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Dr. Helf has been studying and working in the USSR and NIS for twenty years. After receiving his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in political science in 1994 he taught comparative politics and Russia/CIS politics at the University of Notre Dame and Cornell University.

From 1997-2000 he was Central Asia regional director for IREX, starting up a strong portfolio of programs in five countries that continue to this day. From 2000-2002 he was the Director of Grant Programs at the Eurasia Foundation in Washington, DC where he was responsible for overall grants management and grant-making programmatic policies, including oversight of the individual country strategies of the Foundation's regional offices.

Since 2003 he has been an instrumental resource in the USAID-funded Civil Society Support Initiative in Central Asia, working with individual country programs to develop advocacy strategies in very different environments, develop the capacity of intermediary service organizations, grants management and grant craft, community-driven development and NGO organizational development.