

Twinning and Sharing Best Practices: Regional Partnerships

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Brief Summary of Case Study:

In the fourth session of this year's *Building Bridges Across the Laboratory Community* series, members of the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) Quality and Systems Analytics team, Ms. Lorelei Kurimski, MS and Ms. Bertina Su, MPH, shared an overview of the benefits of public health laboratory regional consortia. Mr. Ryan Bernard, MBA, discussed the Missouri State Public Health Laboratory's participation in twinning with the State Hygienic Laboratory at the University of Iowa. Mr. Jason Wholehan, MLS (ASCP) and Mr. John Laurance IV presented their experience as twin partner laboratories focusing on biosafety training at public health departments in Michigan and Alaska. Finally, Dr. Christine Bean, PhD, MBA, MLS (ASCP) and Ms. Jill Power, MS, M(ASCP), CMQ/OE(ASQ) presented a large-scale regional case study on biosafety training for both clinical and public health partners conducted by the Northeast Regional Consortia.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices Applied by Faculty:

In order to conduct effective laboratory twinning, sharing of best practices, and peer-to-peer learning experiences, it is critical to:

1. Recognize the value of engaging regional laboratory partnerships.
Regional laboratory partnerships provide opportunities for partner laboratories (both public health and clinical laboratory partners) to support each other by: providing cross-cutting training in laboratory areas of universal need (e.g. biosafety), troubleshooting regionally-shared safety concerns (e.g., natural disasters, etc.) or local responses to epidemics, participating in peer-to-peer laboratory visits, engaging in regionally-relevant laboratory regulatory discussions, reducing feelings of isolation (e.g.,

knowing that challenges faced by one laboratory may be faced by other others as well), benefitting from shared resources or training materials (where context is similar and/or fine details can be modified), supporting roll-out of a new technology or testing method, and helping mitigate potential supply chain disruptions. Peer-to-peer learning can take many different forms depending on the need and goals for partner laboratories, from routinely scheduled calls, Zoom meetings, in-person trainings, or peer-to-peer laboratory visits.

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2. Identify an appropriate laboratory twinning partner to mutually benefit from the peer-to-peer learning experience.

In order to conduct successful and collaborative peer-to-peer laboratory learning/sharing experiences, it is very important to identify a laboratory twinning partner that is comparable in laboratory operations. Depending on the area(s) of the laboratory that will be the focus of the twinning experience, this may involve looking for a laboratory that shares similar systems, organizational structures, specimen processing (types, volumes, etc.), LIMS, operations, and/or testing menus.

It is valuable for each partner to candidly consider operational strengths and weaknesses (or challenges) to identify areas where best practices in one partner laboratory can be shared to overcome or alleviate challenges of the other partner laboratory. These best practices could take shape both in considering changes to improve laboratory operations or in other forms (e.g. sharing materials, tools, trainings, or other collaborative opportunities to expand the capacity of laboratory training or testing at a partner institute). Ideal laboratory partners will also help each other build connections and networks of professional colleagues to learn and grow.

3. Communicate clearly and consistently on shared vision and goals, expectations, and progress to achieve the desired outcome of the partnership.

For this type of laboratory partnership to be successful, it is necessary to have clear and consistent communication between both parties in order to set shared goals and exchange progress and challenges. Partners must demonstrate mutual respect for and understanding of each other's operations, expertise, and workplace cultures to building a trusting rapport. This relationship built in trust can be a source of support not only for a productive peer-to-peer learning experience, but also for continued sharing of best practices in the future.

4. Develop a plan for the peer-to-peer exchange, leaving room for flexibility.

Once an appropriate lab partner is identified, propose review terms (i.e. laboratory areas or systems for review) with your laboratory partner and determine if the terms are agreeable. Develop a schedule and make a plan with the laboratory partner and prepare to execute and roll-out. Be mindful to leave plenty of space for open discussion, and include time with other subject matter experts (SMEs) in the laboratory to broaden the knowledge base and seek additional points of view.

It can also be beneficial to show off your city/state, as this can provide additional context on why your laboratory operates the way that it does. Throughout the exchange process, be sure to discuss ways to adapt what you learned to your facility and collaborate with your laboratory partner to brainstorm creative solutions that may work in your own practice setting.

Visit our [hub site](#) to find additional resources for this Building Bridges Across the Laboratory session!

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