Executive Summary: Assessment of IWHC grants and advocacy work  
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In the context of an independent investigation into allegations of racism, discrimination and bullying at IWHC, the board of IWHC commissioned a review of the organization’s grantmaking and advocacy practices to assess alignment with core values articulated by IWHC. Specifically, the board hired a consultant to explore the following questions:

1. What IWHC’s stated values are in respect of grant-making and advocacy;
2. What processes and practices are in place in a formal sense that aim to support these values;
3. Whether grantees are experiencing the grant making process as one that is efficient, respectful and trust-based;
4. Whether staff feel they have the skills and knowledge to provide grantees support and guidance that is efficient, respectful and trust-based;
5. Whether Advocacy partners are experiencing the advocacy processes and actions of IWHC as respectful and trust-based;
6. Whether staff who are in advocacy-roles and/or situations feel equipped to participate in joint actions in a respectful and trust-based manner - in other words do they feel as though partners trust and respect them?

The methodology consisted of a review of documents describing principles, values and processes related to grantmaking and advocacy followed by interviews with staff, grantee and advocacy partners. IWHC currently has 40 grantees. From these, 16 were selected in consultation with staff and the board special committee and 13 organizations agreed to be interviewed. The list of advocacy partners was significantly longer as IWHC participates in various advocacy spaces, coalitions and partnerships. 15 advocacy partner organizations were selected again in consultation with the staff and special committee of the board. Of these, 12 agreed to be interviewed, including four who were also grantees and therefore interviewed for both.

Key findings

Grantees
The grantee organizations have had an overwhelmingly positive experience with their program officers, which for them represent the organization. Grantees spoke of their program officers as partners, contrasting them positively with other funders that they experienced as more top down. They described their program officers as respectful, trusting, open, thoughtful, work hard to understand country and organization context and needs, open to conversation, open to feedback, transparently discuss changes to funding, share their own challenges, able to discuss power dynamics related to grantmaking, open to learning, desire to live up to the values, mission and vision. Grantees described the grantmaking process as easy, relaxed, flexible, conversation based, and not burdensome (longer term grantees saw the process become less burdensome over the years). Several described how IWHC helped them grow over time, through ongoing conversations about what the organization needed e.g. capacity building/strengthening including through AIP and connecting them to other funders. Of particular note for grantees was IWHC’s longstanding support to several organizations, with at least four having been funded for over 10 years, particularly for work that was hard to get funding for like legalizing abortion, or in regions that were deemed difficult or too sensitive by other funders.

Advocacy partners
Overall, advocacy partners described their experiences as positive. Global advocacy staff is seen as extremely knowledgeable, excellent, thorough with the documents produced, up to date intel from and about member states and negotiations. IWHC is a recognized leader in advocacy on SRHR. They stand out as consistently advocating from a feminist and human rights perspective, which is not a
given for other international advocacy organizations in sexual and reproductive health, “IWHC has been a very important player in the movement.” IWHC is deeply appreciated for their trainings and capacity building on UN advocacy. AIP was felt to not be as inclusive and participatory as it should be, with a staff that is not diverse, and agendas set and meetings facilitated by only IWHC staff. Some noted that IWHC is working to change this. IWHC could sometimes be felt to push their own agenda limited to specific issues like abortion, though several also acknowledged the challenge of balancing advocacy priorities. There were also concerns about a culture of working excessively hard/long hours in the UN during negotiations, without attention to the impact on the physical and mental health of the partners. There are real concerns about IWHC engaging in regional spaces using the same model as for global advocacy. Concerns were expressed about having white women from the US seeming to set the agenda risking undermining organizations from the region who could be seen as advocating an externally determined agenda. Several remarked on the conflict between how IWHC advocates for shifting of power while internally struggling with power dynamics.

Grantee and advocacy partners both called for more racial and class diversity in the leadership to mitigate against internalized biases that may have contributed to the current situation. There are concerns that IWHC is now in a weaker position due to the allegations.

**Staff**

*Grantmaking:* Staff expressed mixed experiences overall. Some more positive than others, depending more on personality and ability to work in a high-pressure environment. All described their peers as supportive, especially of new staff and helping them understand their work. The work environment was described as extremely hierarchical, coupled with expectations of excellence that stifle staff contributions and opportunities for growth. Staff feels like they propose good ideas that are not taken up by management. Internal learning is not felt to be valued, including as it relates to what successes IWHC has (relying on a few of the same stories repeatedly rather than developing robust, diverse ways of assessing their impact). IWHC doesn’t foster a culture of learning from others doing similar work. IWHC is not tapped into broader resource mobilization for movement building, not part of a broader sisterhood of funders, and therefore not on the pulse of innovation. Burden of grantmaking process internally -- lots of documents, asking for same information even for longstanding grantees so what does trust mean, inefficient systems of compiling information. Staff questioned how closely aligned the list of current grantees is with its new strategy and emphasis on intersectionality. That they need to revisit the balance between the “big, sexy” groups and the “scrappy new ones.”

*Advocacy:* The advocacy team has intentionally sought to work in a collaborative and respective way, because IWHC had little trust from other advocacy organizations. Staff doing US government advocacy described their approach as trying to be good allies, balancing “staying in their lane” issues wise with “showing up for others” working on different issues like racial, economic and environmental justice. They felt IWHC has to figure out how to participate in coalitions in which they don’t play a substantive role (“IWHC is good at leading, but not at being a supportive actor”). Staff feel they could do better in ensuring grantees truly inform the advocacy and not just be supporting evidence to what’s already been decided. They feel that the work of the past few years to rebuild trust in the broader advocacy community has enabled them to be a good partner. They expressed awareness about the need to equalize decision making and open up leadership in global advocacy. Regarding the flagship Advocacy in Practice (AIP) trainings that precede UN meetings, they feel that they have done a lot of learning in the past few years and are committed to making them more participatory and inclusive. They are aware that they need to seriously re-evaluate doing regional advocacy and whether they should only support grantees and partners to do so.
There is a deep desire among non-management staff to align values with practice. There is also serious concern about how much the leadership prioritizes the board and funders with the feeling that some activities grantees are asked to do related to this are tokenistic and performative.

Recommendations

**Grantmaking**

*Strengthening collaborations and partnerships*
- Streamline internal operational processes related to grantmaking to reduce workload so staff can do more external facing work with grantees and internal reflection.
- Do more sharing and learning with like-minded funders in feminist and movement building spaces.

**Advocacy**

*Re-examining role in advocacy spaces*
- IWHC should consider creating more room for organizations from the Global South to take up leadership in global UN advocacy efforts.
- Adapt AIP to be less technocratic/prioritizing of those with technical skills, and be more political and movement building, inclusive and collaborative.
- Develop advocacy priorities more collaboratively with global South partners. Open advocacy spaces to new actors (be less cliquish).
- Reflect seriously on continued engagement in regional spaces.

**Internal culture and practices**

*Ensuring internal culture and practices align with external ones*
- Review the capacities, expertise and knowledge that are valued by leadership so they contribute to a supportive and inclusive environment and do not limit growth and advancement for staff of color.
- Develop values for internal work for better alignment with external values then provide adequate support to ensure practices align with the values by actively operationalizing them and promoting a culture of learning.
- Develop stronger alignment and learning across teams.
- IWHC should consider a more horizontal structure that supports its staff to thrive.

**Embracing a culture of learning**
- IWHC should actively promote a supportive culture of learning internally so staff can safely address the questions and challenges they face.
- IWHC should actively engage with and learn from other feminist and movement building funders.

**Rebalancing priorities**
- IWHC should expand how it defines its success and what it can claim in order to address tensions/frictions with collaborating partners.
- Leadership needs to better balance efforts expended on fundraising and donors and staff needs.

**Leadership and governance**

*Ensuring robust oversight and accountability of leadership and the organization*
- Reassess how robust the current oversight and accountability mechanisms are. Risk of strong nexus between leadership and board creating weaker accountability and inability to mitigate situations like the current one.
- Board should have effective relationships with all staff and consider having terms.
• Assess whether board and staff are truly aligned on the vision that IWHC projects externally in its work.
• Establish a feedback mechanism for grantees and advocacy partners.
• In the spirit of transparency, IWHC should be willing to open itself up to sharing information about themselves that they ask of grantees during due diligence, including board and staff composition, inclusion and intersectionality issues.

Having a leadership and governance that reflects their values, principles and work
• Establish a diverse and representative leadership and board that better reflects IWHC’s work and regions of engagement.

Additional considerations
Grantee and advocacy partner reactions to and reflections about the current situation
• Pleased that concerns have come to light with hopes that they will be taken seriously. Several grantees expressed feeling heartbroken that staff working so hard for them were experiencing such challenges within the organization.
• Noted that what is happening at IWHC has an impact on the broader field, making it all the more important for the organization to address the concerns seriously.
• There is a lot of concern for the current staff that are doing their regular jobs and crisis management simultaneously. They urge the board to ensure that they are being adequately supported and are explicitly shown appreciation for their efforts.