



TRAINING REFLECTION
April - May 2024

AIC Twinning

A special way to “move forward together”

Introduction

AIC volunteers carry out their mission to transform society by working in teams and following guidelines set out in our Priority Lines of Action. One of our current priorities invites us to “move forward together”. In this sense, an interesting way of working together is to set up a **twinning**¹.

The **aim** of this training reflection is to explain what a twinning consists in and to encourage groups to set up twinings. Doing so will enable volunteers to experience this special type of interaction within our international network, taking advantage of the fact that today’s social media make communication between AIC groups much easier.

1. What is a twinning?

Between AIC associations, a twinning is a partnership between two or more groups of AIC volunteers, who network with and support each other, enabling them to get closer and work in solidarity with one another. Solidarity among groups from different countries has been encouraged in AIC since the AIC operational guidelines were adopted in 1990 at the Assisi Assembly. AIC moved into a Culture of Solidarity at the 1994 Assembly, and then redefined the solidarity of associations as “twinning,” as associations themselves developed relations between themselves. These special relationships are what AIC currently promotes and encourages.

Twinning began as a method of providing financial support to groups having difficulties, but has evolved into relationships wherein the groups exchange experiences, encourage mutual training, support and solidarity, which generates more cooperation between volunteers and better knowledge of each other.

Groups interested in establishing a twinning share their expectations with each other and agree on the commitments they want to make. Good communication between twinned groups is essential. Twinning can have a variety of objectives, such as:

- Financial support or gifts in kind
- Shared training

¹ This topic has already been developed in a previous training document ([Training booklet no. 2](#), 2003), but we felt it was important to update this valuable material and share testimonies from current twinning projects.

- Exchanges of experiences
- Friendship
- Shared responsibility for a specific project
- Visiting each other
- Mutual understanding of the countries involved
- Cultural exchanges, etc.



2. Efficient twinning

For the twinning to achieve a real spirit of solidarity and result in growth for the participants, it is necessary to consider the following:

1. Responding to mutual needs

- The twinning should meet concrete needs of both groups.
- The twinning should be reciprocal.
 - Avoiding one association becoming financially dependent on the other, thus thwarting its development and independence.
 - Avoiding support which is only assistance, thus creating a relationship of giver/beneficiary.
 - Planning for periodic evaluation and follow-up.

2. Clearly specifying objectives and deadlines

- Short term support
 - Supporting the launching of a specific project
 - Supporting a new team or association
 - Support during a natural catastrophe or temporary difficulty
- Long term exchanges
 - A more permanent relationship formed in order to understand various aspects of the other association
- Training objectives
 - Mutual training through exchange of experiences, a source of cultural enrichment for both
- Specific objectives can include (but are not limited to)
 - Deepening knowledge of the other's culture
 - Learning other work methods
 - Implementing a project in its local environment for immigrants from the twin country

3. Deepening mutual knowledge

- Each association's values, spirituality, culture and traditions
- Social, political, economic and religious context
- Priority problems of poverty in its local environment
- Working methods and project management

4. Establishing and maintaining efficient communication

- Between the two associations
 - Defining mode and frequency of communication between the associations.
 - Ensuring contacts continue uninterrupted.
- Within AIC
 - Informing AIC International of the twinning at the start of the relationship².
 - Evaluating the relationship on an annual basis³.
 - Requesting information from AIC as needed.

5. Planning for periodic evaluation of actions and results of the twinning in progress

- Purpose of twinning
 - Actions accomplished
 - What was learned from the other association?
 - Exchanges/Future objectives
- Did the twinning meet expectations
 - Communications
 - Management
 - Reaching objectives
- Strong points and/or points to be improved of the twinning



3. Financial support

In the past, financial support was granted by various associations to groups having difficulties. There are many other reasons for twinning which go beyond financial support, but many times financial support is still a part of the twinning process. In those situations, it is important to remember:

- Financing should be a response to a request based on a concrete project.
- Financing should be justified by specific information on material as well as economic needs.
- Granted amount should not exceed the requested amount.
- The receiving association commits to sending receipts for the amounts, documents covering expenses and regular financial reports.
- The association who is contributing should forward funds as needed, as the project develops, rather than in one lump sum.

Financial aid must be based on trust between the associations. It must not generate a one-way relationship. As in all human relationships, the person who receives always has something to offer in return, in addition to gratitude.

² Information sheet template available from AIC International.

³ Evaluation form available from AIC International.

4. Advantages of well implemented twinings

- Increased solidarity, tolerance and a welcoming spirit to work together for peace
- Individual and collective training for the volunteers of the groups involved, based on action in the field
- Reciprocal exchange of experiences
- A different experience of co-responsibility
- Development of a greater sense of belonging to the AIC International network
- A very enriching experience of internationality at all levels



5. Putting twinning into practice

When a twinning decision is made, the two parties commit to:

- Meeting mutual needs, defining the objectives and duration of the twinning.
- Naming a person in charge.
- Informing the AIC secretariat and national president.
- Defining a mode of communication.
- Establishing and maintaining regular contacts with the other team.
- Listening, research, study, consulting one another before acting.
- Sending a report of activities annually, to the other twin team and to AIC International.
- Sending regular evaluation reports.

6. Examples and testimonies of AIC twinning around the globe



AIC GRANADA (SPAIN) – AIC DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: To support the Margarita Naseau Preschool in Villa Duarte. Along with financial support, the twinning creates friendship between the two groups, solidarity, which generates more cooperation between volunteers and better knowledge of each other. The volunteers in the Dominican Republic find this relationship beneficial because they can receive support for work aimed at impoverished people in a very

vulnerable place, for which they lack economic resources. The work at the Preschool is very important because of the positive impact it has on the children who attend the school, where they receive affection, but also learn human and Christian values, especially lessons about St. Vincent and St. Louise. AIC volunteers of Granada are very committed with the twinning, and they feel happy when they receive pictures showing the children's activities at the Preschool, as they are contributing to improve their lives.

AIC ARGENTINA – AIC PARAGUAY: The associations have formed a relationship which extended across the borders, until the Covid-19 pandemic prevented them from meeting. But thanks to the internet, they have been able to access trainings from each other.



AIC SLOVAKIA – AIC UKRAINE: Providing financial support, exchanges of experiences, and friendship. AIC Slovakia organizes a public fundraising called “Fight against Hunger” and collects money to send to Ukraine. There is a sense of solidarity, which generates more cooperation between volunteers and better knowledge of each other. They recognize the importance of being aware of the needs of other groups. Following the outbreak of war in 2022, which caused a huge influx of refugees, AIC Slovakia and AIC Poland welcomed large numbers of people fleeing the conflict. These two countries, which share a common border with Ukraine, have shown great solidarity.

AIC LAOS – AIC THAILAND, AIC LAOS – AIC JAPAN: Relationships which include financial support, exchange of experiences or best practices, friendship, shared responsibility for a specific project, visits, and mutual understanding of the countries. AIC Thailand strongly supported and encouraged the creation of the new AIC Laos group, which has been a full-rights member of AIC since March 2023. Prior to the pandemic, AIC Laos would interact with AIC Thailand and visit them occasionally. With AIC Japan, they provide updates on a pipeline water project installation in the village of Nampath. They find these relationships beneficial in terms of management, leadership and partnership to work for the empowerment, development and sustainability of the people served by the organization.



Chantavisouk Niradsay, President of AIC Laos, explains: *“Developing collaboration and good human relationships is an effective way to foster joint action for the service of people living in poverty. Opportunities of sharing information and resources with other AIC groups are something we consider valuable thanks to the teachings of our holy founders St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, who, in their time, instilled into AIC volunteers a concern for other AIC groups.”*



AIC GERMANY – AIC MADAGASCAR: This is not a typical twinning between two AIC member organizations. Anne Sturm, a member of AIC Germany, created an independent NGO called “The Friends of AIC Madagascar”... She explains: *“Most members of this group are donors who simply want to support the work of AIC Madagascar. However, it is important for both countries to have a partnership of equals. Through exchanges with volunteers in Madagascar and Rose de Lima Ramanankavana’s visits,*

photos and reports, the German NGO group members learn a lot about the country, its beauty and its needs. They feel enriched and are happy when they can support volunteers in their

work...". "All this – personal exchanges, partnerships at equal level, mutual enrichments and autonomy of the partners in the implementation of the projects – is also important for each twinning."

AIC SPAIN – AIC BOLIVIA: The associations have had a twinning relationship since January 2011. AIC group La Milagrosa (Pamplona) provides financial support to AIC group Jorochito in Santa Cruz de la Sierra for four specific projects, targeting children, the elderly, sick and women (specifically detection of breast and/or uterine cancer). Carmen Lopez, President of the AIC Group "La Milagrosa" from Pamplona, Spain, explains: *"We find this very beneficial. It enables us to collaborate with the economic resources that our colleagues need in order to alleviate some of the needs they identify and on which they work every day. We recommend twinning because we are fully convinced of the importance of the union of forces between their work and our financial contribution."*

AIC UNITED STATES – AIC MADAGASCAR: This twinning began in 2003. The women of the United States contribute annually to support the needs of women and children in Madagascar. Holly Walter, President of AIC United States writes, *"The importance of this twinning project cannot be underestimated. As Ladies of Charity, we are dedicated to serving those who need us no matter where in the world they are. The people of Madagascar strive to improve their lives every day and through our contributions are able to fund projects and educational opportunities for their women and children. I would recommend a twinning relationship to other groups. The value of a twinning project is a two-way street. Those receiving the support are able to improve their lives and become more self-reliant. Those making the donations are able to see the growth of the people they are helping and, in turn, see that they are making a difference in the lives of people living in poverty."*

Questions to discuss in your groups

1. What struck you most about this kind of collaboration between AIC groups?
2. What could your group of volunteers offer to other AIC groups?
3. What would you like to achieve by establishing an AIC twinning?

**Would you like to establish a twinning with another AIC group?
Don't hesitate to contact the International Secretariat for more information!**

Reflection compiled by Suzanne Johnson, February 2024