

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

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The National Spiritual Assembly of  
the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

As the first year of the Nine Year Plan draws to a close, the Universal House of Justice wishes to share with you its appreciation for the progress of your community and has asked us to convey the following points to assist you in your reflections on the path ahead.

The current Plan provides a moment of historic transition for the development of the administrative systems in your country. More than a half century ago, you consolidated the basis for the national administration by establishing your National Center with offices for the National Assembly and its vital National Committees. Over many years, programs were developed at the national level and disseminated to the friends to promote progress in areas such as teaching, Assembly development, pioneering, Bahá'í schools, Fund education, and the spiritual education of children. Although often supported by a network of representatives and regional agencies, these programs were centralized in character, directed by committees and departments at the National Center, and provided much needed direction for the expansion and consolidation efforts of the friends across the country. In recent decades, the systematization and decentralization of the work of the Faith has brought with it new institutional arrangements, foremost among these thirteen Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Training Institutes, and you have progressively been involved in enhancing the capacity of these entities to foster aspects of the work such as community building, the development of human resources, and the development of administrative systems. The current series of Plans will place increasing demands on this decentralized system. It is therefore timely for you, in close collaboration with the Counsellors, to reflect further upon it. In light of the growing capacity closer to the grassroots, this does not merely mean adding regional elements to the current national system but entails a reorganization no less significant than that which created the system surrounding the National Center so many decades ago. Such a far-reaching change, wisely implemented, will position you for the many challenges anticipated in the decades ahead.

Efforts are already under way for the further development of the Regional Councils and the strengthening of their administrative systems. As the conditions of the Faith differ across the many regions, naturally the capacities and responsibilities of the Councils will also differ, and much experience can be gathered from those at the front ranks of the learning process. Practical considerations, such as the establishment of a suitable office, the use of properties, and the implementation of sound financial practices, will require attention. But increasingly, in addition to the expanding demands of community building, new responsibilities for social action, involvement in the discourses of society, and work with Local Spiritual Assemblies will emerge that require strengthening of the capacity of the Councils to facilitate a process of learning in their regions, as well as ongoing guidance and support from you and the Counsellors.

Of course, an essential feature of decentralization is the continuing evolution of training institutes. It is the institute process which, as it unfolds and intensifies, fosters profound advances at the level of culture within a community enabling it to counteract and serve as a bulwark against the forces of disintegration ravaging society. The resulting dynamic gives rise in the life of populations to a devotional character that fosters love and unites people as one family, to a longing to share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and learn to apply them more effectively, to a commitment to the education of successive cohorts of young people, and to a determination to redress injustice in material and social conditions. Up to this point, the network of regional training institutes in your country, operating at various levels of complexity, have rightly concentrated on learning to develop capacity to multiply core activities, and this will naturally continue as an important aspect of the work into the future. At this time, another stage in the development of your institutes beckons. If the desired transformative process is to take root in neighborhoods and clusters across your nation, then institutional capacity must correspondingly increase, and the training institute must emerge as a greatly enhanced educational organization capable of contributing to the progress of an entire region. The 30 December 2021 message concerning the Nine Year Plan emphasizes the many challenges ahead to create "an educational system in a state of constant refinement". This includes the ability to raise in community after community a constant flow of new and capable individuals who will continually widen the reach of the community-building activities, as well as to systematize the delivery of the educational content. The outcome sought should be a system that takes cohorts of young people through an educational experience, year after year, beginning at age five and continuing right through to adulthood. The emergence of training institutes as organizations capable of fostering such an advance will require sufficient funds and a host of collaborators, including a few at the heart of the effort who, central to the institute's capacity to grow and learn, will need to dedicate themselves to full-time service for many years. For just as developments at your National Center and permanent schools could only occur over many decades by the engagement of dedicated workers, similarly, ensuring that training institutes are able to offer spiritual education in a manner sufficient to meet growing demands will require the involvement of some full-time, thoughtful, and far-sighted individuals, particularly at the regional level, who are capable of guiding the sound evolution of an educational organization over an extended period of time.

Training institutes will need to pay particular attention to the pivotal role of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. In addition to engaging ever-larger numbers of new entrants into the Faith's educational endeavors, the junior youth program will increasingly have to accommodate those completing children's classes, as well as ensure that those who successfully complete the study of its content enter the sequence of courses and advance on the path of development and service. Thought, then, needs to be given to how the capacity for learning about the development of the program continues to unfold in the various regions. For more than a decade, learning sites have played a pivotal role in nurturing systematic learning about the establishment of the junior youth program, the delivery of its content, and the systematic multiplication in the number of groups. Institutes have, of course, benefited greatly from the knowledge and experience the sites have generated. Beyond capacity to foster the effective implementation of the program, the most advanced institutes have also been growing in their ability to follow a systematic process of learning and to disseminate the accruing knowledge. As institutes in some regions attain to a new stage in the development of their institutional capacity and become able to establish and follow the development of the junior youth program in all its complexity in cluster after cluster, they will initially draw upon, and eventually absorb, the functions currently offered by resource persons and learning sites. This will have implications for the structures of such institutes and for their staffing needs.

As the institute is strengthened and the work in the clusters is intensified, attention will need to be directed toward learning about the emergence of social action in the context of the community-building process. Of course, many of the friends in your country have initiated activities for social and economic development at various levels of complexity in the past, and such approaches will continue into the future. What has become evident from experience worldwide is that as the work of community building advances in a cluster, participants are very naturally drawn to apply their newly cultivated capabilities to address the material and social challenges within their communities. An increase in the consciousness of cluster agencies and local participants of the way in which the sequence of courses cultivates capacity for social action, beginning from Book 1—but gradually more so through Books 3, 5, 10, and others long before engagement with Book 13—will ensure that these first stirrings are encouraged and supported so that they will give rise to individual and community-based initiatives as programs of growth progress in size and intensity. Attention to the emergence of these new activities will help ensure coherence among the efforts for community building and social action as well as involvement in discourses in neighborhoods and clusters. Over time, experience about the approaches that prove to be most effective can be shared with other parts of the country. As noted in the 30 December message, many of the initial efforts for social action emerging around the world involve expanding educational opportunities; such initiatives can serve as the starting point for learning how the spiritual education offered by the training institute can be complemented and reinforced by academic and other educational opportunities within diverse populations.

As time goes by, adequate facilities will, more and more, be a vital requirement for extending the reach of the training institute. You have no doubt already learned a good deal about the need for facilities and about effective ways to utilize them to support the institute process, whether through the use of existing local structures or those you have recently obtained for use in advanced clusters. You may also wish to consider how the permanent schools have served over the years to complement and support the work of the institute and whether it would be advantageous to learn about how these long-standing facilities might increasingly be placed at the disposal of the relevant regional institutes.

The House of Justice looks forward to receiving reports of the progress of your community as the work of the Nine Year Plan unfolds. Be assured of its prayers at the Sacred Threshold that the devoted labors of all the friends across your fertile land may yield a rich and abundant harvest in the years ahead.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

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