

Nicaragua Program Summary

For more than 20 years, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has worked with political parties and civil society organizations to foster democracy and increase political and civic awareness in Nicaragua. IRI currently focuses on empowering individuals and groups that want to contribute to Nicaragua's political and civic future. IRI programs help women, youth and disenfranchised groups play a more active role in the country's political and electoral processes, and help to raise civic awareness among Nicaraguans in general.

Strengthening Local Leaders

On a local level, IRI helps municipal leaders become more responsive and capable advocates in their communities. IRI works with both local elected leaders and non-elected leaders by providing them technical assistance and trainings.

IRI's objective is to provide these emerging leaders with the technical skills needed to remain engaged in politics. For example, participants from IRI-sponsored roundtables develop concrete plans for projects to improve their communities, and then learn to communicate and work with each other to advance such plans.

Civic Participation and Advocacy

IRI recognizes the need to maintain and increase opportunities for civil society to engage with government. To do this, IRI is working with local groups to increase and strengthen their advocacy capabilities on key municipal issues. Currently, IRI is organizing roundtable sessions with local organizations, mayors and city council members to create and maintain an environment that encourages political dialogue. For example, in San Jose de los Remates, municipal authorities put together a project to address access to water as a direct result of the discussions that took place during IRI-led roundtable sessions with community leaders.

IRI also organizes multiparty roundtable discussions with *Foro de Mujeres* ("Women's Forum"), a local civil society organization that focuses on strengthening women's role in politics. The roundtable sessions are attended by women leaders, who discuss gender and inequality issues in Nicaragua. Other topics discussed include equal access to opportunities, strengthening of democratic institutions and women's economic empowerment.

Empowering Youth Leaders

The involvement of Nicaraguan youth in society is integral for democracy in Nicaragua. Through activities ranging from voter education campaigns and radio programs to youth forums and the creation of youth agendas, IRI encourages Nicaraguan youth to become more involved in their country's future. In line with IRI's current focus on local-level activities, IRI helps local youth leaders promoting youth participation in local issues while strengthening youth structures in the political parties and civic groups at the grassroots level.