

Rising Stars Program Summary

Time and time again, democratic transitions have come accompanied by high citizen expectations and demand for quick and effective political and economic reform. In this regard, what ultimately separates a nation's success or failure is the ability of its leaders to govern effectively and democratically.

For more than 25 years, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has worked closely with democratically minded activists from closed societies and developing democracies around the globe. From this work the Institute has identified Rising Stars - individuals with the potential to quickly rise to positions of national political leadership.

Launched in 2007, IRI's Rising Stars program works to ensure the leaders of new democracies are fully equipped with skills in effective democratic governance before they take office. Through international exchanges, participants are exposed to the experience of recent successful transition countries, and obtain insight into the challenges of democratic governance and best practices in policy development. Rising Stars meet with decision-makers who have played an important role in their country's democratic opening such as former government heads, political party representatives and civil society leaders. While sharing their successes institutionalizing the rule of law, fostering economic openness, and laying the foundations for representative democracy these individuals also lend participants advice and recommendations on managing the many challenges that exist during a political transition.

Since 2007, IRI has facilitated international exchanges for Rising Stars from Afghanistan and Burma to Indonesia, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan to Estonia, Cuba to Czech Republic, Liberia to Botswana, Timor-Leste to El Salvador, Zimbabwe to Chile, Colombia to Brazil, and Jordan to Slovakia. Many of the participants have initiated policy initiatives upon their return home and continue to try to apply the best practices they learned on the exchange.

In the coming year, IRI will continue to provide democracy activists from closed societies with intensive practical and academic training on a topics ranging from democratic governance to executive management and macroeconomic policy. In an effort to solidify gains that some countries have already made, IRI will also host Rising Stars at the state or local level on exchanges to expose them to best practices in democratic governance and equip these individuals with the skills necessary to further consolidate their country's democracy. Through these initiatives, IRI aims to further cultivate the global network of tomorrow's democratically-minded leaders.

Belarusian Rising Stars to Estonia

In June 2007, IRI hosted Rising Stars from Belarus in Estonia for a two-week seminar on transition economics policy and sessions with the country's most prominent policy and business leadership. The Belarusian participants also met with former Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar; the Central Bank of Estonia; the stock exchange; Enterprise Estonia, a foundation promoting private enterprise and investment; and the software company Skype. In May 2009, the Belarusian Rising Stars returned to Estonia for follow-up consultations on how Estonian leaders are managing the economy in the global economic downturn.

Timor-Leste Rising Stars to El Salvador

In November 2007, IRI sponsored a 10-day exchange with six young leaders from Timor-Leste in El Salvador. The participants from Timor-Leste's Ministry of Economic Development met with Salvadoran leaders, including President Elias Antonio Saca, the minister of economy and the former minister of foreign affairs, to learn how El Salvador succeeded with political reconciliation and managed tough market reforms in the aftermath of its civil war.

Afghan Rising Stars to Indonesia

In June 2009, IRI hosted six emerging Afghan leaders in Jakarta, Indonesia. Participants included up-and-coming Afghan business and banking executives, chamber of commerce members, parliamentarians and ministerial advisers. They studied Indonesia's experiences with development planning, decentralization, shifting from a centralized to a market economy, budget development, parliamentary oversight and fighting corruption. They also observed policy implementation first hand, meeting with leaders from the Indonesian Stock Exchange, Parliament, the Commission to Eradicate Corruption and the Chamber of Commerce.

Zimbabwe Rising Stars to Chile

In September 2009, IRI hosted six emerging leaders from Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change in Santiago, Chile. Economic experts from the think tank *Libertad y Desarrollo* (Liberty and Development) and the *Universidad de Desarrollo* led seminar sessions focused on macro- and micro-economic principles, the types of economic reforms implemented in Chile, the political strategies employed to achieve policy implementation, and the lessons learned in Chile's economic and political transition.

A second exchange conducted in 2010 allowed Rising Stars from Zimbabwe to gain insight into this country's recent transition to democracy. The exchange placed a special emphasis on the topics of transition, justice and reconciliation. Participants met with past and present members of the executive, legislative and judicial branches; political party representatives; key figures of the Truth and Reconciliation commission and the Political Prisoners and Torture commission, and the *Mesa de Dialogo* (Dialogue Table).

Rising Stars to Czech Republic

In September 2011, eight democracy activists from Belarus, Bolivia, Burma, Russia, South Sudan and Zimbabwe participated in a two-week intensive practical and academic training program in Prague on topics ranging from democratic governance to executive management, anti-corruption and macroeconomic policy. During this two-week program, participants met with experts, academics, government officials and civil society organizations who spoke of the Czech Republic's successful democratic transition and discussed lessons learned. Additionally, the group visited the city of Pilsen, where they met the mayor and learned about the challenges faced in making the city the thriving business and population center that it is today.

Local Rising Stars to Brazil and Slovakia

In August 2011, Reinaldo Manjarrez, mayor of District II in Cartagena, Colombia, and three members of his cabinet traveled to the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre to learn best practices in areas such as public safety, poverty reduction, e-government and citizen participation. While in Porto Alegre, the city most known as the birthplace of participatory budgeting, the delegation attended a preparatory meeting for one of these assemblies and was able to observe firsthand the participatory budgeting process.

In October 2011, Khaled Huneifat, mayor of Greater Tafleeh, Jordan, and two members of his cabinet visited the Slovakian cities of Bratislava and Martin to learn best practices in the areas of service delivery and identification of citizen needs. In a meeting with the vice mayor of Bratislava, Viera Kimerlingova, the delegation was briefed on methods of citizen inclusion, such as the creation of participatory committees to identify and address priority issues.