



An Evaluation of the Professional Exchanges and Training Program (PET)

Executive Report

April 2005

In June 2002, the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the Department of State selected Aguirre International to conduct an impact evaluation of the Professional Exchanges and Training Program (PET), focusing on women's leadership and media training since 1997. The PET Program was administered by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) from its inception in 1992 until 1999, and, since that time, by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Funding was provided by the U.S. Congress under the Freedom for Russian and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act of 1992.

Overall Assessment

I realized that I can do this very job, can achieve this very objective, resolve this very problem, and that I can achieve the final result. I became more self-confident...it influenced the quality [of] relations at home, at work, with colleagues, and with bosses.

– Russian Focus Group Participant

The evaluation of the Professional Exchanges and Training Program demonstrates that these training Programs have significant and positive effects on the careers and personal development of both the participants who came to the United States and those who participated in the in-country trainings only. There are statistically significant differences between the two kinds of trainees, with greater proportions of those who took part in the U.S. component reporting significant changes to their careers and self-confidence. The differences in outcomes can be attributed to the length of the trainings and exposure to new materials and the intensity of the experience.

Program Goals

The Professional Exchanges and Training Program is authorized and funded by the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992 and the Fulbright Hays Act of 1961. In keeping with the legislative mandates, the Program aims:

- To contribute to economic and democratic reform and development in the independent states of Eurasia; and
- To promote mutual understanding through international exchange activity.

The specific goals of the PET Program are as follows:

- PET grantee institutions will create sustainable institutional partnerships between American and Eurasian organizations.
- PET participants will expand their professional capabilities and capacities.

- PET participants will gain skills and ideas and apply them in their workplaces and volunteer organizations.
- PET participants will expand their networks with their country and/or regional counterparts.
- PET participants will share their expertise with others in their country and/or region.

Additionally, the Program has the following goals that pertain to the relationship between the trainers and the participants and to the development of mutual understanding:

- PET U.S. training participants will interact with their hosts and generate enduring ties; in-country training participants will begin to forge relationships with U.S. trainers.
- PET participants' knowledge of U.S. culture will increase.
- U.S. trainers' knowledge of PET participants' cultures will increase.

Program Description

The Professional Exchanges and Training Program is administered by the Office of Citizen Exchanges in ECA. Grants are awarded to U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with identified foreign partners in specific Programmatic areas through an open-grant competition. The ultimate goal of these exchanges and training Programs is to create in-country capacity in particular fields that will further economic and democratic development, as well as to increase understanding between the United States and host countries. Although the PET Program includes professional training and exchanges in a number of thematic areas, the scope of this evaluation was limited to two areas: women's leadership and media training. Between 1997 and 2003, 41 grants were awarded in these two areas – 32 in women's leadership and nine in media training – to 26 different organizations. These grants represent 60 percent of the total number of PET Program grants awarded in this time period.

All PET activities are based on a train-the-trainer model, but ultimately, each particular training Program is unique. Programs may draw participants from a variety of sectors, or may focus their efforts on key organizations within a single sector or community. Regardless of the participant or organizational focus, each grant typically includes a variety of activities above and beyond the U.S. or in-country training components. For example, grantees might organize conferences, produce publications, provide small grants to support the implementation of the new ideas, and conduct outreach to the wider community.

Evaluation Methodologies

The evaluation focused only on the grants implemented with local partners in Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan and included 93 percent of all the grants in women's leadership and media training awarded between 1997 and 2001.¹ Four primary types of stakeholders were included in the evaluation: U.S.-based training participants, in-country training participants, U.S. grant managers, and U.S. technical staff (such as trainers). Different data collection strategies were employed to capture the opinions and experiences of each group:

- A face-to-face survey of Eurasian training participants;

¹ The grant cycle ran from September to August, and thus the 2002 grants had not yet been awarded at the beginning of the evaluation. ECA also wanted to allow sufficient time between the training and the evaluation to allow the participants to implement what they learned.

- An online survey of trainers and technical staff from the U.S. grantees;
- Focus groups of participants from Eurasia;
- Site visits to U.S. and Eurasian participating institutions, including open-ended interviews with U.S. grant managers and their Eurasian partners;
- A telephone survey of the U.S. grantees not receiving site visits; and
- Open-ended interviews with Program officers and other key informants.

Summary of Data Collection Methods by Country			
Country	Survey (Tel/Person)	Site Visits	Focus Groups
Belarus	150	5	1
Georgia	110	4	2
Kazakhstan	67	5	2
Russia	253	6	3
Ukraine	72	4	2
Uzbekistan	107	5	4
United States	25	12	0
Total	788	41	14

The data were collected between April and October of 2003. Seven hundred and sixty-three PET participants responded to the in-person interview, for a response rate of 35.9 percent. The survey was administered in the local language of choice and on average lasted 35 minutes. The telephone survey for the 25 U.S. grant managers averaged 41 minutes. The evaluation team conducted 14 focus groups in six countries: one in Belarus; two each in Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine; three in Russia; and four in Uzbekistan. In total, Aguirre International staff conducted site visits with 12 U.S. grantees (representing 22 grants) and 25 local partners between February and October 2003. The focus groups were held concurrently with site visits and the administration of the surveys. Site visit and focus group findings – examples of participant activities and projects, quotations from interviewees, and evaluator impressions of the impact on local organizations and employees – are incorporated into the report and augment and give nuance to the statistical findings.

Survey Participation by Country				
Country	Grants	Actual Trainees	Numbers Interviewed	Percent of Total
Belarus	4	739	150	20.8
Georgia	7	274	110	40.1
Kazakhstan	5	187	67	35.8
Russia	17	554	253	45.7
Ukraine	5	97	72	74.2
Uzbekistan	5	277	107	38.6
Total	41 (43)	2,128	759	35.9
Note: Numbers represent projects funded in women's leadership and media training since 1997. Some Programs were conducted in multiple countries, so they are counted for each country, but only included once in the total. Number of trainees was compiled from participant lists supplied by each grantee.				

Evaluation Findings

The Professional Exchanges and Training Program is meeting many specific needs among journalists and women leaders in Eurasia. Those who attended U.S.-based training felt that they had made significant progress, both personally and professionally, as a result of the Program. The in-country training participants – whose training courses were shorter and for whom Program costs were much lower – also thought they had benefited from the Program, but they generally reported lower rates of improvement of personal and professional skills. More importantly, not only did all the participants indicate that the training experiences were of *personal* benefit, they also reported actively using their new skills in their workplaces and volunteer organizations, formally sharing their new knowledge with others, and expanding their in-country networks and connections.

One of the hallmarks of ECA training is the cultural and relational element not found in other donor organizations' training activities. As expected, the U.S. training had a stronger effect on the participants' knowledge and impressions of the United States than did the in-country training. Nevertheless, even for the in-country participants, the trainings were clearly important for setting the stage to develop enduring ties with their U.S. counterparts.

<p>Goal 1: PET institutions will create sustainable institutional partnerships between American and Eurasian organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-half of the U.S. grantee organizations partnered with an in-country firm or consultant to assist with the Program. Of these, all (100.0%) reported that they are still in contact with their in-country partners. • Some 53.9% of all PET participants surveyed still maintain contact with U.S. grantees, with the media/journalist trainees exceeding the women leadership trainees (69.5% to 50.2%, respectively). • Many NGO organizations in the Caucasus and Central Asia are competing for scarce funds and struggling for economic survival, and, while they desire to forge institutional linkages with American organizations, they have been less successful in doing so.
<p><i>“The entire team which has attended the [PET] training has become as one family. I’d say again that this was a purpose [of the training]—to establish partner relations, at least between us, our partner organization, and those who are working here.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Uzbek Focus Group Participant</i></p>	
<p>Goal 2: PET participants will expand their professional capabilities and capacities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 93.7% of the U.S. trainees and 89.1% of the in-country trainees felt they learned new professional skills or techniques through the trainings. • 92.7% of the U.S. trainees reported an increase in their ability to communicate with others, as did 87.5% of the in-country trainees; 91.7% of the U.S. and 85.1% of in-country trainees reported increased self-reliance; and 89.1% of U.S. and 79.8% of in-country trainees reported increased willingness to take risks. • 81.9% of the U.S. trainees and 66.0% of the in-country trainees felt that the PET training supported their career goals either “a great deal” or “a lot.”
<p><i>“How to do fund raising, how to work with mass media, how to work with administrative structures, with the administration, how to work with parents—that is to say, we have completely reformulated our field of work and forms of work as a result of these training sessions.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Russian Focus Group Participant</i></p>	

<p>Goal 3: PET participants will gain skills and ideas that they can then apply in their workplaces and volunteer organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81.4% of U.S. trainees used the information acquired in their training “a great deal” or “a lot” in their workplaces; in contrast, about 62.9% of the in-country trainees reported that they did so. • 87.6% of PET U.S. trainees and 76.4% of the in-country trainees reported that the training had helped them to become more efficient at the workplace or as community leaders. • About 85.0% of all trainees are actively volunteering and, of those, about 74.0% of U.S. trainees and 57.0% of in-country trainees are using “a lot” or “a great deal” of what they learned through PET in their volunteer organization. • Participants from smaller towns were significantly more likely to apply what they learned through PET to their volunteer activities than those in larger cities. • Older participants (age 45 and above) were also more likely to apply what they learned “a great deal” or “a lot.”
<p><i>“After I came back from Oklahoma in 2001 I compiled three business plans: one for a major enterprise, another for myself, and the third one for a small business that was just starting. They were all successful. In one of them, they managed to get an \$80 million loan.”</i> – Uzbek Focus Group Participant</p>	
<p>Goal 4: PET participants will expand their networks with their country and/or regional counterparts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 84.0% of both in-country and U.S. trainees found the PET training to be “useful” or “very useful” in meeting colleagues from their own country. • Nearly 70.0% of U.S. trainees reported that the training was “useful” or “very useful” in meeting colleagues from other countries in the region. • Some 84.0% of both groups maintain active ties to the organizations that provided the training.
<p><i>“Before [training] I couldn’t use the Internet or e-mail, and now I know how to do it. It expands the possibilities of contacts with other organizations, not just inside Volgograd. Now we work in the network. This is a large coalition. This non-profit organization covers all Russia under the project of a Moscow “sister” group. Generally speaking, it is very convenient that you can get any information you need almost at once with the help of your computer, e-mail and the Internet.”</i> – Russian Focus Group Participant</p>	
<p>Goal 5: PET participants will share their expertise with others in their country or region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some 98.0% of U.S. trainees and more than 92.0% of in-country trainees reported sharing their experience with others. • 46.5% of U.S. trainees and 28.1% of in-country trainees say that they have formally shared their training with more than 100 people.
<p><i>“There is already feedback on the part of those whom we have taught. Our merit is that we are helping them not to be taken back to the past. Some are still standing on the border—this way or that way. But communism is over and we can help them.”</i> – Ukrainian Focus Group Participant</p>	
<p>Goal 6: PET U.S. training participants will interact with their hosts and generate enduring ties; in-country training participants will begin to forge relationships with the U.S. trainers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some 85.6 % of the U.S.-based training participants and 43.4% of the in-country trainees have maintained contact with the U.S. grantee. • 88.0% of U.S. grant managers said they were still in contact with PET participants.
<p><i>“We have stayed in touch and maintained both business and personal relationships. There is no longer the fear of not being able to make a change because the objective is now set and the team has been gathered. Everything is possible.”</i> – Russian Focus Group Participant</p>	

Goal 7: PET participants' knowledge of U.S. culture will increase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64.0% of U.S. trainees indicated that their perceptions of the United States broadened following their visit, compared to only 38.0% of the in-country trainees who changed their views about the United States as a result of the training experience. • Focus group comments show that the U.S. experience has opened the participants to a greater appreciation of the positive elements of U.S. life.
<p><i>"I went there [US] to take a brief educational course in ecology. Really, I was amazed at the ability of Americans to plan things, to clearly express their thoughts and to resolve problems over a short period of time."</i> <i>– Kazakh Focus Group Participant</i></p>	
Goal 8: U.S. trainers' knowledge of PET participants' cultures will increase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. grant managers indicated that their friends and colleagues now look to them as a source of information on the Eurasian country with which they partnered. • 100.0% of the U.S. technical staff reported increased understanding of the politics, economics and culture of the partner country as a result of the Program.
<p><i>"The visit by the Russian participants opened my eyes and that of my staff to what we share in common. It takes one-on-one contact to neutralize the stereotypes that exist on both sides."</i> – Internship Host, Wayne State University</p>	

Conclusions and Recommendations

The PET Program is meeting its baseline legislative and programmatic goals of developing in-country capacity in specific fields and developing ties with U.S. counterparts. Given the dramatic transformations in Eurasia in the past decade, the evaluators recommend that the Program be continued but that it be updated and fine-tuned to take this new Eurasian context into account. The evaluators believe that the following changes will make the Program even more effective:

- More attention should be paid to the selection and oversight of the local partners. Eurasian organizations should demonstrate experience, commitment, transparency, clear communication, and attentiveness to detail and schedules *before* being selected as a partner.
- The recruitment/application process for Eurasian participants should be reviewed to ensure that applicants for both the in-country and U.S.-based training are properly screened, are more homogeneous in background and experience, and are committed to the Program goals.
- The grant period should be lengthened in order to allow the U.S. grantees to provide support and follow-up training.
- A small grant component should be included so that participants and their organizations have the resources to apply what they learned in the training.
- U.S. trainers selected to provide in-country and third-country training programs need to be adequately briefed about the culture, economics, and politics of the countries where they are going so that they appear knowledgeable and informed to their audiences.
- Trainers need advance information about the audience in order to develop and plan activities that are appropriate to their skill levels and needs.

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