

Cuba Program Summary

The International Republican Institute (IRI) has been working in Cuba since 1994. The Institute focuses on increasing access to information and providing opportunities for Cuban citizens to be both producers and consumers of free media. By broadening civil society to encompass non-traditional groups, IRI is strengthening citizens' skills to find common ground and solve problems through consensus building. Establishing links between Cubans around common interests and identities ensures that marginalized groups have the skills needed to participate in the democratic process.

Increasing Access to Information

The absence of a free press combined with internet censorship severely decreases the amount and quality of information that is available to Cuban citizens. In addition, the high cost of telecommunications and internet access limits the ability of Cubans to communicate with each other and the outside world. IRI expands and extends the avenues through which Cubans communicate with each other and with the outside world.

Additionally, IRI's extensive public opinion research program provides a methodologically sound and credible measure of Cuban public sentiment. This information enables IRI to provide useful data with which people on the island can develop issue-based platforms and greater levels of constituent representation and responsiveness, thereby enhancing their credibility and capacity as civil society organizations.

Skill and Capacity Building

IRI provides Cubans with the tools they need to develop their own talents and ambitions and to engage in the civic processes that affect their life and well-being. Working with formalized networks of individuals, IRI aids in incorporating strategies and best practices from successful civil society organizations in Cuba as well as other countries. Through regular contact with partners, IRI responds directly to their most current needs and provides citizens with the skills and resources needed to make their voices heard.

Connecting Cubans

While the amount and quality of information that is available to Cubans remains limited, so does the capacity of Cubans to communicate and connect with each other. The Institute works to link these citizens with similar interests and identities through collaborative projects, group activities and enhanced communication.

IRI also helps enhance the participation of marginalized communities in the democratic process. In 2007 IRI launched an Afro-Cuban initiative focused on advancing the active leadership role of Afro-Cubans in Cuban civil society. Through leadership development, grassroots organization and message development trainings, Afro-Cubans are becoming influential mentors in their own communities.