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# An Innovation in Parliamentary Staff Training

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**Vienna Pozer**

*In June 2012 the pilot session of a global first – an International Executive Parliamentary Staff Training Program – was hosted by McGill University’s Institute for the Study of International Development. Organized as a collaborative venture between ISID, the World Bank Institute, the Canadian Parliamentary Centre, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the State University of New York, with support from other organizations around the globe. The program brought together participants from 11 countries.*

Assistance to parliaments has historically included activities intended to improve the skills of Members of Parliament. And, more recently, to help improve the infrastructure, such as libraries and information technology, within parliaments. However, experience has shown that focusing on these areas alone yields limited results. The effectiveness of parliaments depends on more than structure and capacity of their premises, equipment and technical services and of the skill-sets of MPs, important as these are. Over the past decade, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of enhancing the institutional memory of parliament and thus combating the problem of skills loss at election times, when in some countries the turnover of MPs is 80% or higher. Building institutional memory in parliament requires a focus on training of parliamentary staff.

## **The Need for Parliamentary Staff Development**

Starting in the early 2000s the development of training programs geared towards meeting the specific needs of parliamentary staffers has expanded dramatically. Leading the way in this new approach to parliamentary strengthening were several of the world leaders in international development; the World Bank Institute (WBI), the Canadian Parliamentary Centre, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the State University of New York’s Center for International Development (SUNY-CID), among

others. However, early attempts in the development and delivery of training programs for parliamentary staff lacked coherence, and were usually delivered on an *ad-hoc* basis, not interwoven with broader staff development initiatives within parliaments. Furthermore, because these early programs relied mostly on traditional face-to-face training methods, there was an issue of equity of access. International organizations and bilateral donors tended to focus on a few favoured countries, such as Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, with francophone nations and smaller jurisdictions being excluded due to unavailability of resources.

Concerned about these and related issues, the World Bank Institute undertook a ‘capacity enhancement review’ in order to help it to best manage the burgeoning demand for parliamentary staff training globally, in the face of only slowly increasing – and more recently declining – aid budgets. The review identified two challenges to providing support to parliaments globally; sustainability and scalability. The review recommended the scaling up of training for parliamentary staff in order to achieve sustainable capacity results and the use of ‘new technology’ – such as the delivery of courses online and via multimedia – so as to be financially sustainable. At the same time, it was recommended that WBI’s partnership network – *inter alia*, the Canadian Parliamentary Centre and the CPA – be approached in order to develop a multi-organization approach to parliamentary staff training, thereby helping to reduce the overlap and duplication of staff training programs heretofore offered by international organizations.

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*Vienna Pozer is a Graduate of McGill University and currently a consultant to the World Bank’s parliamentary program.*

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## International Executive Parliamentary Staff Training Participants\*

### Bangladesh

Md Enamul Hoque  
Md Faisal Morshed  
Abu Sadat Mohammad  
Ataul Karim  
A.K.M.G. Kibria  
Mazumdar  
Shahan Shah Azad  
Kabir  
Md Enamul Haque

### Barbados

Ruth Linton  
Suzanne Hamblin

### Canada

Kimberley Hammond  
Linda Buchanan

### Ghana

Robert Apodolla

### Kenya

Phyllis N. Makau



### Namibia

Margareth Walenga  
Dorothea Haitengi  
Amalia Iita  
Dorothea Fransman  
Benedict Likando

### St. Helena

Gina Benjamin

### South Africa

Timothy Layman

### Tanzania

Emmanuel Mpanda

### Trinidad & Tobago

Keiba Jacob  
Candice Skerrette

### Uganda

Paul Wabwire  
Josephine Watara

\*Three participants from Nigeria, Aisha Ali Kotoko, Lawal Daniel Omolade and Ibrahim Ma'aruf, registered in the Program, but their visas did not arrive in time for them to participate in the 2012 residency. They will participate in the 2013 residency but have already started the e\*Learning courses.

## Using New Technologies

This approach resulted in what evolved as a two-track approach. First, driven by potential economies of scale, was the development of an open-access, introductory-level, program of e\*learning courses. By increasing the number of participants that are able to engage in such a program, costs of delivery were reduced and access was increased. Operating over the past six years or so, this program – offered free to parliamentary staff around the world on a first come-first served basis – offers a dozen different courses, ranging from Executive-Legislative Relations and Committees to Parliament and the Budget Process and Climate Change. Each course typically has 40-50 participants, which come from countries as diverse as Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, New Zealand and Greece, although the majority of participants are from English-speaking African countries. Encouraged by this success, the World Bank Institute, with encouragement from the Canadian Parliament, is working with ASGPF (the Association of Francophone Parliamentary Secretaries General) to deliver these courses in French.

The second track is the outcome of ongoing collaboration between WBI and the CPA. As successful as the basic e\*learning courses are, there was increasing

demand from parliaments for a more advanced set of courses. Recognizing this, and the fact that such a program should be demand-driven, thereby reflecting the needs of developing country parliaments, rather than supply-driven (reflecting the interests of donor agencies) WBI and its partners sought guidance from the clerks and secretaries general of developing country parliaments. A three-stage consultative process was launched: regular briefings to Commonwealth Clerks and Secretaries General; a survey of Clerks and Secretaries General across the Commonwealth and la Francophonie and a WBI-CPA study group which brought together a dozen senior parliamentary staff for a week to provide detailed guidance to program designers.

## Professional Development for Parliamentary Staff

The outcome of these consultations was the development of a pilot program which represents the height of technological and academic knowledge available today which recognizes the expectations of what is needed for the future. To complement the existing e\*learning courses, which were designed to expand the breadth of international efforts to support parliamentary staff training, WBI and its partners have developed a unique program that expands the depth



During the week participants had the opportunity to break away from the more traditional class setting and visit the Parliament in Ottawa, where the group was acknowledged by the Senate and where the group attended presentations by Charles Robert and Terry Moore on the procedures of the Senate and House of Commons. The group also attended a roundtable on extractive industries and parliaments, organized by the Parliamentary Centre, which provided participants with an opportunity to discuss the role of legislatures in ensuring good governance of extractive industries around the world.

of parliamentary staff training programs. While the e\*learning courses described above are designed for junior parliamentary staff, the new program is more for mid-career parliamentary professionals. It is a global, university-certified, executive-level training program which combines the personal aspects of face-to-face training with the flexibility of web-based courses. Unlike the basic e\*learning courses, however, there is a fee for participating in this program. Currently, Can. \$5,995 per participant – representing the financial break-even for program delivery. WBI and its global partners, the Government and Parliament of Finland, have both met all program development costs and offer discounts of up to \$1,500 to highly qualified participants from developing countries.

The program comprises a one-week intensive residency, at McGill University in Montreal, a set of advanced e\*learning courses and an applied research project, related to the individual's professional interests. Throughout, participants are assigned a mentor to assist and guide them through the program. A unique feature of the program is that it combines theory and an academic approach with practical case studies and experiences.

Recognized international leaders in parliamentary development from Canada, the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia were engaged in the development of the curriculum for the residency and the e\*learning courses and an advisory board of leading academics and practitioners provides strategic

guidance. The first residency, held in Montreal in June 2012, included resource persons from a wide array of backgrounds and specialities, from business administration and political science to parliamentary administration and parliamentary development.

To open the residency, program co-ordinator, Dr. Rick Stapenhurst, parliamentary adviser to WBI and Professor of Practice at McGill University, led the opening address along with Paul Belisle, former Clerk in the Canadian Senate. Following this, eight sessions were held through the week:

- Democracy, Accountability & Parliaments
- Legislative-Executive Relations
- Parliamentary Oversight
- Parliamentary Representation
- Strategic Communications for Parliaments
- Corporate Management of Parliaments
- Legislation
- Parliamentary Procedure

Resource persons included Philip Oxhorn (Professor, McGill University and Director, ISID), Riccardo Pelizzo (Parliamentary consultant, WBI), Anthony Staddon (Professor, University of Westminster), Rasheed Draman (Director, Canadian Parliamentary Centre), Mitchell O'Brien (Team Leader, WBI), Craig James (Clerk, BC Legislature), Gurprit Kindra (Professor, University of Ottawa), Marie-Andree Lajoie (former Clerk Assistant, Canadian Parliament).

Included within the residency were a series of keynote speakers, including the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark,

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former Prime Minister of Canada. Other speakers were: Jean-Paul Ruszkowski (President and CEO of the Parliamentary Centre) and Mark Baskin (Senior Associate and Professor at SUNY-CID).

### **E\*learning and Applied Research Projects Begin**

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Each participant is required to take a total of seven e\*learning courses, out of ten offered, by December 2013. The first such course, on Executive-Legislative relations, began in August 2012. Future courses include Committees, Corporate Management, Strategic Communications, Public Financial Management, Research, ICT, Parliament and the Media, Controlling Corruption, Extractive Industries Oversight and Parliaments and Climate Change. Participants have the option for a short attachment at another Parliament, in lieu of one of the e\*learning courses and McGill and WBI have agreed to give advance standing in the program to parliamentary staff who have completed the Canadian Parliament's Parliamentary Officers' Study Program (POSP).

All participants have been assigned mentors and are now beginning, either individually or in groups, to develop their applied research projects, the topics of which range from improving the 'money' committees in Bangladesh to enhancing parliamentary communications across the Caribbean. The professional mentoring relationship is a unique feature of this program, building a professional ink between participants and experienced professionals with parliamentary experience. The selection of each individual's mentor was made in the last two days of residency, to allow participants and resource persons to become familiar with each and their own respective fields of interests.

On completion of the program, in December 2013, participants will receive a certificate from McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development.

### **Participant Feedback**

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As the residency came to an end, an overwhelmingly positive response was shown from participants and resource persons alike. Both groups attributed an overall Program content score of 4.3 out of a possible 5. This first review reflected the relevance, interest and organization of the week-long seminar as well as a marked enthusiasm for the 18-month-long e\*learning portion of the course that is still to come. Additional positive feedback was given based on the quality of instructors and moderators as well as the level of synergy that developed within the group. Along with their praise for their initial experience in what is to be

the first of an annual program, participants offered several suggestions as to the possible changes that could be made in order to benefit future participants. A recurring remark was made regarding the demanding agenda during residency. From 9:00 am until 5:30 pm every day, participants followed an intense program. It was suggested that this be eased somewhat, to allow time for individual reflection and interaction among participants. Furthermore, looking beyond the technological and academic improvements, WBI and its partners were asked to more explicitly recognize that no single model is right for all jurisdictions and especially to develop greater insights into the needs of parliaments in smaller jurisdictions and 'semi-westernized' states.

Furthermore, many participants noted a particular interest in going beyond the objectives set by program co-ordinators and building upon the platform of knowledge of the parliamentary procedures and practices at the international level. In particular, they wanted to increase their own level of understanding of parliamentary democracy and democratic principles and become better knowledgeable in core functions of parliament, in order to provide efficient services to MPs. Participants also showed significant interest in the specificity and flexibility of e\*learning courses offered. The exchange of knowledge using peer-to-peer learning, was viewed by participants as a valued way to share, replicate, and scale-up those parliamentary practices found effective elsewhere. Parliamentary staff participants voiced a desire to learn from the practical experience of those who have faced similar problems.

In short, participants found that the current Program's framework provides parliamentary staff with what is perceived as both needed and lacking in other available training programs.

### **Next Steps**

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Response was overwhelming for the first residency – not only was the program over-subscribed, but about half-a-dozen participants who were not accepted this time round were placed on a waiting list. As a result, a second program offering is being planned, with its residency at McGill in mid-April 2013.

At the same time, substantial interest is being shown by francophone parliaments in such a course. WBI is currently working with its current program partners plus professors at Laval University to adapt the program for francophone parliamentary staff, with the aim of offering the program in French in late 2013.

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