

Higher Education Partnerships - Paraguay Attachment A

USAID/Paraguay currently implements programs in the democracy and governance and economic growth sectors. The Mission's programs have become a USAID-wide model for working with foreign governments to support transparency and utilizing local solutions, including building the capacity of local higher education institutions (HEIs) within these sectors. Working in close collaboration with government and local civil society organizations, these programs seek to consolidate positive and sustainable institutional change.

Paraguay Rule of Law and Educational Context

The enactment of a Freedom of Information Law and its entry into force in September 2015 have given way to unprecedented levels of transparency in Paraguay. As a result, considerable high-profile corruption cases have been unveiled. Yet a still weak and politicized judicial system enables pervasive impunity, undermining Paraguayans' public support for democracy --which fell sharply from 66.9 percent in 2012 to 48.6 percent in 2016 -- the second lowest in the region, only above Guatemala¹. Corruption² fueled by impunity, together with low quality education, are two of the most important impediments to Paraguay's Journey to Self-Reliance³.

According to the World Economic Forum's 2017 Executive Opinion Survey, an inadequately educated workforce was the third most problematic factor for doing business in Paraguay, only after corruption and infrastructure⁴. Furthermore, the 2017-2018 Global Competitiveness Index⁵ ranks Paraguay at 107 out of 137 countries in the Higher Education and Training pillar. Even more disturbing is the overall quality of the higher education system, where Paraguay ranks 135 out of 137 countries, only above Haiti and Mauritania.

Paraguay's National Education Plan acknowledges that the higher education system not only needs a reform, but a revolution. Between 1991 and 2006, the total number of universities grew from two to 33, but was not accompanied by an increase in the quality of education and the professional competence of graduates. According to Paraguay's National Council for Education and Culture⁶, the main causes for Paraguay's shortcomings in the area of higher education are:

- low-quality high school education;
- the massification of university degrees;
- low wages for teachers and professors;
- insufficient training of teachers/professors in their areas of expertise, part-time classroom

¹ Boidi, F. & Zechmeister, E.J. (2018). *Cultura Política de la Democracia en Paraguay y en las Américas, 2016/17*. Available at: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/paraguay/AB2016-17_Paraguay_Country_Report_V3_05.03.18_W.pdf.

² Costello, C., Battilana, M. (2018). *Rule of Law Assessment -Paraguay*. Available at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00T3MV.pdf

³ <https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance>

⁴ http://reports.weforum.org/pdf/gci-2016-2017/WEF_GCI_2016_2017_Profile_PRY.pdf

⁵ World Economic Forum (2017). *The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018*. Available at: <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2017-2018/05FullReport/TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2017%E2%80%932018.pdf>

⁶ CONEC. (2002). *El Estado de la educación en Paraguay*. Available at: http://www.conec.gov.py/application/files/4015/2389/5426/03-InformSitEducPya_MAYO-2002-6.pdf

dedication, and the lack of pedagogical instruction.

Additionally, scientific research, often one of the main objectives of higher education institutions, is not currently included in the academic curriculum⁷.

A recent Rule of Law assessment⁸ conducted by the Mission underscores the need to work with law schools to elevate the legal profession. The assessment notes that Paraguay has a serious surplus of lawyers, over 50,000, with a ratio of 722 per 100,000 citizens, the highest in the region. This, coupled with little control over qualifications or professional conduct, has led to public contempt for the legal profession and the judiciary writ large. The proliferation of law schools without substantial control from the Ministry of Education, and without any formal accreditation does not contribute to promoting a culture of lawfulness and the Rule of Law.

USAID's Response

USAID/Paraguay's programs have achieved impressive results in terms of greater government transparency and access to public information. The Government of Paraguay has clearly conveyed two main priorities: fighting corruption and improving the quality of education. After extensive consultations with key stakeholders, including the Minister of the Presidential Management Unit, education-focused NGOs, and the private sector, USAID sees a unique opportunity to strengthen the higher education sector to address corruption, thus complementing the Mission's current strategy.

This addendum seeks concept notes which will support a consortium of institutions made up of at least two Paraguayan HEIs (including at least one public university and one justice-related training institute⁹), at least one U.S.-based HEI, and at least one non-HEI Paraguayan partner entity to address the issues noted in this attachment.

The main objective is to strengthen the capacity of local higher education institutions (universities and training centers) to address gaps in the area of rule of law, while building a culture of lawfulness necessary for Paraguay to embark on its journey to self-reliance. The partnership should ensure academic excellence and experience in international academic collaboration in rule of law and anti-corruption reform, in alignment with an approach that promotes self-reliance through building strong and sustainable partnerships. The partnership should integrate knowledge from international best practices, including U.S. higher education culture and values of academic freedom. The new program should be built on a system that strengthens higher education results through long-term relationships between both institutions and individuals, resulting in research collaborations and student experiences that exist long past the initial assistance period.

The proposed activity must include an initial assessment, to better understand the gaps in higher education and determine the most efficient and impactful approaches. The final goal is to elevate HE in Paraguay and to use learning as a catalyst for improving the Rule of Law.

Illustrative activities could include:

⁷ CONEC. (2002). Plan Nacional de Educación 2024. Available at https://www.mec.gov.py/cms_v2/adjuntos/2344

⁸ Costello, C., Battilana, M. (2018). Rule of Law Assessment -Paraguay. Available at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00T3MV.pdf

⁹ Prosecutor's Office Training Center, Supreme Court's Training Center, and/or Council of Magistrates' Judicial School

- Curriculum Reform/Development for non-degree and professional certification programs, working with universities and training centers, in key areas such as economic crimes, ethics, compliance, anti-corruption and transparency;
- Establishment of extension programs to help students interact with respected professionals working on anti-corruption matters, both in the judiciary and in the private sector;
- Engagement of academia, think tanks, and investigative journalists in justice-related reforms, including policy and legislative initiatives to ensure a thorough analysis on issues such as judicial career, organization, transparency, and accountability;
- Improved quality of instruction and faculty development;
- Strengthened capacity to obtain certification from the National Evaluation and Certification Agency (ANEAES);
- Increased research capacity of local HEIs;
- Strengthened scholarship administration and management programs for the Carlos Antonio Lopez Scholarship fund (BECAL)¹⁰, among other potential beneficiaries;
- Student exchange programs between local and U.S. universities to provide opportunities for Paraguayan students to gain an understanding of American culture and values, as well as benefit from a research-friendly and evidence-based environment, with direct exposure to state-of-the-art anti-corruption mechanisms and to experience examples of academic freedom and liberal-arts style of education;
- Access to higher education for marginalized¹¹ or underrepresented groups, including women and people with disabilities;
- Economic incentives and reasonable accommodations to facilitate access should be taken into account, and may include paid internships or other forms of stipendiums.

The U.S. HEI(s) will bring in much needed expertise to train professionals that are both knowledgeable of best-practices in fighting corruption and committed to ethical standards. The U.S. has been a role model for other countries in areas such as rule of law, ethical behavior, internal controls to fight economic crimes, corporate compliance, data analysis for citizen oversight of the government, and other related areas. Paraguayan partners will learn from U.S.-based HEIs with proven experience in supporting Rule of Law and anti-corruption reforms in civil law countries with an academic approach through an innovative local adaptation/design process and collaborative learning.

The consortium will work with public and private universities' Schools of Law, Political and/or Social Sciences, with the Judicial School, the Judiciary's International Center for Judicial Studies, and the Prosecutors' Training Center.

Concept notes should be closely aligned with the Integrated Country Strategy¹², and USAID/Paraguay's Country Development Cooperation Strategy¹³, which calls for "a more prosperous, well governed democracy in Paraguay". It falls under Development Objective (DO) 1, "internal management and governance systems strengthened in select public institutions", and be clearly aligned with the Administration's Journey to Self-Reliance. Additionally, the proposed activity should align with the

¹⁰ <http://www.becal.gov.py/>

¹¹ Per the USAID Education Policy, USAID defines marginalized groups as girls, children affected by or emerging from armed conflict or humanitarian crises, children with disabilities, children in remote or rural areas (including those who lack access to safe water and sanitation), religious or ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS, child laborers, married adolescents, and victims of trafficking.

¹² Integrated Country Strategy. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/284636.pdf>

¹³ Country Development Cooperation Strategy. Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/paraguay/cdcs>

Government of Paraguay's 2024 National Education Plan¹⁴, and with the Paraguayan Administration's recently launched Education Reform Dialogue.

Additional Resources

- How-To Note -- Disability Inclusive Education: <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/how-note-disability-inclusive-education>
- Law 4995 of Higher Education: <http://www.cones.gov.py/ley-4995-de-educacion-superior/>
- List of Universities of the official and private sector with legal framework of approval for its operation: <https://www.aneaes.gov.py/aneaes/index.php/ct-menu-item-31>
- Judicial School/Council of Magistrates: <http://www.ej.org.py/main/>
- Ministry of Education and Science: <https://www.mec.gov.py>
- National Education Plan 2024: https://www.mec.gov.py/cms_v2/adjuntos/2344
- National Program of Postgraduate Scholarships Abroad "Don Carlos Antonio López": <http://www.becal.gov.py/>
- Public Ministry: <https://www.ministeriopublico.gov.py/>
- Supreme Court of Justice: <https://www.pj.gov.py/>
- The Paraguayan Association of Professionals Graduated in the U.S.A.: <http://www.appg.org.py/>

¹⁴ <http://www.becal.gov.py/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2.%20Plan%20Nacional%20de%20Educacion%202024.pdf>