



Welcome to ICF *Education Connections*

ICF is helping to improve educational outcomes by navigating clients through today's and tomorrow's challenges. From early education to K-12 and postsecondary schooling, ICF gives clients the insights they need to turn research into practice. In this issue:

- ICF engages in international education with federal and private clients
- Helene Jennings discusses her career in evaluation of international programs

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ICF Engages in Research to Improve International Programs

ICF is part of the team that just won the IDIQs in evaluation for the U.S. State Department (DoS), set to sub with PricewaterhouseCoopers on public diplomacy and exchanges. Our international initiatives feature in-depth evaluation, extensive surveys and site visits, evaluation tools, as well as market research for clients like DoS, the World Bank, the U.S. Department of Education, USAID, the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, and other public and private entities.

For the Institute of International Education and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, ICF just concluded its study of NEXUS, a specialized Fulbright program that engages participants from the U.S and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere for two years to work together on projects, often related to energy or climate change. The sponsors wanted to set their course for the fourth cohort and know what had worked well and what needed to be adjusted.

ICF's study of the Fulbright Foreign Graduate STEM Student Participants program, for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at DoS, was designed to assess how graduate students progressed in their professional fields following their program of study in STEM

fields at American universities through Fulbright Fellowships. The goal of the research was to assess the impact and innovations that program participants had undertaken since their involvement in the program. ICF conducted a survey of all seminar participants, complemented by field work in Brazil, Colombia, Pakistan, and Indonesia. The study considered academic and applied pursuits, understanding and applying entrepreneurship, and problem-solving directed toward global challenges in their home countries.

The World Bank launched the international Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) in June 2000, designed to provide a virtual meeting place for dialogues, consultations, and training on development topics among World Bank specialists but also with other public, private, and non-governmental organizations. After four years, with 68 distance learning centers in place, the Bank requested an evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the network, conditions leading to greater distance learning center effectiveness, congruence of the content and use with World Bank goals, and the capacity enhancements of GDLN. The multi-method impact evaluation required data collection at sites in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

ICF was selected to provide market research for a major university in the U.S. to identify international markets with high potential to recruit students for online graduate programs, identify barriers to entry, and identify key attributes that could be used to develop marketing strategies for specific audiences. ICF developed an algorithm that weighted publicly available data related to the supply and demand for higher education in various countries.

For the U.S. Department of Education, ICF conducted an evaluation of its fourteen domestic Title VI programs. Performance measures included common measures in standard units that could be aggregated across all programs, while also allowing some measures to vary in order to reflect differing goals of different programs. For example, some programs had language proficiency attainment as an ultimate goal, while others sought specific career placements.

For USAID, ICF has conducted three program evaluations focused on the agency's Foreign

Service Recruitment and Selection Programs, their New Entry Professional Training Program, as well as a Foreign Service Workforce Planning Study. Since its first engagement with the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, ICF has provided services to enhance their capacity to incorporate evaluation into their planning, data collection, and reporting.

Interview with ICF Thought Leader Helene Jennings

Recently we interviewed Helene Jennings about highlights of ICF's work in the international arena. Here are excerpts from that interview.

Question: Could you offer some highlights of ICF's international work?

Answer: Where I personally have done work is primarily but not exclusively for the State Department, which runs a lot of exchange programs, where they either bring people to the U.S. or they send people to other countries. In fact when I finished my undergraduate work, I was actually on a Fulbright to Chile so that makes me a little bit predisposed to the Fulbright program. Over the years I've done various evaluations of the Fulbright program. The most recent one was for Fulbright foreign graduate students who come to the U.S. and the particular focus here was on STEM education. ... After they'd been doing this special seminar plus graduate school for about four or five years they wanted to go back and see what had transpired. Over the years the kind of work I've done for the State Department is usually that question: we made this investment, how is it playing out?

Question: How far out were you doing the study?

Answer: It had been two to seven years, and one of the challenges is, you don't want to do it too soon, because you want the thing to take hold. At the same time, if you do it too far out, people get lost, and there's a whole lot of intervening things, so the whole notion of attribution goes away. So first you have to find all these people as best you can—I had a team of people working on trying to find these people—some very creative people! We got a

very good response rate of 60%, which on a follow-up survey is pretty impressive. Often they want you to go out to the field so we looked at countries that had the greatest number of participants and went to a number of those countries not just to interview them but to see the environment in which they were working, to actually see the products of what they were doing. So we were standing on a rooftop in Columbia watching how they were measuring air pollution. In the end we delivered a report that talked about what aspects of the program had been most meaningful, where people had been successful and under what circumstances, and ways in which this kind of educational initiative supported U.S. foreign policy purposes.

Question: So were you able to make connections that argued that this kind of program does support the foreign policy purposes of the U.S.?

Answer: That there was an increased interest in staying connected with professors and colleagues that was gained while they were in the U.S., a healthy respect for the way science is conducted in the U.S., a much more rigorous approach, much more concern about the impact on others of the research you do.

When I've done these follow up programs—these people are usually exceptional when they get picked. And the experience of being in the U.S., and realizing that they are kind of an elite, in that they've been plucked out of their countries, sometimes from really dispersed remote areas, and given experience, time to work with scientists or other people in academic environments or even professional environments that are really exceptional, and they feel like they've been really super blessed and it reinvigorates them. They're already excelling but it reinforces a commitment to go back and use what they've learned and not take it for granted that this has been a special experience for them.

I'm doing some work for the HR unit of the State Department that does professional development. Foreign service officers can opt to take long-term training, like a year's training, and they might go to the War College, or they might go to a university—there's a lot of different places they can go, or they can opt to do a detail, which means they go to a

different agency or maybe Congress or different places and spend a year doing a job in some other setting. And what they wanted to know was, were they getting their money's worth, how well was the HR department facilitating this, but also what were the outcomes, what was the experience like, and then so what? When you got to your next assignment, or your next post, or your next-next post, were you able to apply what you had learned. And we're still working on that. That project has a couple of months to go. That involved a survey, but we're going to do some interviews as well. They were interested in—to justify but also to make improvements in this standard practice of professional development.

Other organizations are interested in international education. I have done something for the World Bank that involved looking at a mechanism to help people convene virtually across the world. Did having this technology medium facilitate problem solving and joint interaction and virtual convenings that produced anything? It's been a big investment on the part of the Bank and they wanted to know that answer.

Question: Are there attributes that you bring to this work that leads to their coming back to the company?

Answer: Well, I think you can't get ruffled, you have to keep your eye on the objective, and make things happen.... You have to figure out how to do things in less than ideal conditions, but remembering that the people sitting in Washington D.C. are needing to have the answers they were seeking. Figuring out how to make it happen, and not being put off by impediments. When you work in developing countries, and when you do field work, you have to be willing to work with the resources that are in the country, and one of the pluses is that we often can rely on networks of people that have been established for other purposes. The company itself has a network and a reputation for delivering and delivering on time and not having excuses for why something couldn't happen. Rather than say well, let's not do Pakistan, because of security concerns, rather we find a way to still make it happen. And some of the interactions with Pakistan were super helpful and valuable in terms of their observations. Most of the people I talked to were super eager to talk about what they'd learned and how they were adapting the work they were doing to international standards.

That experience in the U.S. gave them not only understanding of what Americans were dealing with but also elevated their work to international standards, which I think is critical for their own development.

Question. As you look back over these multiple projects and years of work, what stands out for you in terms of the importance of international education?

Answer. That the State Department makes these investments, but then they don't rest on the numbers—"we brought in so many people from so many places," that kind of superficial tally of numbers. But rather they want to say, did it really make a difference in the long run, did it have impact for the kind of policies and kinds of relationships that the State Department wants to have, but also did it have an impact on these countries, have these people been able to go back and serve the national or even more local needs. I think the positive thing is that evaluation, which sometimes is thought of as being a nicety or an afterthought, is more ingrained, more part and parcel of how they are thinking about what they've accomplished, is not just the initial activity but the short run and then the longer term consequences.