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Legislative Strengthening Program

## FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

September 2011

Contract No. 263-I-03-06-00015-00 (REDI Task Order No. 3)

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September 2011

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# Fellowship Program Assessment

## INTRODUCTION

Committees in the Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR) have identified a lack of research support as a major obstacle to effectively undertake their work. Many committees lack resources to perform academic and strategic research to support and implement their ideas and projects. Designed specifically to address this issue, the Iraq Legislative Strengthening Program's (LSP) Fellowship Program makes academicians and subject experts available to the COR to conduct research in areas requested by committees.

The LSP Fellowship program enables the COR to benefit from access to various professors and other professionals who are experts on a variety of policy issues, a broad range of legislation and sectoral subject matter. Fellows respond to the requirements of the COR by conducting research, and providing objective policy solutions. They provide an important Iraqi context to the research papers. Research has covered such topics as the economy, energy, elections, corruption, fiscal policy, transportation, education, human rights and health care.

## BACKGROUND

In July of 2011, LSP conducted interviews and distributed surveys on the Fellowship Program to committees that have participated in the program. These interviews and survey responses form the basis of this assessment, the goal of which was to measure the effectiveness of LSP's Fellowship Program and shape recommendations for improvement. Out of eight COR committees that have participated in LSP's Fellowship Program, four committees responded to the survey. All but one of the committees that responded used LSP's fellowship program several times. Fellows drafted a total of fourteen different research papers for these four committees. In total, twenty-six papers have been drafted and submitted to the COR.

## FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Previously, LSP operated the Fellowship Program in two separate phases each year. LSP recruited a program Chair, and between four and six Fellows per phase, which lasted approximately three months each. Currently, LSP operates the program without phases, and will have eleven Fellows per year. Following an extension of the LSP by USAID in April 2011, LSP recruited a program Chair, whose role it is to collect and provide Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of potential Fellows, nominate and recommend Fellows for particular research, vet CVs provided to LSP from other sources, review every research paper drafted for quality control, and draft research papers.

LSP currently operates the Fellowship Program by contacting COR committees for discussions on committee research needs. Committees typically identify three to five (or more) areas of interest in which they require the assistance of a researcher. LSP offers one Fellow, and asks committees to prioritize their research needs and identify the topic they would like assistance with immediately. Once the topic has been identified, LSP contacts the Fellowship Program Chair for nominations of qualified candidates to conduct the research. Once LSP has selected the Fellow, a contract is drafted, and terms and deadlines are discussed. A meeting is then held with the Fellow, the COR committee representatives, and LSP to discuss in detail the committee expectations for the research paper content. Fellows are usually given eight weeks to complete their research and submit the paper. Throughout the research and drafting process, LSP maintains contact with the Fellow Chair as well as the Fellows themselves in order to preempt any possible problems that may arise and ensure that the research will be completed on time. In addition, Fellows have open communication with the committee for which they are conducting research. Throughout the research and drafting process, Fellows frequently communicate with LSP and the committee on a casual basis to ask questions, clarify requests for information and generally ensure they are responding to the committee's research needs. Once papers are completed, the Fellow Chair reviews the paper for quality control, and sends it back to the drafter for edits if necessary. When the Chair is satisfied that the paper is of good quality, and is responsive to the COR committee's requests, the Chair will submit it to LSP. The LSP team then also reviews the paper for quality control before submitting it to the COR.

## ASSESSMENT THEMES AND OUTCOMES

### i. Need

In undertaking this assessment, LSP could not obtain any information on the quality, quantity, or responsiveness of the COR Research Directorate to the COR committees' research needs. However, committees did reveal that they found LSP Fellows more responsive and professional than the research staff at the COR Research Directorate.

Respondents were asked if they could use the services of more Fellows than they currently had access to. Each committee agreed that additional resources would be helpful to them. One committee was more specific, outlining its wish for two Fellows and two research papers per month, or twenty-four Fellows and twenty-four research papers per year. Requests for Fellows are increasingly demand-driven.

### ii. Purpose

The respondents listed various purposes behind their research requests. The two most popular reasons listed were "to draft a bill" and "to improve the committee's work". Other reasons listed included a broader effort to simply "collect... academic and scientific data and information on the subject being researched".

### iii. Meeting Committee Needs

Three of the four committees responded that their needs had been met by the research paper produced. One committee noted that its needs had been "partially met", specifying that more detailed data, including statistics would have been helpful.

### iv. Satisfaction

The majority of the respondents stated they were generally "very satisfied" with LSP's Fellowship program. All of the respondents stated that they would chose to work with LSP again for their research needs, and that they would recommend LSP's Fellowship Program to their COR colleagues.

Specifically, respondents ranked their satisfaction with the program on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) in the following areas:

1. Professionalism:
  - Of LSP: 10, 9, 5, 9
  - Of the Fellow: 8, 9, 5, 9
2. Communication: 7, 7, 8, 9
3. Responsiveness: 7, 6, 6, 10
4. Quality of research: 8, 9, 5, 8
5. Quality of writing: 8, 9, 5, 8
6. Responding in a timely manner: 5, 6, 6, 9
7. Meeting deadlines: 8, 8, 7, 9
8. Providing relevant information: 8, 9, 5, 9
9. Providing the information that was requested: 8, 8, 4, 9

### v. Suggestions for Improvement

Three of the four respondents gave recommendations for improving the program. Two of them asked for Fellows with more practical experience in addition to the professors and academics on offer. The



committees specifically expressed an interest in recruiting experts working in the industry in which research is required. In this manner, committees can benefit from theory as well as practical ‘hands-on’ insights and statistics.

Across the board, the committees asked for an expansion of the program, in both the numbers of Fellows, and in the realms of knowledge and capacity. Committees also asked for papers to be submitted more quickly and for more frequent follow up and communication from LSP and the fellows on the content of papers as they are being drafted.

## **RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

LSP’s Fellowship Program is meeting a need expressed by COR committees for quality research in support of their activities. There is a great demand for effective, responsive and timely research for COR committees – a demand which far outweighs the current capacity of LSP’s Fellowship Program. It is recommended that LSP increase the amount of resources for this program in an effort to meet the research needs of COR committees. An increase in the number of fellows, as well as the scope of their experience, would greatly enhance LSP’s ability to effectively respond to the growing demand for services for this program.

Several COR committees commented that a faster rate of return for research papers would be helpful. To this end, LSP could recruit Fellows who have the capacity and the time to produce quality research papers in two to three weeks, as opposed to the usual eight weeks given currently. Fellows could be recruited both on merit, as well as the time they have available to dedicate to research. Committees that require research quickly for upcoming conferences, public hearings, legislative forums, etc., could be asked to specify a deadline that LSP could then respond to.

With an increased number of Fellows, and timelines being shorter, resources would also have to be dedicated to an increased number of quality control measures. As the program now operates under one Chair, a significant increase in the number of Fellows would necessitate a change in this structure. One possibility would be to recruit one or two additional “Co-Chairs” of the program. Each of the three Co-Chairs would be responsible for nominating and vetting candidates, drafting papers and conducting quality control for topics in their areas of expertise. Another option would be to recruit one or two “Quality Control Officers” whose sole role would be to review, edit and vet research conducted by the fellows before submission to LSP.

Some COR committees also suggested that more frequent contact and follow up with the Fellows while they are conducting their research would lead to more responsive, guided and comprehensive results. To this end, LSP could ensure that instead of one meeting with the selected fellow and the committee requesting the research, that at least two meetings take place between the parties, the second while research is ongoing. Having two formal meetings throughout the process in addition to the casual communication that occurs while Fellows are conducting research and drafting papers should meet the committee’s needs for more frequent contact.

LSP’s has taken an incremental, low-profile approach in working with the COR on the Fellowship Program. LSP has been dealing directly with the committees, allowing LSP to continue working without political interference or becoming embroiled in COR politics. This approach allows LSP to be prolific, working with a variety of committees and covering a variety of topics, and allows LSP to be responsive to the immediate and pressing concerns of the COR committees. By operating in this fashion, LSP has slowly and quietly built a reputation for providing consistent, quality, responsive research. LSP has been successful enough in this approach that COR committees will continue approaching LSP to provide Fellows.

## **CONCLUSION**

LSP has designed and implemented an effective, demand-driven, quality program that meets a substantial need for the COR. With a few small changes in the structure of the program, as well as more dedicated resources, LSP’s Fellowship Program could be more widely effective, and address the COR’s research needs more thoroughly and promptly.