

Update on the Peer-to-Peer Learning Alliances (P2P LA)

The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) aims to foster accountable, inclusive and transparent public sector institutions that deliver responsive policies, effective resource management, and accessible and quality public services. As part of EIP's effort to capture innovative approaches through collective learning processes, members of the EIP have called for the development of multi-stakeholder peer-to-peer exchanges.

Peer-to-Peer Learning Alliances are meant to stimulate country-driven and contextually adapted approaches to public sector reform. They leverage the unique potential of the EIP as a multi-stakeholder platform and are to provide a venue for experience sharing among peer reformers.

Peer learning¹, facilitated by the P2P LA, presents an opportunity to generate evidence and the shared insights of reform teams working on public sector management reform. It acknowledges the importance of context, aims to tackle the existing evidence gaps, and builds on a more honest peer-to-peer sharing of experience and innovations between reformers.

- ❖ EIP's P2P LA are designed as **collaborative multi-stakeholder groupings** of institutions and organisations drawn from multiple contexts that share knowledge on public sector reform.
- ❖ Stakeholders will use different peer learning tools to engage with each other over time. These are not ad hoc learning events, but allow for **continuous learning** on both content and peer learning processes.
- ❖ The EIP P2P LA give the peers the opportunity to **learn from each other in safe spaces** and experiment with problem-driven and iterative approaches to public sector reform. They also enable broader learning beyond the members of the learning alliance.
- ❖ The **stories of change** will be made available for the EIP membership and beyond.

The EIP has completed a global [Mapping of peer engagement initiatives in public sector reform](#) and compiled learnings and lessons that have informed a toolkit for organizers of P2P LA in the context of public sector reform.



The next steps for EIP members and others are to test the P2P LA toolkit and to document their endeavor and experiences. During the launch phase, organisers will put an emphasis on documenting impact and lessons learnt – a significant knowledge gap identified during the mapping. These will inform a revised toolkit for wider application.

¹ In the context of public sector reform peer learning refers to the efforts by which public officials or practitioners with responsibility for reform design) gain practical insights into technical options and tactical implementation modes from each other. It aims to address the need for more flexible, tactical and context-specific approaches to problem-solving. The premise being that solutions can emerge when those actually involved in reform processes are able to tap into the tacit and experiential knowledge of their peers and adapt it to their respective contexts.

Key Findings of the Mapping²

The Mapping shows that peer engagement initiatives have covered a broad range of issues ranging from core areas of public sector management (e.g. public financial management, municipal management), reforms in service delivery sectors (e.g. water, health), to administrative and policy reforms in strategic parts of the broader social and economic development agenda (e.g. democratic reform, economic growth, financial regulation, investment promotion, etc.).

Many of these areas were dominated by technical agendas in the past and emphasized the work of external experts and not internal peers. Many of the international organizations working in these domains sponsored such interventions as well, but they are now focusing at least some resources on a different approach—engaging peer practitioners actually doing reforms, helping these peers learn from others, and fostering an emergent and contextually fitted agenda rather than a technically driven one.

The vast majority of the peer learners identified experiential knowledge sharing as the key gain of their experience. This kind of exchange fostered learning about ‘softer’ issues of reform, like building teams and managing political tensions and maintaining political support, and dealing with cultural challenges. This experiential knowledge sharing also helped participants learn about prioritization and sequencing reforms. Such learning is extremely difficult to codify and formalize in documents and is therefore often a peculiar product of peer learning exchanges—where peers can exchange tacit experiential knowledge with other peers who have enough in common to make sense of the informal sharing process.

Some of the key challenges related to peer-to-peer learning include: identifying the “right” peer to engage with, getting the peers to engage fully in the process, logistics of peer interaction, peer learning and its impact at scale.

Toolkit for Peer-to-Peer Learning Alliances (P2P LA)

In view of the findings of the mapping exercise, a stylized path to “peer-to-peer learning” has been proposed. The stylized path (or generic approach) to engage groups of peer would consist of four stages/objectives:



The toolkit on P2P LA consists of a tailored checklist with associated guidance to assist organizers in reflecting on their options and strategies for moving along the “stylized path” in achieving the objective of creating change at scale.

² Available at http://www.effectiveinstitutions.org/media/EIP_Mapping_on_peer_learning_initiatives_in_public_sector_reforms_in_development.pdf

Activities during the Launch Phase

- The EIP Joint Secretariat organized a **Preparatory Workshop** on P2P LA at the UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence (GCPSE) on 24 April 2015. Government officials from Bhutan, Maldives and Vietnam participated. The workshop offered an opportunity to reflect and feedback on key pieces of work on peer learning conducted under the auspices of the EIP – the Mapping and Toolkit – and what they may mean for peer learning in the shape of P2P LA. It allowed the participants to identify opportunities for future engagement, potentially in the framework of a P2P LA on Large Public Sector Reform efforts.

One of the proposals from the P2P-LA Preparatory Workshop was to add an additional stage of “pre-foundational engagement” to the “stylized path” of P2P-LA. Other proposals included: envisioning P2P-LA in the bigger picture of national reform’s efforts, the engagement of political actors in the process, institutional mechanisms to link learning to change on the ground etc.

- The EIP Joint Secretariat intends to sign an MoU between the EIP and participating countries/institutions of its first set of P2P LA and is approaching potential partners to scope their interest and solicit their commitment. The **first set of P2P LA** will focus on Large Public Sector Reforms and Foresight for Resilience in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with foundational engagement workshops planned for the 4th quarter of 2015. Other potential topics for P2P LA that are under discussion are: (1) Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM) / Linking Revenues and Expenditures and (2) Engagement of SAIs with external actors.

The respective work streams for the P2P LA will be discussed and decided at these workshops, which will see follow-up engagements between the peers through face-to-face and online engagements. The EIP Joint Secretariat is welcoming expressions of interest from among the EIP membership.

- In addition to these efforts, the toolkit authors Prof. Matt Andrews and Mr. Nick Manning are undertaking several **experiments to validate and expand upon the toolkit content**. They are designed to promote the understanding of peer learning methods. A preliminary report on the outcomes of these informal experiments has been completed in July 2015. A summary of the preliminary findings of the experiments is provided below.

Summary of Findings of Experiments

The first experiment involved a test of different ways of matching peers from multiple countries who participated in a foundational learning event lasting ten days. The goal was to see how the different approaches to matching peers fostered interaction, knowledge generation, and sharing and exchange during this event.

The second experiment involved testing different ways of structuring peer engagement across one government, over a five-month period, to see how different methods fostered interaction, knowledge generation, sharing and exchange, and even reflection, application and diffusion.

The third study took the form of a natural experiment examining transnational learning on anticorruption reforms through peer engagement. Different countries have used different approaches to such engagement, allowing one to examine the differential impacts of these approaches. The natural experiment gives particular attention to the way ideas can be shared by one set of peers who have undergone an apparently successful experience in their country with a different set of peers embarking

on such experience in a different country.

The fourth study was a natural experiment, focusing on the questions of what peer learners hoped for and what they actually got from formal peer review exercises. It tackled questions about peer learning by engaging participants who had been involved in OECD Governance Reviews. These reviews assess public governance arrangements from an international comparative perspective and include a peer pressure and learning focus.

Experimental Findings:

(1) The peer group's foundational engagement – matching of peers is a crucial entry point to the path

- The most effective peer learning tended to happen in the groups where peers had pre-identified the same type of problem – but distilling out a functional problem requires considerable time and attention (experiment 1).
- Matching on the basis of formal position can produce positive learning results and can lead to peer mentoring based on experience as well as sharing approaches for responding to common problems (experiment 1).
- Matching on the basis of common tasks and policies seems least effective (experiment 1).
- The significance of matching runs right through the path from peer engagement to peer learning to results at scale. Successful matching can be achieved by focusing on shared problems or on professional responsibilities (experiment 2).

(2) There are better and worse ways for managing the subsequent sustained contact

- Sharing lessons tends to happen only after individuals develop some trust and camaraderie (experiment 2).
- Time matters. Over time, the barriers and inhibitions of working across organizational boundaries can diminish – and the process of further refining the functional problem and reviewing progress made in ameliorating it can intensify (experiment 2).
- Formal peer reviews can lead to broad strategy advice rather than the practical problem-solving which peers seek unless they are accompanied by some mechanisms for maintaining contact after the review is complete (experiment 4).

(3) There are better and worse strategies to ensure that peers are actively learning through their engagements and to diffuse or scale the learning from individual peers back into their organizations

- The perceived legitimacy of knowledge offered to peers affects their willingness to take it seriously, particularly when the insights are seen to come from more junior officials. The challenge is to find a way around the catch-22 situation where those who are going to learn the most may be the least capable of fostering diffusion (experiment 2).
- Repeated, transparent and good-natured competition between peer groups can foster learning, diffusion and action (experiment 2).
- When learning across countries, peers should be engaged over the longer-term and should be asked to help with reform implementation not just with reform design or objectives (experiment 3).
- The mutuality of learning between peers that yields effective reform rather than the one-way advice from an external peer to passive internal reformers (experiment 3).

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Please send comments to the Joint Secretariat at: effectiveinstitutions@oecd.org