

Interview: Robert Pantzer, IDB

«The IDB is looking for specialists»

Robert Pantzer has been a staff member at the IDB since 2004. He currently works as Sector Specialist at the Institutional Capacity and Finance Department (ICF) in Bogotá, Colombia, and is responsible for the IDB portfolio and activities related to anti-corruption, public reform, modernization of the state and citizen security. Prior to joining the IDB, he worked, among others, for the State Secretariat of Economic Affairs (SECO), the Inter-American Investment Corporation and UNDP. From 1999 to 2002, Robert Pantzer was the IDB Adviser to the Executive Director for Belgium, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. He studied Macroeconomics and International Trade at the University of Fribourg.

***cnfo:** You have worked in a range of different organisations and institutions, including SECO, the Inter-American Investment Corporation and UNDP. What motivated you to switch to the IDB?*

Robert Pantzer: I was originally mandated by SECO to spend three years at the board of the IDB. From the beginning I liked the multilateral approach of this regional development bank. Being connected to different cultures, especially the Latino culture was very interesting. So after having spent three years at the board I looked for an opportunity to stay with the IDB. According to policy rules, members of the board however have to stay out of the IDB

for at least one year before becoming staff members. With the support of SECO, I had two transitional positions, one with the Swiss embassy in Washington and one with the Swiss Mission to the UN, before I was free to apply for a position at the IDB.

What was essential for your success in getting the job as Sector Specialist in the Institutional Capacity and Finance Department in Bogotá, Colombia?

I believe it was a combination of different things. Firstly, I had strong support from the Swiss government. As Switzerland is under-represented in the IDB, the Swiss government really pushed for me to become a staff member during the discussions with the high administration. Secondly, the fact that I was at the IDB board from the beginning surely helped. Thirdly, I felt very connected to the Latin American culture, and speaking Spanish and Portuguese, certainly helped me to find my way through the institution.

All of this made it a little easier to re-enter the IDB once a position was open. That being said, I had to pass through interview panels like everyone else. Although it was not at all easy, I believe that this combination allowed me to finally become a member of the IDB and being posted in different country offices.



Robert Pantzer

Are there issues about working at the IDB that you would not have expected?

Working as a staff member is very different from working at the board of the IDB. When you are at the board, one can see just one side of the Bank activities and in the rather short period of time (three years) it is a challenge to understand the way in how this institution is functioning. When switching from the 11th floor (the floor of directors) to another floor, the situation becomes very different. You then really get to see the pros and cons of working for an institution like the IDB. On one hand it is very nice and charming to work for an institution, which is very Latino in the good sense. It can however also be very Latino in the bad sense, meaning that it is sometimes chaotic and badly organised. Everything is of course also very much focused on Latin America. If you have a Eu-

ropean passport, it is often not that easy to get your voice heard since the Bank, representing more than 50% of the Bank's capital is in the hands of the region.

Which tips would you give to Swiss professionals that aspire to a position with the IDB?

You have to be an expert in the field you are applying for. Whether you are a specialist on governance, on procurement, on health or on education, you need to have a sharp and specialised profile. Generalists are less and less required. Although I am a generalist too (and I am learning new things every day) the IDB mainly looks for good technicians. So you have to have a sharp profile and a sharp CV, focused on things you studied or have worked on. Furthermore you have to accept and embrace the Latin culture and working environment. Finally, it is of course a must to speak Spanish fluently.

Do you feel that your work has a concrete impact on the everyday lives of people?

I think it is very rewarding to work with a multilateral institution when coming from a different continent with a different culture. I believe that work experience from Switzerland and from SECO has an added value and brings something new and refreshing to the IDB and to our daily work in the countries.

«I do really sense that I mark a difference.»

Being posted in a field office probably allows you to feel the everyday impact of your work more directly than at headquarters. It allows you to engage in direct dialogue with the government and to follow up on the changes taking place.

Although there are tiring bureaucracy issues occur at times, there is much operational work on a daily level. I have a portfolio of loans, and technical co-operations dealing with politically very sensitive issues such as anti-corruption, citizen security, and in a broader sense, reform of the state (which means more efficiency but also cutting jobs). These issues are going through a very important but difficult moment in Colombia. Maybe aside of my know-how and experience, being Swiss and neutral in this position is certainly helpful. All that said, yes, I do really sense that I mark a difference.

