

## The Integrated Training for Advisors Program (ITAP)

*A working group dedicated to strengthening advising mandates and missions and training advisors jointly across the U.S. Government*

### *Vision*

A working group comprised of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and several USG Agencies has explored the opportunity to establish an integrated training program for USG advisors serving on international capacity building missions. The group has worked jointly to identify gaps in existing training programs (which are now largely run by each agency individually), to evaluate the potential for training advisors from various agencies together, and to develop a structure and content for an integrated advising curriculum. Members of the group concluded that such an integrated training could significantly enhance the USG capacity to advise and assist partner countries.

The benefits of bringing advisors together from across agencies include: 1) developing a common lexicon on advising and capacity building; 2) addressing one of the most significant problems that plague complex operations: insufficient coordination; 3) promoting donor education by establishing one common set of guidelines which can guide the advising activities of all according to the same framework/approach; and 4) developing institution-building capacity for the USG, and 5) pooling ever-decreasing resources.

### *Context*

Advising has become the key mechanism for USG agencies to build capacity in in post-conflict and transitioning environments. Specifically, advising builds the capacity of government institutions, agencies, and the individuals who staff them, and furthers the idea that institution building helps to prevent conflict and create the conditions for lasting peace while employing a light footprint.

Advising requires a careful combination of technical expertise and capacity-building skills. Technical expertise, however, is very difficult to impart on an advisor, as it is the product of formal education and many years of experience. In addition to technical expertise, an advisor's effectiveness depends on his or her ability to make a constructive impact on processes, systems, and procedures. In order to have such an impact, an advisor needs the skills to transfer knowledge, skills, and ideas and to support the development of local and sustainable solutions to institutional problems.

### *Background*

Based on these ideas, in February 2014 a workshop was convened by USIP to explore the potential for integrating advising training across the US Government. At that first meeting, representatives from DoS, DoD, Treasury, DoJ, USAID and USDA (invited DoT, SOCOM, DHS) who deploy advisors to work on capacity building projects met one another and related successes and challenges of their existing advising missions. Participants realized that their programs shared many of the same successes and challenges; and, where these differed, it was evident that there were opportunities for learning best practices together. Participants also came to see that they had similar thoughts about what their current training methods were missing, and visions of what an optimally effective advising training might look like.

Over the course of two additional meetings, the group took steps toward creating an integrated advising curriculum, designed initially for a four-day training (see p.2). This curriculum is intended to be adaptable for a variety of missions, purposes, and training environments and durations, but directly reflects all content that participants felt their advisors had to learn before or during deployment.

## *Objectives*

- To strengthen the effectiveness and impact of USG civilian advisors as capacity builders by imparting the advising skill set before they deploy.
- To provide advisors across sectors of capacity building with a common set of skills and tools, and to promote mutual reinforcement and coordination of efforts and broad-based effective capacity building activities.
- To enable the USG to provide assistance to foreign institutions with a light footprint and targeted approach that engenders a strong return on investment.

## *Curriculum Content Overview*

The draft integrated advising curriculum covers essential skills and tools that advisors must acquire before and/or during deployment. The learning objectives outlined in the curriculum directly address challenges faced by advisors in the field. In present form, the curriculum is designed to be taught over four full days, though it can be adapted to varying lengths. It is specifically designed so that a training group with diverse technical competencies, agency backgrounds, and previous experience in international capacity building missions may learn from one another and deploy with an integrated mindset.

### **Session 1: *The Advisor as Capacity Builder***

*Learning Objective:* Know the rationale, goals, and fundamental characteristics of an advising mission; understand the need to coordinate with multiple stakeholders; navigate dilemmas and tradeoffs.

### **Session 2: *Becoming an Effective Advisor***

*Learning Objective:* Know the role and functions of an advisor:

- Identifying attributes of an effective advisor
- Making the shift from technical expert to advisor
- Knowing the guiding principles for an effective advising mission.

### **Session 3: *Coordination and Cooperation in Complex Environments***

*Learning Objective:* Navigate foreign assistance missions and the foreign work environment:

- Understanding US and international policies, strategies, and politics governing a foreign assistance mission.
- Leveraging existing resources and create channels for coordination and information sharing.

### **Session 4: *Working Effectively with Counterparts***

*Learning Objective:* Develop a productive professional relationship with counterpart(s):

- Acquiring essential communication and facilitation skills: cross cultural communication, active listening.

### **Sessions 5 & 6: *The Joint Capacity-Building Project***

*Learning Objective:* Develop a project with counterpart(s) and effectively see the project through:

- Learning project management requirements
- Challenging assumptions about local capacity, understanding counterpart resistance to change and promoting buy-in.
- Understanding the difference between supporting/partnering vs. executing a plan, sharing advice in planning and implementation phases.