compare, contrast, analyse, assess, draft, design, propose, suggest, defend, justify, recommend, advocate".

**C** stands for **Content**. Now is the time to formulate relevant subject matter content.

As a rule of thumb, stick to **two learning objectives** per international visit. As the visit starts, help participants to **focus their attention by highlighting the learning objectives**.

### Examples of learning objectives:

Example 1: After the project groups international visit, the team are able to identify key components of gender mainstreaming

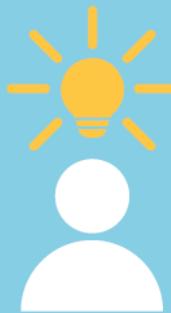
Example 2: After the steering groups international visit, politicians are able to define their role and responsibilities as a steering group



## Method 1. Structured peer assessments

Peer assessments is a **broad term** for a range of activities that include local governments **evaluating and providing feedback** on the work of their peers. Peer assessment is **most commonly used with written work**, but can also be used with **presentations, posters or videos**.

ICLD project planning workbook has been designed in way to promote peer reflection and assessments. **The last page of the workbook is a peer assessment.** To encourage peer learning in your partnership we highly recommend that you present your project planning workbook to each other, in the format of your choosing, and fill in the assessment.



### Project planning workbook peer assessment

During one of your first international visits, present the results of your completed workbook to your partner in a half-day workshop.

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#### For the international government:

- Describe the challenge your partner is undertaking as you understand it.
- What did you learn from your partner's project plan? What was most interesting?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Any suggestions for improvement (of the problem definition or goals)?

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#### (OPTIONAL) For the Swedish local government:

- Describe the challenge your partner is undertaking as you understand it.
- What did you learn from your partner's project plan? What was most interesting?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Any suggestions for improvement (of the problem definition or goals)?



## Method 2. Study visits

A study visit is a day or half day **visit organised by the host local government or a project and/or steering group visit**. Study visits usually include presentations and local visits to special departments, NGO's, educational/training institutions, and/or local facilities. **We suggest you organise thematic study visits relevant to your project's topic during your international visits.** Here are three suggestions for themes.

### Theme: Localising the Global Goals

**Overview:** The role of local politicians and local governments can vary depending on the context. Visiting a local government in another country can contribute to new learnings and insights. This brief provides a set of questions and study visit ideas to initiate discussion between your local governments on the status and challenges of localising the Global Goals at a local level.

### Theme: Gender equality and Gender Mainstreaming

**Overview:** The role of local politicians and local governments can vary depending on the context. Visiting a local government in another country can contribute to new learnings and insights. This brief provides a set of questions and study visit ideas to initiate discussion between your local governments on the status and challenges of gender mainstreaming at a local level.

### Theme: Political leadership

**Overview:** The role of local politicians and local governments can vary depending on the context. Visiting a local government in another country can contribute to new learnings and insights. This brief provides a set of study visits ideas and questions to initiate discussion between local politicians in Sweden and their counterparts in ICLD partner countries during study visits abroad. The intention is to enhance the understanding of different systems in terms of the role of the local governments and local politicians.



## Method 3. Peer visits

Peer Visits offer opportunities for **mutual learning** for all partners involved. A Peer Visit puts emphasis on **demonstrating and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of existing projects/processes**. In contrast to Study Visits, Peer Visits put a strong emphasis on **professional feedback** by a group of peers within a **clearly structured procedure**. The core intention of the procedure is that this feedback is valuable and helpful for the host local government.

The four phases of a Peer Visit:

- Phase 1. Preparation of the Peer Visit
- Phase 2. Peer Visit in the host local government
- Phase 3. Peer feedback to the host local government
- Phase 4. Follow-up: consideration of improvements based on the feedback

### Phase 1. Preparation of the Peer Visit

The host local government should reserve a timeframe of normally **three to five months to prepare** for a Peer Visit. The host institution **identifies the area in need of improvement**. Use your organisational readiness assessment to inspire you. Basic decisions concerning the Peer Visit need to be documented at an early stage by the host institution. It includes the basic information about the Peer Visit (timeline, project, roles and responsibilities).

### Phase 2. Peer Visit to host local government

During the Peer Visit, the host institution and other stakeholders or experts **present the selected area**. Visits to relevant organisations, bodies can take place. **Peers check the accuracy** of the information provided in the organisational readiness assessment and **conduct their own investigation**, by gathering and assessing additional data related to the selected assessment. Peers gain a deeper understanding of the measure selected by the host institution and the related issues, by **active listening, asking questions and analysing** all information and evidence provided.

**A peer who is practising active and effective listening, observing and questioning is:**

- Knowledgeable: familiar with the focus of the Peer Visit.
- Focused: stays on the topic (selected measure).
- Clear: asks simple, easy and short questions.
- Gentle: lets people finish, gives them time to think; tolerates pauses.
- Sensitive: listens attentively and carefully to what is said and how it is said, is empathetic.
- Open: responds to what is important to the presenter or interviewee and is flexible.

### Phase 3. Peer feedback to the host local government

In phase 3, **peers give feedback** to the host institution during a **moderated final feedback session**. In this feedback session, the peers deliver their **feedback on and ideas for the improvement** of the selected measure to the host institution. Depending on the decision of the host institution, peers can **give feedback individually, as single persons, or as a group of peers**. The host institution documents the Peer Visit including the peers' feedback. The final feedback session, during which the main observations

are presented, **should be guided by a moderator**. The aim of this session is to come to a **common understanding regarding the strengths and weaknesses** of the selected measure between peers and the host institution.

#### **Reflective and constructive feedback:**

- promotes reflection as part of a dialogue between the giver and receiver of feedback;
- is descriptive rather than judgmental;
- is specific rather than general;
- is directed toward aspects which the receiver can change;
- considers the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback;
- is requested rather than imposed;
- involves sharing information rather than giving advice;
- considers the amount of information the receiver can use, rather than the amount the observer would like to give;
- requires a supportive, confidential relationship built on trust, honesty, and genuine concern

#### **Phase 4. Follow-up: consideration of improvements based on the feedback**

In the last phase of the Peer Visit procedure, the focus is on the usage of **peer feedback as a source for improvements** in the host local government. As an important additional learning outcome, peers are also encouraged to think about if and how they might adapt/ transfer good practice observed during the Peer Visit in their own local government. As a first step, the peer feedback is analysed and reflected on, by the host institution and disseminated, as appropriate, to relevant stakeholders.





## Method 4. Work shadowing

Work shadowing involves **one or two** people spending a **period of time** with one or more people who work in the **same field or on similar projects**. The aim is to facilitate an **exchange of expertise** by **observing** first-hand how things are done elsewhere, thus providing inspiration and new ideas for working methods.

ICLD encourages work shadowing as part of your project and steering groups international visits where 1-2 people spend a day or two following their peers from their partner local government. (Separate trips for 1-2 people is also possible and encouraged).

Work shadowing is an opportunity for the visitor to work alongside a person with similar responsibilities in the host local government. The possibility to observe, ask and discuss ideas on the spot allows people to **gain experience and fresh insights** into specific professional roles and the methods employed therein. This can be useful when new tasks are introduced into a professional field (e.g. coordination of climate action) or new methods are implemented (e.g. youth participation in climate action).

Work shadowing will likely **vary from visit to visit** as the programme is fully dependent on the topic(s)/project(s) of the visit. It might cover an **introductory presentation** by the host of the specific topic(s)/project(s), the visitor's **participation in relevant meetings, site visits, personal meetings between the visitor and other stakeholders**, to name just a few examples. The final programme is up to the host's creative ideas and the visitor's needs. During the visit, the visitor should take advantage of the host's experience: **ask questions, request further information and explore new ideas** and ways of working in his/her home city.

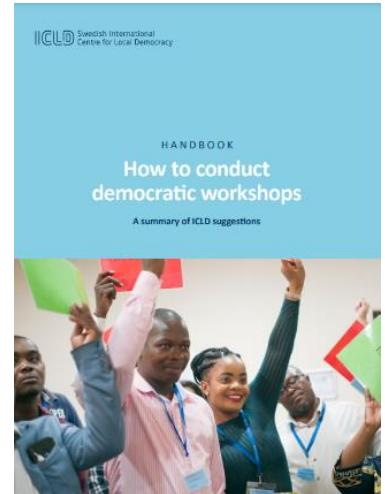




## Method 5. Peer learning workshops

To encourage peer learning between your organisations, ICLD recommends you organise joint workshops and activities that encourage inclusivity, openness, and learning. Please consult our “Handbook: [How to conduct democratic workshop](#)” for workshop method ideas for your partnership’s international visits.

The handbook contains some workshop methods that are particularly to encourage peer learning such as: Reflecting teams, The cafe method or Appreciative enquiry. You may want to implement some of these during your international visits.



# Peer to Peer timeline suggestion for Project- or Steering group team

## Inception Phase (Project Planning Phase)

### Objectives:

- Establish project goals, build initial understanding, and set the groundwork for collaboration.

### Suggested Activities:

#### Set learning objectives and engagement plans:

- Define two primary learning objectives for the peer-learning activities during this phase, such as understanding the decentralised governance structure in each partner country.
- Develop a plan to encourage active participation, such as regular debrief sessions after each exchange to discuss key takeaways and their relevance to the project.

#### Peer Assessments and Baseline setting:

- Exchange and review organisational readiness assessments with your partner to identify shared objectives and baseline capabilities.
- Conduct peer assessments to clarify each organisation's current capacity and identify priority areas for capacity building.
- Map out how your project ambition aligns with global sustainability frameworks such as Agenda 2030.

#### Study Visits focused on exploring project themes:

- Organise study visits to explore specific themes, use ICLD **Study Visit Guides** if relevant.
- During these visits, team members can observe practices in action, which helps identify strategies that could be beneficial to adapt locally.

### Considerations:

- Ensure clear communication of objectives and document expectations for each visit.
- Establish a feedback mechanism for continuous improvement and to align on mutual learning goals.

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## Implementation Phase (Active Project Phase)

### Objectives:

- Deepen practical knowledge, address project challenges, and foster collaborative problem-solving.

### Suggested Activities:

### **Work Shadowing and Collaborative Working:**

- Facilitate work shadowing opportunities, where project- or steering group members spend time observing or working alongside counterparts in the partner organisation.
- This hands-on experience allows team members to learn directly from peers and to map out best practices.

### **Regular Thematic Peer Visits with Structured Feedback:**

- Conduct thematic peer visits focused on specific project milestones or challenges, with structured feedback sessions to evaluate and discuss the effectiveness of various approaches.
- Organise feedback sessions where team members present their experiences and receive constructive input, helping both teams to refine their methods and improve project processes.

### **Joint Problem-Solving Workshops:**

- Arrange workshops focused on current project challenges, using peer-learning workshop methods such as *Appreciative Inquiry* or *Reflecting Teams* (see ICLD How to conduct democratic workshops Handbook).
- These sessions can be an opportunity for teams to collaboratively explore solutions and share insights, especially in addressing unforeseen challenges or improving project quality.

### **Considerations:**

- Adapt peer-learning methods based on mid-project evaluations to meet emerging needs.
- Involve relevant stakeholders in these learning exchanges to ensure that insights are contextualised and actionable.

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## **Dissemination Phase (Project Completion and Sharing Results)**

### **Objectives:**

- Share the project's achievements, ensure the knowledge transfer, and create sustainability for future initiatives.

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### **Joint Dissemination Events and Presentations:**

- Host joint events where project teams can present key findings, methods, and tools developed through the project to local stakeholders and other partners.
- Use strategic communication methods to ensure results are shared effectively, highlighting practical insights and replicable practices.

#### **Final Reflection and Peer Evaluation Session:**

- Conduct a final evaluation to review what worked, what could be improved, and which methods can be sustained or adapted by each organisation.

#### **Identify Knowledge Transfer Channels for Broader Impact:**

- Consider partnerships with local networks, local government associations, and NGOs to help disseminate project insights to other communities or governments facing similar challenges.

- Develop resources or case studies based on the project's work to ensure long-term accessibility of insights for similar projects.

### **Considerations:**

- Document key learnings in an accessible format for sharing with wider audiences.
- Create plans for ongoing communication to support the continued exchange of knowledge and maintain partnerships beyond the project lifecycle.

# Content suggestions for project and steering group meetings

## Decentralisation and Local Mandates:

- Conduct a comparative analysis between Sweden and your international partner regarding decentralisation and the mandates of local governments, see Study Visit Guide: Political Leadership.
- Identify key similarities and differences in governance structures and responsibilities. Pay special attention to factors that need to be considered due to these differences.
- Highlight areas where one partner may be well-equipped to assist the other, based on their respective experiences.

## Deep Dive into Local Democracy (KAP-Survey Follow-Up):

- Use the ICLD's KAP-survey follow-up materials to examine the four core areas of local democracy: equity, participation, transparency, and accountability.
- Discuss how your project aligns with these core democratic values and identify areas for improvement.

## SDG Impact Mapping:

- Use the SDG Impact Assessment Tool to assess and map your project's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030.  
<https://sdgimpactassessmenttool.org/en-gb>
- Identify the specific SDGs your project impacts and develop a plan to track progress in these areas.

## Online Core Courses for Capacity Building:

- Select relevant modules from ICLD's online Core Course to enhance understanding of key areas, such as gender mainstreaming, citizen budgeting, anti-corruption practices, or a human rights-based approach (HRBA). <https://learn.icld.se/>
- Conduct joint learning sessions to apply these concepts within the context of your project.

## Learning Case Application:

- Choose a learning case from ICLD's resources and review it as a team to extract relevant insights and strategies that can be applied to your project. <https://icld.se/en/icld-education-material/>
- Use the case study to stimulate discussion and identify practical approaches that can be implemented locally.