

EVIDENCE BRIEFER

BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS ON ANTI-CORRUPTION



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ANTI-CORRUPTION**

International Republican Institute
IRI.org
@IRIglobal

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Best Practices for Working with Governments on Anti-Corruption

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International Republican Institute

1225 Eye Street NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20005

info@iri.org

INTRODUCTION

Interventions to counter corruption take various forms. Approaches focused on assisting civil society to pressure elites often receive the lion's share of attention. Depending on the context, the U.S. government and its partners can also work with a host government on anti-corruption initiatives. This evidence brief outlines entry points and best practices for doing so, based on the International Republican Institute's (IRI) experience globally and its review of the literature.

Potential Entry Points

Corruption is a multifaceted challenge. Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) support programs generally focus on empowering civil society to uncover and widely expose corruption. Where feasible, DRG practitioners should also work with the government to combat corruption and improve transparency. IRI identified the following entry points for doing so:

- ◆ **Financial Transparency and Budgetary Literacy:** Transparency is a prerequisite for improving the accountability environment and an area prime for collaborating with governments on anti-corruption reform, given the proliferation of technical solutions to make information available. Several measures can lead to more transparent and accountable governance:
 - **Access to Information Laws.** Access to information (ATI) laws combat corruption by allowing CSOs, journalists, and citizens to monitor the government and hold it accountable while also limiting opportunities for corruption. Partners can collaborate with legislators and reform-minded political parties to help pass and implement such legislation. Studies have found that, accompanied by other measures, [effective ATI legislation is positively correlated to control of corruption](#). In **The Gambia**, IRI support paved the way for adoption of the country's 2021 ATI law. IRI worked with civil society and media partners to advocate for the legislation and provided financial and technical assistance to the government.
 - **Citizen Budgets and Participatory Budgeting.** Citizen budgets are budget literacy tools designed to reach and be understood by as large a segment of the population as possible. Participatory budgeting is a system for allocating government resources that gives the public direct say over a portion of the budget. These mechanisms [can combat corruption by improving citizen engagement, fostering transparency, building trust amongst stakeholders, and reducing the opportunities for corruption and conflicts of interest](#). International partners can work with governments to provide technical training on implementing citizen budgets and improving budget transparency. In **Mongolia**, IRI worked with officials in Ulaanbaatar to implement anti-corruption initiatives focused on fiscal accountability and citizen budget oversight. This and other support led to sectoral citizens budgets, which ultimately served as an example for the development of Mongolia's national Citizens Budget. In **Ukraine**, [IRI has empowered young people to participate in municipal participatory budgeting exercises](#), contributing to the success of the initiative and improving the enabling environment for open government.

- **Open Data Portals.** Open data portals are web-based platforms where citizens can access government contracts, procurement data, and other government information. They help combat corruption by making it more difficult for government officials to siphon funds from contracts or award bids through rigged processes. Partners can provide technical assistance to governments in creating and implementing open data portals. IRI guided the development of the [Open Finance Portal](#) for **North Macedonia's** Ministry of Finance. Launched in 2019, this tool gives Macedonian citizens access to financial transactions of state institutions through the ministry's website—increasing government accountability and citizen engagement. Investigative journalists, civil society organizations, and other government watchdogs are using this tool to monitor state spending, creating an unprecedented level of transparency and making North Macedonia's government a leader in the region.
- ◆ **“Naming and Faming” Integrity Champions:** Traditional approaches to anti-corruption emphasize the importance of exposing corruption (“naming and shaming”) to foster accountability. However, studies show the limitations of these programs, which can backfire by exaggerating the pervasiveness of the problem. Instead, [elevating integrity champions can have positive cascading effects](#). These champions serve as an inspiration to other government officials and civil servants and demonstrate to the public that government can be clean and transparent. IRI uses its Vulnerabilities to Corruption Approach (VCA) to identify these reformers and provide them with resources to amplify their home-grown efforts. In **Ecuador**, for instance, IRI used its [VCA to assess transparency and citizen participation gaps in the three city governments of Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca to adjust and maximize several ongoing initiatives](#). IRI supported these municipal governments in strengthening local ordinances and practices to make information more publicly accessible, as well as to better connect with citizens to ensure municipal officials can fulfill their citizen oversight requirements under Ecuador's decentralization and transparency laws. This has the potential to create a more resilient governance ecosystem, diminishing opportunities for corruption.
- ◆ **Fostering Networking and Cross-Sector Coalition Building:** Interventions that promote [collective action approaches](#) can result in more effective advocacy efforts and more transparent and accountable institutions and practices. IRI works to bring together both demand and supply-side actors to find actionable solutions that can reduce vulnerabilities to corruption. In **Mexico**, an IRI program was instrumental in the implementation of the national anti-corruption system at the subnational level by supporting multi-stakeholder coalitions in three states. An IRI evaluation showed that the program contributed to impact level results by influencing the passage and content of regional anti-corruption legislation. In **Albania**, IRI has supported the establishment of the U.S. Albania Transparency Academy (USATA), a novel anti-corruption platform that promotes the adoption of global transparency and accountability standards by partnering with the Albanian government, justice sector, civil society, youth, academia, and private sector. In **Panama**, IRI established an effective working relationship between government entities and civic actors. As a result, government bodies such as the Judicial System built on existing partnerships with civil society organizations and began sharing datasets on the official government website for the first time.

Tips for Program Design

Regardless of the entry point, IRI has identified the below best practices when designing programs to support government anti-corruption work.

- ◆ **Focus on Prevention:** While addressing corruption can easily center on major acts of fraud and embezzlement committed by high-profile government leaders, this approach can overlook the systematic incentives and loopholes that allow for illicit influence on public resource allocation. Programs should also strengthen preventive measures. This includes strengthening enforcement of campaign finance laws, and working with government institutions to improve transparency and compliance with ethics and integrity principles.
- ◆ **Develop Trust with Changemakers:** Systemic corruption is often entrenched and accepted as normal. Reform-minded leaders are required to dismantle these systems and their incentives. To achieve meaningful change, programs should identify, build trust with, and empower key decisionmakers who are committed to incorporating best practices into their institutional processes, operations, or policy. In some cases, reform-minded leaders must be prepared to face risks associated with exposing systemic corruption, including different forms of retaliation. Through these institutional champions, donors can share knowledge and resources with a larger group of public servants, thereby increasing the likelihood that content is internalized and applied.
- ◆ **Carefully Consider the Use of Technological Solutions:** New technologies have provided opportunities for governments to be more transparent to the public. Some have also helped enable citizens to conduct government oversight. However, for these technological solutions to be effective, governments must have the political will and invest in accessible systems to gather and publish data for a public audience. Donors should support the deployment of government technology when the institutional setting is appropriate and political environment open. These efforts should be complemented with improving internet penetration and tech infrastructure in underserved areas, as well as prioritizing safety and digital security.

IRI's Anti-Corruption Work

IRI utilizes its long-standing in-country partnerships, political expertise, and regional knowledge to foster more citizen-focused governments and help communities address governance shortfalls, including corruption. Over the past 15 years, IRI has implemented over 75 anti-corruption and transparency programs in more than 150 countries across the globe, supporting government officials and CSOs alike in bolstering transparency in service delivery.

IRI advances initiatives that foster relationships crucial to creating and sustaining accountability mechanisms. The Institute's collaborative programming with national and subnational governments ranges widely, from supporting the establishment of institutional safeguards such as one stop shops- single offices and portals that provide a broad range of services to citizens- and transparency offices, to accompanying the adoption of transparency portals and participatory budgeting practices, and to conducting hyper-localized assessments targeting specific governance processes and then collaborating with government actors to implement cost-effective reforms.

International Republican Institute

IRI.org

@IRIglobal

P: (202) 408-9450

E: info@iri.org

