

Guatemala Program Summary

The International Republican Institute (IRI) has been providing assistance to Guatemalan political parties, elected leaders and civil society activists since 1993. The Institute's programs have ranged from helping political parties effectively and ethically compete in campaigns to assisting women and youth in becoming stronger leaders in their communities. Starting in 2008, IRI began a democratic governance program to address issues such as administrative organization, problem-solving, policy development, governmental transparency, efficient service delivery and constituent outreach at the municipal level. In addition, IRI promotes stronger civic interest and involvement in municipal affairs, especially among the non-Spanish-speaking indigenous population.

Democratic Governance

IRI designs its governance programming around citizen needs and priorities as gauged through public opinion research. In the Guatemalan Altiplano region, public opinion research collected by IRI in June 2009 revealed three main issues of concern among citizens: 1) a lack of local economic development; 2) gaps in communication between the municipal governments and the general public; and 3) employment generation. The Institute developed training programs to help municipal officials respond to these priorities, as well as to improve overall service delivery and transparency at the municipal level.

IRI currently works in the departments of Totonicapan, Quetzaltenango and El Progreso, partnering with the mayors and municipal government staffs in San Cristobal Totonicapan, Cantel, El Palmar and San Cristobal Acasaguastlan. The Institute also supports an association of municipalities, the commonwealth of Oxib' Tyox, whose member municipalities include San Cristobal Totonicapan, San Andres Xecul and San Francisco El Alto. IRI has specifically chosen to focus its work primarily in the largely indigenous-dominated areas of the Altiplano region, where municipal resources are relatively limited and where people currently have low levels of confidence in their governing institutions. The Institute has additionally placed a special emphasis on working with women mayors. Currently there are only seven women mayors among all of Guatemala's 333 municipalities. IRI is working with two women mayors and their staffs to share strategies that promote effective response to constituent needs and bring government closer to citizens.

In all of its partner municipalities, IRI provides technical assistance to build the capacities of local officials through technical trainings and targeted programmatic activities focused on improving their skills and knowledge of Guatemala's decentralization laws, enhancing communications with constituents and working to promote economic development.

Local Economic Development

IRI works with local experts to provide training on the government's role in promoting local economic development, including analyses of the local economy, identification of competitive advantages, assessment of public investment priorities, as well as areas for private sector and strategic alliances. In addition, IRI is supporting the permanent physical establishment of a Municipal Office of Economic Development and Tourism, in partner municipalities to promote effective economic governance to lay the foundation for long-term development and small business growth. Through these offices, municipal governments can provide trade and investment information to local business owners, farmers and entrepreneurs, as well as attract local and outside investment to develop unrealized potential in areas such as tourism.

Government Outreach to Citizens

Communications are a key component in institutionalizing governing practices which respond to citizen priorities. IRI works with partner municipalities to create information kiosks, informative publications, television shows and other media to improve municipal governments' communication outreach capacities. To this end, the Institute has promoted the publication of reports for television, radio and print media that highlight the municipal governments' achievements and expenditures in a given fiscal year.

IRI has pioneered the use of cable television as an effective means of communication between municipal authorities and citizens in Guatemala. The Institute also works with its partner municipalities in the development of municipal websites and provides training for staff in the use of the Internet to communicate with citizens locally and abroad and to enhance economic development through tourism.

Over the course of the Institutes' engagement with partner municipalities, IRI has observed noticeable gains in the areas of economic development, efficiency, civic participation and transparency. Over the long term, IRI hopes that its work will provide successful examples of democratic governance for all of Guatemala's 333 municipalities, as well as for national and departmental authorities and other institutions that support Guatemalan municipalities such as the Guatemalan Association of Municipalities and the Institute of Municipal Promotion.

