

I-VOTE PROJECT SUMMARY

To bring the message of American electoral democracy more efficiently to a global audience, the Department of State has created “I-VOTE” (International Visitors Observe The Election), a special, two-week project organized within the framework of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). As it has done for many years for thousands of smaller IVLP projects, Meridian International Center is partnering with State to design and implement the I-VOTE project.

To help carry the I-VOTE message, 100 participants — “Election Fellows” — have been chosen by American ambassadors all over the world. The Fellows are emerging leaders, aged 30-50 involved in promoting democracy and demonstrating rising political influence in their countries. Some are Members of Parliament or other elected officials, party leaders, political consultants, or government elections administrators. All are active participants in the political process in their respective countries.

The project has three primary goals for the Fellows:

- to understand the dynamics of the U.S. electoral process;
- to witness the final stages of the 2008 presidential campaign, including participation in election-day activities; and
- to examine the impact of U.S. domestic politics on U.S. foreign policy.

As it unfolds, the I-VOTE project will allow the Election Fellows to experience the U.S. political process in various locations around the country. Discussions with experts in Washington will lay the foundation; in five “swing” states, groups of 20 Fellows will observe preparations in important electoral battlegrounds; as pairs in fifty “election day” communities around the country, they will observe the actual balloting; and finally, in Boston, the entire group will gather to analyze the results with scholars from Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

Throughout the itinerary, the schedule will include traditional seminar-style lectures and panels, interactive sessions, and hands-on experiences with voters, campaign organizers, the media, candidates and election officials — all will allow the Fellows will engage Americans as both political professionals and as typical citizens. The varied program will ensure that the Fellows return home with a solid understanding of the complex and de-centralized process within which, for millions of Americans, ideas are transformed into political action.