

# **LINKS**

## **Study Tours**

**A Guide for Hosting Programme Offices**



This brief set of guidelines is designed to support you to make a decision about whether you are able to support a LINKS activity and the degree to which you can be involved.

LINKS policy is that host programme offices should be the first point of contact for any LINKS activity planned to take place in your country, and that where possible you take on a lead coordination role.

That said, this may not be appropriate, for example due to capacity issues or because an activity falls outside the scope of your Country Strategic Plans, for the programme office to coordinate the tour.

When you are approached to host a LINKS activity, there are four possible outcomes:

1. [The programme office takes on the tour coordinator role and takes the lead in all aspects of tour planning within the country](#)
2. [The programme office is happy with the decision to host the tour but is unable to take on a coordination role. The programme office then identifies an appropriate organisation to take on this role.](#)
3. [The programme office is happy with the decision to host the tour but is unable to take on a coordination role. The LINKS team then identifies an appropriate organisation to take on this role.](#)
4. [The decision is taken that your country does not provide an appropriate hosting opportunity and the tour is located elsewhere](#)

[\*\*Click here for a flow chart that maps out the decision making process.\*\*](#)

**1. The programme office takes on the tour coordinator role and takes the lead in all aspects of tour planning within the country**

In this case, the host programme office will manage all aspects of tour coordination, as detailed in the tour coordinator guidelines.

**2. The programme office is happy with the decision to host the tour but is unable to take on a coordination role. The programme office then identifies an appropriate organisation to take on this role.**

In this case the programme office is required to:

**Select the coordinating organisation:** The role of the tour coordinator is key in ensuring the success of a LINKS activity. The coordinating organisation can be a partner organisation or an external agency. When you have identified a suitable organisation you can either approach the organisation yourself, or ask the sending programme office to approach them. It is important that tour coordinating organisations have the following features:

1. Display openness and willingness to work with VSO on the study tour
2. Have the organisational capacity to manage, plan, and implement the study tour (independent consultants would not have this, and would not be suitable unless they were working within a suitable organisation).
3. Have programmes and projects that will provide the opportunity for learning on the chosen theme of the tour OR indirectly, must have established relationships and partnerships with networks and organisations that run these programmes and projects
4. See the value of the study tour as a learning opportunity for themselves and an opportunity to validate the work they are doing with their partners
5. Provide any relevant resources and access to available information
6. Provide staff time and support for the tour implementation
7. Co-facilitate the learning workshop and tour evaluation

**Identify an Emergency Contact Person:** You will need to identify a liaison person from your staff team for the duration of the tour, who can be contacted by the tour coordinator in the event of an emergency, and who is familiar with AXA Assistance procedures. You are also asked to provide the tour coordinator with details of the VSO doctor in-country.

**Transfer the funds for the tour to the tour coordinating organisation:** When the sending programme office has agreed the budget with the tour coordinator, and both the tour coordinator and sending PO CD have signed the contract, you will need to transfer the appropriate amount to the tour coordinator, charging it to the sending PO's cost center. The sending PO will ensure that any balance from the tour is transferred back to you from the tour coordinator.

**3. The programme office is happy with the decision to host the tour but is unable to take on a coordination role. The LINKS team then identifies an appropriate organisation to take on this role.**

In this case the programme office is required to:

**Agree the choice of tour coordinating organisation:** LINKS will only proceed with a given partner after receiving the host programme's say so.

**Identify an Emergency Contact Person:** You need to identify a liaison person from your staff team for the duration of the tour who can be contacted by the tour coordinator in the event of an emergency, and who is also familiar with AXA Assistance procedures. You are also asked to provide the tour coordinator with details of the VSO doctor in-country.

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**4. The decision is taken that your country does not provide an appropriate hosting opportunity and the tour is located elsewhere**

Your programme office can reserve the right to withdraw support for hosting a proposed LINKS activity for any of the following reasons:

- The country/region proposed for the activity is not secure for visitors
- The country does not contain relevant good practice examples (either within VSO's work or outside it)
- The PO does not have the capacity to take on the organising role and there is no appropriate alternative organisation to take on this role
- Appropriate alternative organisations may exist but the programme office does not have the capacity to research and identify them and the LINKS team is unable to do so
- The LINKS team has identified an appropriate coordinating organisation but the PO does not agree with the choice. Reasons for not agreeing the choice include:
  - The PO has prior knowledge of the proposed coordinator which indicates they would not be appropriate
  - The PO has reason to feel that the organisation identified does not have the capacity/capability to take on this role
  - The PO feels that their relationships with partners might be seriously jeopardised if the activity takes place without their involvement

In situations where there is disagreement between the programme office and the LINKS team on whether an activity should proceed, the matter will be referred to the Regional Programme Manager for a final decision.

**In addition, for all the options where the tour takes place in your country it is useful for the programme office to:**

**Identify your own learning needs:** In order to make the most out of hosting a study tour you can identify your own learning needs and objectives in advance of the tour so these are built in to the programme.

**Identify organisations to visit:** The coordinating organisation takes the lead on designing the programme but you can assist them in identifying suitable organisations to visit even if you are not coordinating the tour.

**Welcome:** As the tour participants are members of the VSO extended family it is generally good practice for a representative from the programme office to chair or attend the first meeting so as to welcome the group to the country.

**Join the tour:** It is completely optional whether a representative from the programme office wants to join a study tour that is taking place in your country. However, active participation has been found to benefit staff through engaging in two-way learning and strengthening networks and relationships in country and with VSO internationally.

### Flow chart for decisions regarding hosting a LINKS activity

