

## USAID/OTI Venezuela Program Description

In August 2002, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began implementation of a program in Venezuela to provide critical and timely assistance to maintain democratic stability and strengthen the country's fragile democratic institutions. The OTI Venezuela program operates out of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas and is part of a larger U.S. government effort to promote democratic stability in Venezuela.

OTI currently has four implementing partners in Venezuela.

1. **Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI):** Begun in August 2002, DAI is implementing a flexible, small grants program called the "Venezuela Confidence Building Initiative" (VICC in Spanish). The goal of the VICC program is to promote peaceful resolution of the current political crisis through public debate on key issues, support to democratic institutions, and the promotion of citizen participation and democratic leadership. All projects are designed to involve both government and opposition supporters, and are open to all regardless of political leaning.

DAI has approved or completed over 200 small grants that support democracy. The projects are primarily in partnership with local NGOs, and involve in-kind assistance (i.e. goods and services) rather than cash. Examples of projects include:

- A. *A Nation-Wide Campaign: "Venezuela Convive"*

This program consists of television and radio spots, and workshops on the theme of convivencia (or peaceful coexistence) in the face of the current politically-charged and polarized environment. The campaign is being implemented through a network of more than 250 organizations and 2,500 volunteers in 12 states. The effort is still active a year after being launched, and recently received a grant from the World Bank and the Canadian Embassy to work with youth and convivencia.

- B. *The Development of Consensus on a National Plan of Governance*

The objective was to provide a nation-wide space for dialogue between supporters of President Chavez and supporters of the opposition once past the August 2004 presidential referendum. This was carried out throughout the country through fora and local debates which focused on key issues. While there did not emerge a national plan that all could rally around, the project resulted in the creation of "the permanent forum on inclusion" which focuses on issues affecting the poor such as crime and unemployment. The group continues to meet nearly a year later as it works with stakeholders to identify policies and strategies to most effectively deal with critical poverty-related issues.

- C. *Social Impact Projects*

These are high-profile projects which serve to reinforce the favorable impression that most Venezuelans have of the American people and that demonstrate the USG's solidarity with the global fight against poverty. These projects support such things as inner-city day-care centers, centers for street children, and cancer hospices for children of low-income families.

2. **International Republican Institute (IRI):** Began September 2003

- A. Training candidates, campaign managers, and other political party workers on the mechanics of electoral campaigns. Topics include: candidate profiles, message development, get-out-the-vote, day-of-the-vote activities, and understanding relevant electoral laws. As with all of USAID's programs to strengthen political parties, IRI (and NDI) offer their services to both government and opposition affiliated parties.
- B. Prior to the referendum and local elections of 2004, worked with political parties to train party-affiliated election observers from both sides in the rules and regulations associated with electoral events.

3. **National Democratic Institute (NDI):** Began September 2003

- A. To facilitate political party restructuring and renovation so parties become political entities that reflect the aspirations of Venezuelan citizens of all economic backgrounds. This is done through the provision of technical assistance on topics such as strategy, message development, and outreach. As with IRI, NDI offers technical assistance to both government coalition parties and opposition political parties.
- B. To support the institutionalization of a domestic electoral observation organization that is widely viewed as credible and non-partisan.

4. **Freedom House:** Began September 2004

To expose Venezuelan human rights organizations and practitioners to successful strategies employed by human rights defenders in other countries, and to increase their institutional capacity. Training events are held in Latin American countries with a history of strong human rights activism and respected human rights organizations.