ISOT Guidance Note 2014-04 – Twinning Arrangements

You may have noticed that some of your colleagues from developing countries are not able to attend ISO meetings as regularly as those from developed countries, and that far fewer developing country members hold committee leadership roles. Because of this, you may not be aware that the national standards bodies from developing nations actually make up the majority of ISO’s membership. There are currently more than 120 developing countries around the world with some level of membership in ISO.

In recognition of this disproportionate representation, ISO introduced the provision for a twinning arrangement, by which a developing country member can partner with a developed country member in order to share knowledge and develop the necessary skills to participate better. In addition, developing countries would gain an ability to take the lead on more of the work that directly affects their national interests.

This partnership between a developing country and developed country has several important goals. It seeks to improve the standardization infrastructures and capacities of developing countries and increase their participation in both the governance and technical work of ISO. This increased participation would help to ensure the global relevance of ISO International Standards and make certain that they represent a truly worldwide consensus and respond to global market needs.

A twinning arrangement is also intended to promote the exchange of experience between members, optimize the use of resources through cooperation, and develop long-term strategic partnerships that will continue beyond the formal twinning relationship. While twinning arrangements are intended to last for three years, they can be renewed as needed.

Twinning can take place in a number of different arrangements:

- Twinning between a Secretary and a Co-Secretary
- Twinning between a Chair and a Vice-Chair
- Twinning between a Convenor and a Co-Convenor
- Twinning between two P-Member Countries

While ISO must be kept informed of all new twinning arrangements and the twinned leaders must be formally approved by either the ISO/TMB or the parent committee, the twinning partners are free to determine the most effective means of implementing a twinning agreement in order to suit their unique needs and goals. ISO strongly recommends that the partners develop and formalize a written agreement and a collaboration plan that outline the objectives, obligations, measurements of progress and desired outcomes. Any written agreements or collaboration plans should be shared with both ISO/CS and the affected committees or working groups.
Among the expected outcomes at the conclusion of such an arrangement are that the developing country member will gain valuable experience and knowledge that they can share with their colleagues and eventually support their independent participation and capacity for leadership going forward. The developed country will have further established its own leadership skills, gained a better understanding of the needs and goals of its committee's fellow members, and will hopefully have earned a strategic partner.

ISO provides helpful guidance on twinning here.

The full list of developing countries recognized by ISO can be found here.

**What this means to you as an ISO secretary:**
As an ISO secretary, you may be approached by the ISO/TMB, a national standards body or an individual from a developing country that is interested in twinning with you or one of your committee leaders. You would need to consider and evaluate any requests that you receive.

Alternately, you or one of your committee leaders may be interested in taking part in a twinning arrangement and may wish to take the lead in identifying candidates. You should reach out to any potential partners from developing countries or to the ISO/TMB to gauge interest and eventually negotiate an agreement.

You would need to ensure that any twinning arrangements involving committee leaders receive the appropriate approvals, as with any officer appointment. Both Convenors and Co-Convenors of working groups must be approved by the P-membership of the parent committee, and Chairs and Vice-Chairs must be nominated by the Secretariat of a committee and approved by the ISO/TMB. The Secretariat and Co-Secretariat of a TC are allocated by the ISO/TMB, and Secretariats and Co-Secretariats of SCs are approved by their parent committee.

Once a twinning arrangement has been approved, regardless of who proposed the arrangement, ISO strongly recommends that you work with the developing country partner to establish both a written twinning agreement and a detailed collaboration plan.

Once a twinning arrangement is in place and details of that arrangement have been established and agreed to by both parties, you should facilitate the training, guidance and assistance that will help build the capacity of your developing country partner. You should monitor and review the progress and outcomes of the partnership.

**What this means to you as a US/TAG administrator:**
You should understand the impact of such agreements at the various levels of engagement as well as the respective role of each twinning partner, and be able to advise US/TAG members on how to effectively participate with such an agreement in place.

If you have a US/TAG member that has been identified to participate in a twinning role at the international level, they will need to be fully prepared to act as a mentor by being well versed in the provisions of the twinning agreement, the ISO procedures as well as the ongoing work of the committee. Your preparation and guidance can aid in a successful partnership.
The US/TAG should also consider supporting a twinning arrangement between two P-members, ANSI and a developing country. This arrangement is not a form of leadership twinning, rather twinning between two members of a committee in order to help a developing country participate more effectively in the work.

**About the ANSI ISO Team (ISOT)**

The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is the U.S. member body to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). To ensure a strong and effective U.S. voice in international standardization, the ANSI ISO Team (ISOT) acts as the interface between ANSI-accredited U.S. Technical Advisory Groups (US/TAGs) and/or ANSI-delegated U.S. held ISO secretariats.

ISOT daily operations include distribution of ISO documents to US/TAG administrators, processing votes on behalf of US/TAGs, accrediting delegates to attend international meetings, nominating experts to participate on working groups, coordination with key group such as the ANSI ISO Forum (AIF), ANSI ISO Council (AIC), and the ISO Technical Management Board (TMB), administering ANSI Virtual Technical Advisory Groups (VTAGs), facilitating training programs, among many other functions. In addition to daily responsibilities, ISOT is available to assist with any committee specific issues US/TAGs or U.S. held secretariats may be facing. ISOT staff is well versed in the ISO procedures, ANSI International Procedures, and has experience in all aspects of the ISO process.

For organizations that are new to ISO or want additional support with ISO related activities, ANSI’s ISOT staff provides hands-on, practical guidance on all aspects of administration of US/TAGs or ISO Secretariats through its fee-based Enhanced Services program. For more information, contact isot@ansi.org.