

# Successful Launch Events Help Build Momentum for IFC Projects: Lessons from the Central Asia Corporate Governance Project

*A good first impression can give any new relationship a boost—even the relationship between an IFC advisory services project and a country. Based on our own experience with the Central Asia Corporate Governance Project, and on lessons from other similar projects in the region, we believe that the first impression of a project is a gauge for the effectiveness of the project's future performance. And the strength of that first impression depends on how well the introduction is organized. This paper shares some of what we've learned about how to organize a successful launch event—and make a good first impression.*

## BACKGROUND

To promote corporate governance reform in the region, IFC runs projects in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. Our experience with the Central Asia Corporate Governance Project—the newest of these projects, launched in 2006—shows that a well-executed official launch event allows us to achieve the following objectives:

- Announcing the official commencement of the project's activities
- Liaising with potential counterparts and clients
- Raising awareness within the business community
- Promoting media coverage
- Attracting state officials' attention to corporate governance issues

## LESSONS LEARNED

*1) Prepare for the launch event: a "to do" list—with deadlines—is vital.*

Do your best to make the organizational and logistical elements perfect before the event. Prepare promotional materials. Give special attention to

liaising with the mass media. Arrange face-to-face meetings with potential clients and counterparts of your project.

Start preparing for the launch event at least two months in advance (see Table 1). It takes the efforts of the whole team, but one person should be responsible for coordination and monitoring.

Organize individual meetings to introduce your project to potential clients and counterparts. Experience shows that face-to-face meetings work most effectively. Prepare all marketing materials that are to be presented at the launch event, and develop



To encourage attendance at the opening press conference, the project staff met individually with journalists ahead of time.

**TABLE 1: SAMPLE LAUNCH RECEPTION “TO DO” LIST**

<i>Actions (To complete before the event)</i>	<b>Timeframe</b>
1) Develop a database of potential clients of the project.	2 months
2) Choose a date and style for the project launch.	2 months
3) Work on promotional materials: the project’s information brochure, banner, flags, Web site, and other marketing materials.	2 months
4) Prepare an invitation card and envelopes in the IFC corporate style.	3 weeks
5) Identify and select speakers.	3 weeks
6) Organize individual meetings with companies and media.	1 month

the project’s Web site, to make the information on your project available to all of the interested parties.

As a result of our preparations, 80 percent of the representatives of companies and 72 percent of the media professionals whom the project staff had met with individually attended the launch.

*2) Have a well-planned launch reception to announce: “An IFC advisory services project has come to your country!” and demonstrate the professionalism of IFC staff.*

It is important for the launch reception to demonstrate the professionalism of IFC staff. But, there is no “one size fits all” for how to do that. One IFC project used the premises of the embassy of the donor organization for its project launch and invited the ambassador, who had a warm 40-minute conversation with the mass media. Journalists liked the open atmosphere and wrote many positive articles. Two other projects used five-star hotels. Another project organized a photo contest beforehand, and on the launch day announced the winners. The style of the project launch can be affected by the venues that are available in the city.

Our project decided that brief speeches during a cocktail reception format would work best. The launch reception took place at the Intercontinental

Ankara Hotel in Almaty, Kazakhstan. More than 127 representatives from joint-stock companies, educational institutions, and the government participated, including Senator Utebaev, chairman of the Committee on Budget, Finance, and Economy of the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Make every team member a promoter. At our launch event, the entire team staff attended and were professionally dressed. Everyone had studied the goals and future activities of the project, to be able to speak knowledgeably and enthusiastically about it and to project a professional image. Our team also understood that, even though it was an enjoyable



The press conference took place immediately before the official launch event.

**TABLE 2: SAMPLE PRESS CONFERENCE “TO DO” LIST**

<i>Actions (To complete before the event)</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1) Develop a list of media companies.	2 months
2) Organize individual meetings with journalists.	1 month
3) Write a press release.	3 weeks
4) Circulate the press release, brochure, and marketing materials.	The day of the press conference

party, our reason for being there was professional and we were all to make an effort to mingle among the guests, introducing ourselves and the project to as many people as possible.

*3) Hold a press conference to inform the media—and to establish a good working relationship with them.*

Build liaisons with the mass media. A good supply of information about the project is vital for a positive IFC image. Our project held a press conference just outside the room where the launch reception was about to take place. Some 29 representatives of 15

leading mass media organizations in Kazakhstan participated. In all, 16 media outlets broadcast this event in Kazakhstan, in the region, in the United States, and even in Spain!

The press conference unexpectedly started late, and we were concerned that guests arriving for the reception had to walk by the press conference. But, the situation turned to our advantage: many reception attendees were excited to watch a press conference with so many media people attending, which served to increase their excitement about our project.

Give journalists as much information as you can. Besides a press release with names and titles of the speakers, provide an information brochure and articles about your project, as well as any other useful information about your business line (see Table 2).

*4) Develop promotional materials that are attractive and professional.*

Promotional materials—including, for example, an information brochure, file folders, and a Web site—create an image of IFC. So, it is important to be professional when presenting information about the project, whether in person or via promotional materials.



As a result of early promotion, the project's first seminar was well attended.

Recommendation: as you develop the brochure about your project:

- Personalize the introduction and perhaps include a photo of your project manager
- Detail the project activities
- Provide information about IFC and other donor organizations
- Include statistics from IFC experience, to confirm accomplishments

To coincide with the project's launch, the Central Asia Corporate Governance Project published the first issue of a 20-page quarterly, *Bulletin of Corporate Governance*, which included an interview with Karl Bach, the project manager, along with staff introductions and updates on the project's activities. It also included interviews with Gorton de Mond, IFC regional representative, and project partners, such as the head of the Association of Financiers of Kazakhstan. In addition, the bulletin provided information about IFC and a brief history of its corporate governance program. The project has since received positive feedback and continued subscriptions.

Also, the project's Web site ([www.ifc.org/cacgp](http://www.ifc.org/cacgp)) became active almost simultaneously with the launch event. Now, all interested parties may use it to browse news and information related to corporate governance. To be effective, a Web site needs to be up and running by, or soon after, the launch event, since project materials distributed at the launch event refer to the Web site.

## EXAMPLE OF IFC STATISTICS

As of December 2005, more than 7,231 companies in the region received consultations on corporate governance from IFC and attracted investments of more than \$486 million, including \$41 million from IFC.

*5) Be proactive after the launch event: don't give your potential clients and counterparts a chance to forget what they have learned about the IFC project.*

Two weeks after the launch event, the Central Asia Corporate Governance Project conducted the first seminar, "Introduction to Corporate Governance: Board of Directors." For the sake of efficiency, as well as to create momentum and excitement about the project's activities, we told potential clients about this seminar at the same time we invited them to the launch party. Apparently it worked: 46 representatives from 29 companies showed up!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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