

**ISSUES  
AFFECTING WOMEN  
PROGRAM –  
MEXICO**

**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**



**20  
22**

**OAK FOUNDATION**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) has administered Oak Foundation's Issues Affecting Women Program (IAWP) in Mexico from April 2016 to June 2022<sup>1</sup>. This evaluation, conducted by an independent consultant team, documents the IAWP's results achieved during the 2016-2022 period. On the one hand, the evaluation identifies examples of how the IAWP nurtured and sustained an ecosystem of grantee organizations that advance women's rights in Mexico and, on the other, documents IAWP grantees' achievements and how these changes are contributing to improve the lives of women and girls. Finally, it identifies good practices within program implementation and offers recommendations.

## The IAWP in Mexico

The IAWP in Mexico focuses on two of the IAWP's thematic pillars: domestic violence and trafficking and exploitation, in addition to contributing to movement building. Grantee organizations conduct a wide range of activities from policy advocacy and litigation to providing direct services to women and girls. Eight grantee partners run safe spaces in four different regions; these include shelters and support centers, providing comprehensive, rights-based services to women and their children.

During the period between 2016 and 2022, the IAWP grew and adapted to changes in Mexico's political and socioeconomic environment. HIP's Gender Program staff conducted periodic context analysis and mapping of potential new grantee organizations and ensured that the IAWP continued to be responsive to organizations' needs. Total investment of the IAWP reached \$10 million USD, with grantmaking representing 87% of Oak Foundation's total investment in Mexico.

## Grantmaking

*The IAWP grantmaking has contributed to building grantee organizations' resilience and to advancing their work*

Long-term support was a game changer for organizations whose funding sources were mostly one-year, project-based grants. For several grantees, the IAWP multi-year core grants eliminated the cash flow problems and allowed them to adequately resource core staff's salaries bringing the organization much needed institutional stability.

<sup>1</sup> The consultant team conducted all interviews, research, and documentation for this evaluation between January and June 2022.

## Key findings

- IAWP's funds were essential to pay for **organizations' core staff** salaries which other -restricted- sources did not pay for
- IAWP's **core, long-term and flexible support** increased organizations' capacity for medium-term planning as it provided **significant financial certainty**
- Core, multi-year support provided a **source of leverage** and contributed to organizational resilience in a constantly shifting funding landscape
- Creating paid positions **helped in clarifying roles** and **improving staff's focus** on their primary duties
- Core support enabled organizations to **provide social security benefits** for staff
- **Project-specific grants** contributed to some organizations' **adoption of a gender lens** to their human rights work
- **Emergency grants** helped address immediate safety concerns and to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic

## Recommendations

- Continue flexible support and increase grant amounts
- Create fund for strategic litigation for emblematic cases of violence against women and girls
- Continue the strategic expansion of the IAWP: increase support to key actors working outside of Mexico City
- Make intersectional work more explicit
- Ensure that grantees new to the IAWP know about the emergency grants fund and its criteria

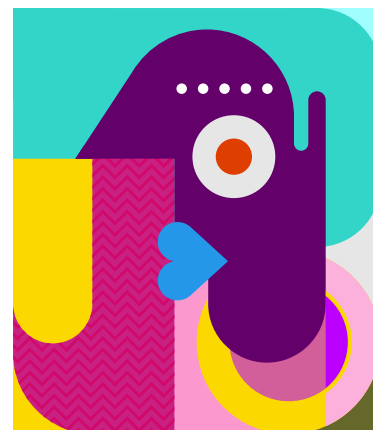
## Capacity building

### *The IAWP is recognized for its sustained capacity building support for grantees*

The IAWP's capacity building goal is to continually strengthen the collective power of Mexico's movements that advance women's rights and oppose violence against women and girls. By focusing on collective power and movements, the IAWP recognizes that enhancing individual organizations' capacity to effectively conduct their work is not only an end in itself but also a relevant path to increase the women's rights movement's capacity to effect change in behaviors, norms and policies.

During the 2016-2022 period, the IAWP's capacity building programming increased substantially and evolved from a predominantly donor-driven approach to a grantee-driven framework. By putting grantees in the driver's seat, HIP ensured that the capacity building programming successfully responded to grantees' needs.

In 52% of responses, grantees reported that they were able to diversify their sources of funds. The IAWP's multi-year, core funding was fundamental in funding diversification, but interview results revealed that three additional factors were equally important for attracting new funding: (1) being recipients of Oak Foundation's support provided strong credibility to their work, (2) receiving information about other funding sources and, in some cases, HIP's introductions to donors, and (3) technical assistance on formalizing institutional policies and improving administrative and financial protocols.



## Key findings

- **Grantee feedback** – including through baseline and midline surveys – was critical for the IAWP to effectively match **grantees’ capacity building needs**
- Capacity building interventions helped **grantee organizations diversify funding sources**
- Some grantee organizations were able to find **new funding sources during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- Grantees effectively adopted **Child Safeguarding Policies** and the policy development process prompted **teams’ additional reflections on ethics in the workplace**
- An ample range of tools are helping organizations **adapt to the complex security situation**
- A more robust **selfcare culture** is improving teams’ resilience and wellbeing in different organizations, a critical component of sustainability
- Grantees benefited from a wide range of **technical and flexible support in leadership development; and leadership transitions represent an area for deeper involvement**

## Recommendations

- Help organizations strengthen compliance with changing legislation and regulations
- Promoting greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities in women’s rights organizations work ethic and programs
- Continue the tailored-approach and in-person capacity building activities
- Encourage grantees to use IAWP grant funds to budget for capacity building needs
- Create a process to monitor grantee implementation of institutional policies
- Double down on supporting grantees in updating physical and digital security
- Expand leadership development programming and continue grantee support in leadership transitions

## Networking

### *IAWP networking opportunities enabled peer-to-peer learning, which in turn helped grantees adopt important organizational policies*

The majority of interviewees considered the opportunities for networking offered by HIP highly valuable: over half of respondents value the opportunity to exchange information and learn in groups (16 out of 25 respondents), to learn what others are doing (14 out of 25), and to share good practices (10 out of 25). In addition to allowing grantees to learn directly from others, networking opportunities are fulfilling providing a space to find commonalities: 18 out of 25 interviewees reported feeling a sense of belonging to the IAWP learning community.

Collective learning activities have been integral to boost the cohort’s understanding of common-interest issues such as the importance of selfcare and the intricacies of providing comprehensive employee benefits. Peer-to-peer learning has paved the way for adoption of key organizational policies in part because it has allowed organizations to learn first-hand what others have tried and succeeded in doing, and how they managed to overcome any challenges. Moreover, by giving them an opportunity to reflect collectively about issues relevant to their work, the IAWP has elevated their ability to understand changing contexts and identify innovative approaches to their work.

## Key findings

- IAWP networking opportunities enabled peer-to-peer learning, which in turn helped grantees adopt important organizational policies
- The IAWP convenings contributed to foster various instances of collaboration between grantees
- Joint advocacy: a potential area for greater grantee collaboration
- Support for existing issue-based networks contributed to stronger collective advocacy
- A variety of perspectives on sex work and inclusion of trans communities coexist in the IAWP cohort, at times these differences become a source of tensions

## Recommendations

- Clarify the IAWP's and HIP's position regarding sex work and trans communities
- Focus on creating grantee spaces for developing trust and relationship building
- Help grantees explore opportunities for collaboration, including joint advocacy
- Explore opportunities to support existing networks

## Field building

HIP has made important contributions to raise visibility of the IAWP's work and their priority issues with different stakeholders. It has also strived for making information more easily accessible to the broader women's rights movement. During the 2016-2022 period, the IAWP produced and made available to organizations several reports and videos on human trafficking, violence against women, and migration. Organizations shared their views on topics in which research and better data are needed, for example, research on the increase in violence and continued rise in femicides without the commonly accepted division between violence in the home and violence by criminal actors.

## Key findings

- HIP contributed to generating relevant information on issues affecting women.
- Organizations identified research gaps, and aspects where better data is needed.

## Recommendations

- Consider supporting research initiatives with input and participation of grantees
- Explore ways to improve data on violence against women by identifying 'proxy indicators'

## Donor engagement

Efforts to increase donors' understanding of and engagement in IAWP's thematic priorities included HIP's participation in conferences on diverse topics, the reports on human trafficking mentioned above, as well as communication campaigns on different themes. During the pandemic groups of donors engaged in online conversations on issues of common concern including defending civic space, and social movements and their current priorities.

### Key findings

- HIP fostered cross-sector conversations, and promoted increased understanding of IAWP themes
- Highlighting the intersectional nature of the IAWP's work may yield areas for greater cross-sector dialogue and donor engagement
- Labor rights, climate, and forced disappearances emerged as issue areas where the IAWP can foster inclusive gender approaches
- Additional issue areas for possible cross-sector conversations and greater donor engagement include:
  - Civic participation
  - People in mobility (migration and displacement)
  - Children's rights and protecting children's wellbeing

### Recommendations

- Explore new partnerships with stakeholders
- Continue supporting areas of work that are strategic to the IAWP
- Define realistic targets for the IAWP to enable greater donors engagement in women's issues



This section presents a series of policy outcomes that represent significant wins for the women's rights movement in Mexico, and even though some of them fall clearly under one or more IAWP's priority issues, others represent important steps in the broader policy framework that resulted in improved conditions for women and girls to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. Most policy highlights correspond to the period between 2016 and 2022, but the section also draws from earlier policy and legal achievements, particularly those that laid the groundwork for more recent advances, for example Mexico's Law on Violence and its Law on Human Trafficking.

The IAWP's support has enabled some of these policy outcomes because of its contributions to women's rights organizations advocacy, case documentation and increased visibility, and have made comprehensive, rights-based services available for women and girls in situations of violence. Thanks to programmatic use of funds, organizations have continued supporting women victims of violence or exploitation, their work in providing safe spaces, as well as their advocacy work proposing policy changes to help prevent or better respond to the different forms of violence against women even in an adverse environment and during a global pandemic. Not every policy outcome can be considered a victory but rather represent examples of pushing against setbacks, "holding the line", and successful safeguarding of existing protections and gender-focused services. The evaluation documented examples of organizations' achievements not only on the IAWP's thematic pillars but in advancing women's rights more broadly, such as Mexico's Supreme Court's 2021 landmark ruling decriminalizing abortion and a gradual yet visible shifting in norms on accepting gender-based violence.

### **IAWP grantees' achievements in addressing various forms of violence against women and girls - Selected Examples**

#### **Domestic violence**

- Changes in agency procedures eliminate barriers to health services for women survivors of sexual violence.
- Legal improvements to facilitate court protection orders.
- Protecting safe spaces for women victims of violence against sweeping federal budget cuts.
- Adoption of Municipal Police Protocol to assist women who are victims of gender violence in Ciudad Juárez.

#### **Trafficking and exploitation**

- Domestic workers' full labor rights are recognized.
- Independent unions gain strength as a result of labor legislation reform.
- Tlaxcala creates a State program to address trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation.

## Other forms of violence

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- Digital violence is now a punishable crime.
- Obstetric violence is recognized as a distinct form of violence perpetrated by health personnel during pregnancy, labor or post-partum.
- The Ministry of Health incorporated explicit actions to address sexual health-related violence in a comprehensive manner in its Integral Program on Violence as of 2019.
- Mexico's Supreme Court banned immigration checks on buses and highways because it found the practice racist and in violation of Mexico's Constitution.
- Civil society advocacy stopped discrimination against migrant women in public health services.





## Conclusions

Throughout the evaluation, grantees offered reflections and suggestions on how to strengthen or continue to expand the IAWP. That feedback was included throughout the report and, more specifically, as a series of recommendations after each of the report's sections. Within that feedback, some overwhelmingly positive aspects emerged. First, the importance of multianual and medium-term support stood out, and the fact that grantees were in a position to undertake institutional strengthening processes mainly because grant terms were generally three-year grants with the possibility of renewing. Second, the fact that the IAWP cuts across traditional thematic silos was repeatedly brought to the fore as a strategic advantage that ripples throughout the work of grantees. The IAWP is well positioned to deepen support to issues that intersect with violence against women and girls, like workers' rights, protection of human rights defenders, and sexual and reproductive rights, in addition to further supporting intersectionality work on population groups like people in mobility (commonly known as migrants' rights, including climate-displaced persons, asylum seekers, and women uprooted from their home communities), and indigenous, afrodescendent, and LGBTQ communities.

## The IAWP helped build organizations' resilience

The tremendous resilience of the IAWP's grantee organizations was evident throughout the period under evaluation. Even though the context has turned more complex, organizations have uninterruptedly provided support to women and girls victims of violence, championed policy changes, and obtained landmark court rulings. Organizations have continued to do essential work on behalf of women and girls despite conditions surrounding them becoming increasingly challenging: from organized crime pervading different aspects of social and economic life and rise in regular crime, to the President's overt hostility towards the sector, and the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, to name the most salient ones. The IAWP, and HIP specifically, proved to be an invaluable ally of grantees not only because of the flexible, and core funding it provides, but because it was nimble and responsive to what organizations were facing in real-time.

## The IAWP and good practices

Oak Foundation and HIP bring a grantee-centered approach and a grantmaking style that is highly valued by organizations and only a small number of foundations operating in Mexico share. The analysis conducted as part of this evaluation showed that in addition to the quality of funding (core, flexible, multi-year) the IAWP provided different forms of support that made a difference in grantee organizations' capacity to face difficulties, gain strength, succeed and even grow. Based on our analysis, the following five aspects enabled grantees to fully take advantage of the IAWP resources and use them productively. These were selected based on the frequency with which they were mentioned by interviewees.

1. A relationship of equals and based on trust. Grantees highlighted HIP team's attitude of 'always listening' in its communication with grantees. Organizations clearly value HIP's 'treating them as equals' and reported 'feeling understood and accompanied' by HIP's staff.

2. Responsive grantmaking. The COVID-19 health emergency was very fresh in interviewees' minds and several mentioned the importance of the IAWP's emergency funding to accommodate unforeseen expenses. Beyond the emergency funding, mentions of the program's grantmaking flexibility surpassed any other comments, including the following traits: not imposing limits on percentage of grant funds that is allocated to salaries, the ample flexibility to include indirect costs (in the case of project grants), and the fact that core costs that virtually no other funder admits (like contributing to operating reserves and purchase of vehicles, among others) were possible under the IAWP grants.

3. Realistic reporting methods. It was equally important for grantees that the IAWP did 'not set impossible information requirements', and organizations prized the opportunities to share information on how the organization was advancing because of 'how humane the process felt', and it prompted their own reflection on important issues.

4. Grantee autonomy in selecting technical assistance providers. This surfaced as one of many right choices in the IAWP's Capacity Building Framework developed by HIP. Grantee autonomy in selecting the consultants with whom to work scored high among interviewees and they reported valuing the process by which HIP offers several alternatives to select from. Grantees also valued HIP's guidance on selecting capacity building providers and gave highly positive feedback for the IAWP's 'right mix' of group learning activities with individually-tailored technical assistance.

5. Opportunities to learn from each other. This aspect came up repeatedly throughout the evaluation. The overwhelming majority expressed their interest in continuing to participate in peer-learning activities. Interviewees reported having benefited profusely from communities of practice on selfcare and labor rights and employee benefits among others.

## **TAKING THE TIME TO REFLECT ON WHAT'S BEEN ACHIEVED**

Civil society organizations in Mexico have made significant progress in the women's rights agenda in many ways and IAWP grantees are at the lead, as demonstrated in the examples documented in this evaluation.

Naturally, as violence continues to affect women and girls, stakeholders working in the field may lose sight of important achievements and focus instead on the challenges and goals still ahead. Taking the time to reflect on big and small wins helps organizations bring that perspective back. And people seeing or hearing about the impact of their work is a well-documented yet underused way of building a team's sense of purpose.

I hope that this evaluation commissioned by Oak Foundation is taken by other funders as an example of how to open up opportunities for grantees to talk openly about the results of their work. For grantee organizations, evaluating and documenting their work is time consuming and often costly, especially when they are already working at maximum capacity. Organizations should be using their resources for doing what they do best: working to advance their mission and thinking strategically. Several factors indicate that funders rather than organizations should invest resources in documenting outcomes achieved by grantees.

First, organizations are busy and formal evaluations take time away from core tasks. It can also cut into self-care and be an added burden for thinly staffed organizations.

Second, hiring an external evaluator with the right collaborative mindset would help grantees get engaged in reflecting more deeply on their work. Evaluators could help identify simple and inexpensive tools to collect the data. This would save grantees long hours of documentation or evaluation processes and enable them to focus on using the results of the documentation to inform their work, which is the most valuable outcome of undertaking any evaluation.

## **THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF GRANTEE ORGANIZATIONS**

Changes to norms, behaviors and policies are invariably the result of sustained, collective work. The IAWP grantees have been part of landmark changes in women's rights issues in Mexico and -not surprisingly- when we asked them to share examples of success in women's rights, interviewees overwhelmingly referred to developments and policy changes that were the result of actions by several groups, advocates, and allied institutions. From the repealing of federal budget cuts to Tlaxcala's authorities' official adoption of a state-wide anti-trafficking program, these policy achievements were the result of coordinated efforts among networks of organizations.

I hope that organizations -broadly speaking- are provided with more opportunities to take stock and value what has been achieved collectively for improving women's and girls' rights. Taking the time to analyze how some broader policy changes have come about will help organizations see themselves as part of something larger and will help them consider their contributions not as isolated outcomes that hit some specific target in a project. Supporting evaluation or documentation approaches that are participatory and fuel creativity will go a long way in strengthening the fields actors' recognition of their own work's tremendous value. Collective documentation of how the work of organizations contributes to women and girls' resources to demand a life free of violence is necessary to help build a narrative of strong successful movements that are chipping away at oppressive systems that reproduce gender discrimination and violence. This kind of opportunity would provide the necessary space for organizations to value their own contribution within a collective. It's important that grantees can see themselves as protagonists in these broader changes, and that the narrative (or collection of narratives) shows that over time the collective result of multiple contributions -no matter how small- are what make subsequent victories possible.

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## OAK FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This summary was written by Liliane Loya, Founder & Director of INNO, in collaboration with Andrea Tapia of Astrolabio Desarrollo Institucional, and Megan Colnar of Impact Revolution. Marcela Buzo and Paola Feregrino, members of Hispanic in Philanthropy’s Gender Program, provided critical input throughout its development.

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