



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

10 YEARS OF PEACEBUILDING INNOVATION

IFIT Case for Support

August 2022



IFIT brings together under one roof the best of theory and practice in relation to successful negotiations and transitions out of conflict or authoritarian rule



Message from Executive Director, Mark Freeman

2022 marks the tenth anniversary of IFIT's existence. Originally conceived as a transitions think tank, today IFIT is a global enterprise that straddles negotiation and transition processes alike, operating mainly behind the scenes through high-level dialogue and strategy formation with local leaders seeking to break cycles of violence and misrule in their country.

IFIT is at yet another inflection point and ready to actively engage with philanthropists with shared goals. We thus present this case for support as a starting point of a deeper conversation regarding how we can work together to move current practice away from fragmented interventions and towards more integrated solutions to strengthen peace, democracy, and human rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

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About IFIT

Organisational Profile

Formed in 2012 and influenced by the optimism and exigency that surrounded the Arab Spring, IFIT supports states through the complications and challenges inherent in the process of moving from conflict to peace, from upheaval to stability, and from crisis to order.

IFIT has established itself as the leading international NGO focused on the integration of policymaking in contexts of negotiation and transition in fragile and conflict-affected states. It serves as an independent and impartial platform for generating creative, realistic, and principled ideas with the aim of expanding the range of perceived options in contexts of negotiation and transition.

The Institute's global team of experts include 30 full-time and part-time staff, 25 Board and International Advisory Council members, and an additional 250 expert-practitioners belonging to its purpose-built thematic practice groups, in-country brain trusts and global initiatives. Members of the IFIT network have demonstrated extraordinary leadership locally, regionally and/or globally:

- 100+ members have played central roles as negotiators, mediators or senior advisers in peace talks within their own countries or abroad;
- 80+ members have held executive roles in government, including as vice presidents, senior ministers, members of parliament, or career ambassadors;
- 70+ members have led major think tanks, NGOs, academic institutions, or multilateral bodies; and
- 60+ members have received prestigious awards for their leadership, including the Nobel Peace Prize, the *Légion d'honneur* and similar international and national recognitions.

Vis-à-vis the intended final beneficiaries (namely, affected populations), IFIT's objective is to help bring about the individual and collective benefits of greater national stability, inclusiveness, and dynamism that arise from the increased cohesion and effectiveness of national policymakers and civil society leaders.

IFIT exercises global field leadership in four areas:

1

Delivering process design of peace negotiations – if the process is not well designed, a deal cannot be reached.

2

Balancing accountability and reconciliation – ending atrocities requires finding creative and realistic solutions that balance punishment and prevention goals.

3

Ensuring real local leadership through the innovative 'brain trust' model – purpose-built local platforms of middle-tier ('go-between') peacebuilders that are key to ending conflicts.

4

Bringing the best of narrative theory and practice to the challenge of reducing polarization and increasing peace.

IFIT's innovative and inclusive negotiation and peacebuilding strategies, as seen in Colombia during the Havana peace talks, allow states to successfully navigate the arduous journey out of conflict and repression.

Through the skilful harnessing of and interplay between local and global knowledge – via the mechanisms of its local “brain trusts” and global “practice groups” – and the fiscal pragmatism that governs its operations, IFIT differentiates itself from other actors in the peace and justice space.

IFIT's achievements in Colombia demonstrate the key tenets of its organisational structure and mission:

- The blending of global and local flows of knowledge
- The power of inclusion and consensus building
- The realisation of policy solutions that conform to problem realities

Global Field Leadership

These and other successes have resulted in global field leadership in the process design of peace negotiations, balancing amnesty and accountability, ensuring real local leadership through its innovative ‘brain trust’ model, and applying narrative approaches to reduce polarization and violence.

IFIT receives constant requests in these areas and currently works intensively in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Uzbekistan. The Institute has also been involved in high-level negotiation and transition work in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and El Salvador.

In seeking to advance these outcomes, IFIT operates on the basis of several assumptions:

- That opportunities exist to shape the course of local events through creative and realistic ideas and the strategic convening of key local actors.
- That IFIT's country-specific proposals, if acted upon, are capable of preventing or resolving violent conflict or repression and advancing dialogue and transition possibilities.
- That policymakers, journalists, diplomats, social leaders, and other key actors continue to make use of IFIT's confidential and public materials as an impartial and reliable source of negotiation and transition analysis.

A Turning Point for IFIT: The Colombian Peace Process

IFIT's turning point was its intensive advisory work in the Colombian peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels that culminated in the 2016 peace deal. Its work involved:

- Making a key intervention in 2012 and 2013 to ensure the Constitutional Court adopted the “Legal Framework for Peace” – without which there would not have been the legal room of manoeuvre to negotiate peace.
- Through its executive director, playing a unique first-hand role inside the Colombian peace talks, acting as the international expert advisor to the Colombian government delegation in Havana during the 18 months of the negotiation of victims' issues, culminating in a comprehensive transitional justice accord in December 2015.
- Creating a peacebuilding precedent, by creating a long-term brain trust of Colombian negotiators and thus avoiding the typically counterproductive dispersion of institutional memory and knowledge when a negotiation ends, and a peacebuilding phase begins.
- Playing a key role in advising the transitional justice bodies established through the final peace deal, conducting dialogue with high-level opponents of the peace deal, and building a bottom-up platform of local leaders in the most conflict-affected regions of the country to ensure a harmonisation of bottom-up and top-down peacebuilding.

IFIT provides expertise at all stages of negotiation and peacebuilding.

It places a premium on open and honest dialogue, and multi-tier collaboration between policymakers, experts and civil society leaders.

With the goal of reducing the risk of a fragmented peace, IFIT's solutions for reconciliation have withstood partisan pressures all the while advancing human rights, sustainable development, and national recovery.

How IFIT works

The respect that decision-makers have for IFIT's expertise and impartiality results in being:

- brought "inside" the decision-making process, whether of a negotiation or a transition; or
- asked to design the process itself or a related draft policy or vision document.

This insider access and trust allow IFIT to have direct influence on key outcomes for peace and human rights, rather than merely reacting from the outside.

Distinguishing Features: What Makes IFIT Different from Other Conflict Prevention and Resolution NGOs?

IFIT's uniqueness lies in the following combination of factors:

1. Expertise that covers both negotiation and transition processes, whether out of violent conflict or authoritarian rule.
2. An emphasis on promoting and harnessing local leadership, local expertise, and local action to advance local solutions.
3. An integrated methodology that ensures local partners have easy and organised access to leading global experts on critical policy dimensions of successful negotiation and transition.
4. A focus on long-term relationship building and systemic change.
5. A philosophy of dialogue and confidential engagement with leaders of all sides in any dispute or conflict.
6. An inclination to do gap-filling policy research on controversial subjects.
7. A highly cost-efficient and sustainable business model.

Organisational Values

Descriptions of structure and methodology can sometimes obscure the importance of professional culture and the deeper set of principles that guide an organisation. At IFIT, the following are the main rules of thumb promoted internally:

- Avoid falling prey to the news and events of the moment. Instead, look ahead of the curve to identify and act on deeper trends, risks and opportunities.
- Don't frame policy choices as binaries. Instead, look for ways to expand the perceived options, generating ideas that can help achieve middle ground among adversaries.
- IFIT provides expertise at all stages of negotiation and peacebuilding and places a premium on open and honest dialogue, and multi-tier collaboration between policymakers, experts and civil society leaders.

IFIT's mission has widespread appeal because it prioritises inclusivity and does not shy away from controversy or complexity.

Solutions are designed by representatives of the affected populations for the affected populations, in order to reach the greatest number of beneficiaries. IFIT's staff and practice groups facilitate but do not dictate transition-to-peace processes and remain involved long after the ink of the signatures on any agreement has dried. All along the way, IFIT adheres to the highest standards of discretion and confidentiality so as not to attract unwanted attention and publicity.

Unlike other international actors in the fields of peace mediation and transitional justice, IFIT will often take policy risks and avoid falling into ideological doctrine.

Its focus is on designing solutions that take seriously the need for mutual concessions and flexibility in any dialogue or negotiation process, putting political inclusion and the prevention of atrocities at the forefront of strategic objectives in contexts in which there will often be few good options available.

IFIT draws heavily on lessons learned from other contexts.

Despite its sensitivity to contemporary regional, national and local circumstances, IFIT understands that each negotiation and transition harbours critical lessons for the next. The adage, "history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes," rings particularly true. Insights gleaned from peace efforts in one part of the world offer creative stimuli for processes in another.

- With the goal of reducing the risk of a fragmented peace, IFIT's solutions for reconciliation have withstood partisan pressures all the while advancing human rights, sustainable development, and national recovery.
- Be guided by objective local conditions, seeking to overcome real constraints rather than pretending they don't exist.
- Guarantee confidentiality and refrain from public criticism, thus facilitating trust building and first-hand access to key actors in decision-making roles.
- Practice fiscal discipline, by keeping overhead much lower than other NGOs and by careful tracking of expenditure.
- Create internal systems and an organisational culture that allow for consistently high impact that does not depend on any one person.

Organisational Structure and Methodology

IFIT's core activities are mainly carried out through its country 'brain trusts' and thematic 'practice groups'. The whole operation is expertly managed and directed by IFIT's global staff.

Brain Trusts

Purpose-built country brain trusts are the cornerstone of IFIT's business model. Typically, an IFIT brain trust consists of a multi-disciplinary group of 15-18 social, business and political leaders from the particular country, chosen for their policy expertise, personal integrity, influential local networks, and capacity to connect elites and ordinary citizens. A single brain trust might include, for example, the rector of an important national university, the head of the national business council, the country's chief religious leader, the director of a top local think-tank, and similar local figures. These are the go-between leaders whose role is critical in bridging national, sectoral and community-level processes of dialogue, peacebuilding or transition.

Once the brain trust is in place, the global staff (including a local coordinator) and IFIT's thematic practice groups offer the brain trust different forms of technical and policy support, based on an evolving set of local priorities tied to an overall strategic aim, such as facilitating a political settlement or successful post-conflict reconciliation process in the country.

The benefits of an IFIT brain trust vary from one country to the next, but above all, they consistently offer a dynamic platform to 1) develop creative and realistic country strategies and processes that are not narrowly filtered through one ideology or set of interests; 2) bring together key local actors who otherwise would not meet regularly, exchange critical information or act in unison; and 3) enable interdisciplinary and real-time analysis and advice that can be made available to decision makers at critical junctures.

As of July 2022, IFIT operates brain trusts in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Uzbekistan.

Practice Groups

Global practice groups constitute the other critical component of the Institute's business model. These are purpose-built, 15-18-person communities of expert practitioners focused on three core challenges that countries face during negotiations or transitions: 1) how to balance questions of reconciliation and accountability as part of a larger peace deal or political settlement (Law and Peace Practice Group); 2) how to build inclusive identities and narratives that facilitate successful negotiations and transitions (Inclusive Narratives Practice Group); and 3) how to empower local recipients of foreign technical and financial aid to achieve better relationships and results with the providers of such aid when a transition is expected or underway (Transition Assistance Practice Group).

The main services of the practice groups are advisory in nature and geared toward a mix of strategy formation and technical assistance, predominantly in relation to IFIT's country brain trusts. Although the specific services vary from case to case, the work typically encompasses lessons sharing (e.g., through workshops or presentations), confidential on-call advice (e.g., technical briefings, commentary on draft negotiating positions) and customised research and writing (e.g., options memos and non-papers). The groups also tend to publish practice briefs and/or policy frameworks on core concepts and comparative models.

In working with IFIT's country brain trusts and other local partners, the practice groups offer three key benefits: 1) aggregating expertise in one place that would otherwise be dispersed across many organisations and individuals; 2) making such expertise available freely and in real time to IFIT brain trusts and leading policymakers; and 3) promoting key lessons, ideas and strategic options that would be insufficiently articulated in the absence of the group.

Research and Publications

The final component of IFIT's global work is its [research and publications agenda](#). In order to be able to provide the most credible analysis and recommendations possible, it is not enough for IFIT to be familiar with existing evidence and lessons learned. It is also important to make new contributions to the state of knowledge with original research and writing – something IFIT is well placed to do because it is so often working at the cutting edge of practice.

IFIT's research agenda reflects this mindset. We produce:

- Long framework publications on topics that lack a systemic approach (e.g., inclusive transitions; locally led transition assistance; negotiated amnesties)
- Practice briefs on specific issues for busy policymakers (e.g., process design for secret talks; interim governments; civil service reform; transitional justice narrative building)
- Case studies, sometimes book length, on important but underexamined country experiences (e.g., the exploratory and public phases of particular peace talks; inclusive policy-making experiments in different transitional contexts; the limits of punitive policies vis-à-vis violent extremist groups in various countries)
- Discussion papers offering novel applications of concepts from one field onto another (e.g., the peacebuilding role of local entrepreneurs; peace mediation concepts for organised crime)
- Original local research that looks ahead to future scenarios (e.g., a book on the foreign aid needs of a Venezuelan transition)

Coordination and Collaboration with Other Organisations

IFIT considers itself part of a global community. Its business model is premised on the inherent value of coordination and collaboration with a wide range of organisations active on issues related to dialogue, negotiation and transition in fragile and conflict-affected societies.

IFIT collaborates with other policy outfits in various familiar ways. For example:

- IFIT undertakes joint research initiatives or convenes public events in cooperation with leading organisations. In the last couple of years, this included research and other activities undertaken in partnership with Yale Law School, UCL School of Laws, Brookings Institution, the Inter-American Development Bank, International Crisis Group, King & Spalding LLP, and many others.
- IFIT also belongs to a variety of NGO networks comprised of like-minded organisations working on conflict, negotiation and transition issues, including the Mediation Support Network (MSN), European Peace-building Liaison Office (EPLO) and Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP).

But by its very design, IFIT also coordinates and collaborates with many organisations in a non-standard fashion. Our country brain trusts deliberately assemble leaders with varied organisational affiliations and networks (e.g., top think tanks, universities, multilaterals), using regular meetings of the members to expand information exchange and promote joint strategy formation. Our global practice groups work in a similar manner, deliberately combining and aggregating the expertise and networks of different individuals and institutions that would otherwise operate in greater isolation, and thus with reduced impact.

A photograph of a woman in a dark blue traditional dress carrying a large, heavy sack of flatbread on her head. She is walking up a narrow, metal staircase. The sack is overflowing with stacks of golden-brown, round flatbreads. The background shows a multi-story building with balconies and a tree on the left. The scene is set in an urban environment with some visible litter at the bottom of the stairs.

Funding Priorities and Opportunities for 2022 and Beyond

IFIT's Resilience

The IFIT model is built for adaptation to major global events and structural changes in the countries and regions of engagement, even severe and unpredictable ones that would otherwise close off access. First, IFIT's cohesive local leadership platforms work in local conditions and deliver impact locally. As such, they depend far less on staff travel than other organisational models. Second, the Institute is long accustomed to carrying out collective analysis, advice and strategic planning by secure email, phone, and video-conference technologies. Third, as the number of internationals based in or travelling to fragile and conflict-affected states plummets, IFIT's model which places emphasis on high-value, local-insider knowledge will become even more indispensable in identifying both new conflict risks and new conflict resolution opportunities.

Bearing this in mind, we envisage becoming "even more local" and "even more collaborative" in the years to come.

Country Work: Funding Priorities and Opportunities

The vast majority of IFIT's work is undertaken through its country brain trusts, backed by the active support of a local coordinator and global staff and practice group members.

Opportunities to underwrite this work are numerous. The total annual budget for the work of the brain trusts is approximately \$1.5 million annually. IFIT seeks philanthropic support to support to underwrite the work of each brain trust at the \$100,000 level.

The work involves critical outward actions:

1. Establish spaces and processes aimed at confidence building and dialogue promotion
2. Organise and host events – both public and private
3. Create and disseminate policy and proposal documents on a restricted or confidential basis to key actors
4. Disseminate new frameworks on the brain trust's central strategic aim/topic
5. Develop pilot projects to test key ideas
6. Form and cross-fertilise key networks of influence
7. Host targeted outreach meetings in the country and abroad

IFIT's fundraising goal is straightforward: to secure the financial means needed to enable the organisation to achieve mission-level goals over the long-term, multi-year strategies over the midterm, and immediate work plan priorities over the short term.

Robust targeted and unrestricted funding will enable IFIT's ability to deliver on its wide range of activities and functions; most notably its work ushering in at the “zero hour” systemic changes to strengthen social contracts and civil society as states transition away from conflict and towards peace.

For corporations, foundations, and philanthropists, IFIT is the key to engendering meaningful, responsible, and lasting peace and security in volatile regions.

8. Conduct interviews and curate opinion pieces in influential local and international media (TV, radio, print) in order to promote key ideas

These are developed through critical preparatory actions:

1. Actor and issue mapping
2. Scenario planning
3. Preparation of talking points for key meetings
4. Inventory of members' key influence networks
5. Technical briefings by IFIT global experts on topics of high relevance for the brain trust
6. Strategic retreats – sometimes including special external guests
7. Peer learning exchanges with other IFIT brain trusts
8. Research field trips to fill any knowledge gaps

Thematic Work: Funding Priorities and Opportunities

IFIT's three global practice groups support the country brain trusts and play an important thought leadership role in IFIT's research agenda. The total annual budget for the work of the practice groups is approximately \$500,000 annually. IFIT seeks philanthropic support to underwrite each practice group through annual sponsorship at the \$25,000, \$50,000 and \$75,000 levels.

- **The Law and Peace Practice Group:** This 16-member group provides constant high-level advice on the challenges of balancing justice and peace in actual contexts of negotiated transition. Its current research agenda includes on topics such as 1) whether and how to engage organised crime groups in negotiation, and 2) the possible role of transitional justice in preventing and countering violent extremism, and 3) an original initiative to create multilateral treaty to incentivise peace negotiations.
- **The Transition Assistance Practice Group:** This 16-member practice group offers creative and practical ideas to improve the way local beneficiaries in transition countries can shape the environment and rules for the delivery of foreign aid. It will complete work on a catalogue of successful innovations in delivering transition assistance, while significantly deepening its support of brain trusts.

IFIT's ability to facilitate multi-stakeholder negotiations and peaceful transitions has only become more relevant in an increasingly volatile world coping with the fallout caused by the coronavirus.

Unrestricted and budget-offsetting funds for capacity-building are as much an organisational necessity for an enterprise that lists operations across the globe as they are a pre-requisite for maintaining the integrity of IFIT's mission statement.

The strength of IFIT's integrated conflict prevention and transition approach lies in the ability to tailor programs and policy solutions to local realities, which are often at odds with conventional peacebuilding frameworks.

It is also essential that IFIT maintains a high degree of flexibility in order to respond quickly and efficiently to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that characterise the organisation's geographical areas of operation and the new requests it receives. **IFIT's sustainable financial practices, including annual third-party audits, ensure that funds are pragmatically allocated and transparently accounted for.**

- [The Inclusive Narratives Practice Group](#): This practice group focuses on the pioneering issue of building inclusive identities and narratives. Cutting-edge practice briefs will be part of the group's early work, which will otherwise focus on supporting IFIT's country brain trusts.

Global Initiatives: Funding Priorities and Opportunities

IFIT has three extraordinary global initiatives. The total annual budget for the work is approximately \$1,000,000 annually. IFIT seeks philanthropic support to underwrite each initiative through annual sponsorship at the \$50,000 and \$100,000 levels. The global initiatives include:

- The [Peace Treaty Initiative](#) (to create an international law of peace negotiation and atrocity prevention)
- The [Global Initiative on Polarization](#) (a four-year collaboration with Ford Foundation on the intersection of polarization, social justice and conflict) and
- The [Initiative on Apex Court Appointments](#) (to establish the first-ever global and regional principles on the selection and appointment of constitutional and apex court judges).

Community Building: Funding Priorities and Sponsorship Opportunities

IFIT's global team has grown exponentially in the past few years. Today the team comprises more than 200 experts belonging to IFIT's staff, country brain trusts, global practice groups, and strategic governance bodies. Fostering interactions and peer learning across this ever-expanding network is a high priority for the organisation.

Three annual core meetings are held, each with its own strategic focus. Philanthropic support of \$20,000–\$100,000 (subject to size and scope) can help underwrite the following:

- Staff retreat, to set priorities for the year ahead
- Meeting of the Board and Advisory Council, to which IFIT invites a rotating selection of IFIT global and local experts
- A global strategy retreat that combines all IFIT structures in a peer-to-peer learning environment

IFIT's donor partners are invited to the latter two events.

Impact Funds: Priorities and Funding Opportunities

For gifts of any size, IFIT offers funding opportunities through targeted Impact Funds:

National Policymakers and Civil Society Leaders Fund: IFIT seeks to engage leaders to apply key international lessons learned in the general area of peace and reconciliation in national dialogue, negotiation, and transition contexts.

— **Goal: 12 per year.**

Workshops and Trainings Fund: Organised on key concepts and strategic lessons learned in the general area of peace and reconciliation.

— **Goal: 35 per year.**

Participation Fund: IFIT seeks to increase participation and engagement on peace and reconciliation issues by affected populations in fragile and conflict-affected states when national dialogues, negotiations or transitions are underway.

— **Goal: Increase of 175%.**

In-Country Brain Trust Meetings Fund: IFIT seeks to engage local expertise on key peace and reconciliation issues developed through regular meetings of in-country brain trusts.

— **Goal: maintain monthly meetings of seven in-country brain trusts in operation.**

In-country Outreach Meetings and Consultations Fund: Held with key local actors to exchange views, build trust, and deepen engagement.

— **Goal: 80 per year.**

Understanding and Awareness Fund: IFIT seeks to engage the general public and international policymakers so they become aware of and understand key concepts and lessons learned in the area of peace and reconciliation.

— **Goal: 6 events per year.**

Pioneering Research Fund: Support for original research conducted by IFIT on new or emerging issues in peace and reconciliation.

— **Goal: 16 per year.**

A photograph of a man in profile, facing left, standing against a weathered, textured wall. The man has a beard and is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved button-down shirt. The scene is dramatically lit from the left, casting a long, dark shadow of the man onto the wall behind him. The wall is covered in dappled sunlight and shadows from nearby foliage. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

Our
Request for
Your
Consideration

As long as human conflict exists, IFIT will have a substantive role to play. The success of peaceful transitions requires continued presence in volatile regions and countries before, during and after peace and political settlements have run their course. IFIT's innovative operational model can be extended to allow for further collaboration with partner organisations and funders to deepen existing relationships in the pursuit of just and lasting peace after agreements are signed.

IFIT helps usher in negotiation and transition processes that are more inclusive, resourceful, evidence-informed and collaborative. Ensuring IFIT's continued leadership in this field will generate reforms to, and eventually bring about the evolution of, traditional peacebuilding techniques which are often fragmented or fall short of aspirations.

Philanthropic support or annual sponsorship of the organisation's short and long-term growth – expanding its local, regional and global impact – is an investment in advancing peace, justice and security for all.

We hope this case for support offers the starting point for a deeper conversation regarding how we can work together to move current practice away from fragmented interventions and towards more integrated solutions to strengthen peace, democracy, and human rights.

To discuss your partnership with IFIT please contact **Adriana Brassart**, IFIT's External Relations Manager, at abrassart@ifit-transitions.org.

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IFIT has received an Equivalency Determination certificate from [NGO source](#), which confirms that IFIT is equivalent to a U.S. public charity

PHOTOS: MOISES SAMAN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Institute for Integrated Transitions

www.ifit-transitions.org



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

10 YEARS OF PEACEBUILDING INNOVATION