

Strengthening Leadership and Advocacy in Population and Reproductive Health

Evaluation of the MacArthur Foundation's Fund for Leadership Development Executive Summary

The Fund for Leadership Development (FLD) was an initiative of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (the Foundation) that was implemented from the early 1990s through 2013. The objective of FLD was to foster new leadership in, and contributions to, the population and reproductive health (PRH) field in four countries: Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, and India. Over the course of its implementation, FLD awarded more than 400 grants to young and mid-career professionals who shared a commitment to promoting positive change in their work. FLD awarded 75 individual grants in Brazil; 153 grants in Mexico; 150 grants in Nigeria; and 77 grants in India. The Foundation's country offices managed 76 percent of these grants, while partner organizations in Mexico, Nigeria and India administered the remaining 24 percent.

Retrospective Evaluation

In May 2016, the Foundation commissioned the Institute of International Education (IIE) to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the FLD. This Executive Summary presents the key findings of the evaluation, which IIE carried out over 15 months (May 2016–July 2017) in all four countries. The purpose of the retrospective evaluation was to: 1) evaluate FLD in achieving its overarching goals and mission; 2) assess program implementation through grantee selection, implementation, and management processes; and 3) identify best practices and strategies that worked in the FLD program, with recommendations for future programs aimed to address similar issues.

Methods. The evaluation team collected survey data from 177 FLD grantees (56 percent of the 315 alumni with updated contact information) and conducted in-depth interviews with 77 stakeholders, including grantees, FLD staff, advisers, and PRH experts. IIE also prepared eight case studies to describe in more detail the complex stories that emerged from individual interviews.

Limitations and Considerations. It is important to note the limitations of the study findings. First, data collected from grantees is self-reported, and may introduce bias in that grantees attributed more individual and communal change to the program. To the extent possible, IIE triangulated grantee perspectives with data from other stakeholders. Second, the study was implemented ten years after the program ended, causing many respondents to have trouble recalling the program specifics, and attributing changes more broadly to the fellowship. Finally, since the evaluation team focused on the individual trajectories of alumni and did not study a comparison group, the reported outcomes may not be exclusively attributed to the FLD. Many grantees were selected based on their leadership potential, and concurrently to the FLD, they may have pursued other leadership opportunities that influenced them as well. Thus it is plausible that they were already prone to leadership trajectories, though FLD was a contributing factor and catalyst on this path.

Key Findings

The findings of the comprehensive evaluation indicate that the FLD program had significant outcomes for its grantees, who in turn have affected change in their organizations and communities, and more broadly in policymaking in the PRH field nationally and internationally.

1. Grantee Outcomes

Leadership growth. All alumni (100 percent) indicated in their survey responses that their participation in the program allowed them to increase their leadership skills. Some grantees reported that FLD's unique approach to leadership development had a considerable effect on their career; in supporting what other donors would not, FLD was a groundbreaking opportunity for those willing to take initiative. The evaluation team analyzed key leadership characteristics of FLD alumni.

- **Self-confidence.** Grantees noted an increase in their self-confidence, including confidence to undertake activities they did not think themselves capable of or speaking out on controversial issues. An FLD grantee from a conservative region in Nigeria indicated that because of FLD, she gained confidence to challenge underage marriages in her community. *"I wanted to open a documentation center ..."* she remarked, *"Instead, I ended up being a voice for my community."*
- **Thinking strategically.** At least 50 percent of survey respondents noted an increase in their ability to think strategically; 70 percent indicated that they are more innovative; 65 percent indicated that they have improved their critical thinking skills; and 60 percent indicated that they have improved their decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- **Understanding context.** Grantees reported improved perspectives on personal success and on reproductive health and gender issues, as well as a better understanding of reproductive health in the social justice field. For instance, a Brazilian grantee stated that *"the grant allowed me to invest in my own cultural capital and cultivation, something that was not part of my family background, [which was] very much geared toward working hard and making money."*
- **Communicating effectively.** On average, half of the survey respondents reported improvements in their communication skills. In Mexico, Indigenous grantees who faced language difficulties improved their Spanish fluency, allowing them to better access knowledge and communicate with a broader range of people. A Mexican grantee noted that in discussion with her FLD mentor, *"I learned stronger communications skills, how to make a stronger argument."*
- **Taking initiative.** More than two-thirds of survey respondents (72 percent) reported that they are able to take initiative and an even larger number (78 percent) reported being able to work independently as a result of their participation in FLD. An Indian grantee who now holds a senior position in the World Health Organization (WHO) stated: *"In my work on research capacity strengthening and running a fellowship, I bring in experiences from my FLD Fellowship. ... The experience changed me, the way I think and look at issues."*

Professional growth. FLD’s outcomes for individual grantees’ professional growth was the most evident in interviewed participants’ responses. Most attributed their level of success to the boost from the FLD program, and some mentioned that **the FLD program “catapulted” their career**. Some changed their professional focus (expanding their areas of work particularly into research or women’s rights advocacy or switching fields); others established their leadership on topics they worked during FLD, there were instances of grantees getting into top academic institutions thanks in part to the training and mentoring they received during FLD.

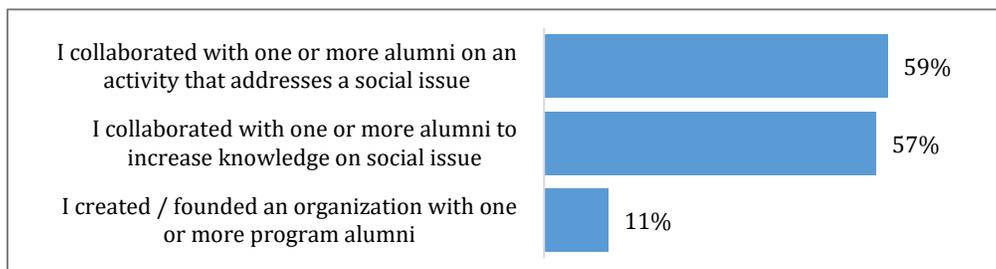
“[FLD] opened up career paths for grantees that often led to important positions, where they could have a positive impact in the sense of promoting a more progressive agenda in the field of PRH.”

FLD adviser, Brazil

- More than a third (43 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they are a **key resource on PRH issues** in their organization, and 50 percent indicated that peers and decision-makers **seek their guidance on PRH-related matters**. A Brazilian grantee stated that the prestige of the grant was fundamental in getting him a professorship at the University of São Paulo Medical School, a leading PRH program in Brazil. *“Receiving the [FLD] grant put [me] ahead of the competition.”*
- Before participation in FLD, 20 percent of survey respondents received awards or recognition for their work. Since participating in the program, **40 percent have received these accolades**. These awards have been national and international, and a few have even been community-based.
- More than three out of four (85 percent) survey respondents believe that their program experience affected their **long-term commitment to the PRH field**. There were no significant differences based on the grantee’s home country, type of program, age, the total length of grant, or grant size, demonstrating that the program, on the whole, fostered the leadership development of individuals working in the field.

Networks and collaborations. Since completing their grant, 82 percent of alumni respondents have had contact with other program alumni. Nearly half of the alumni respondents (48 percent) indicated that they have collaborated with other alumni; these joint activities address a social issue or increase knowledge in PRH.

Alumni collaborations by type

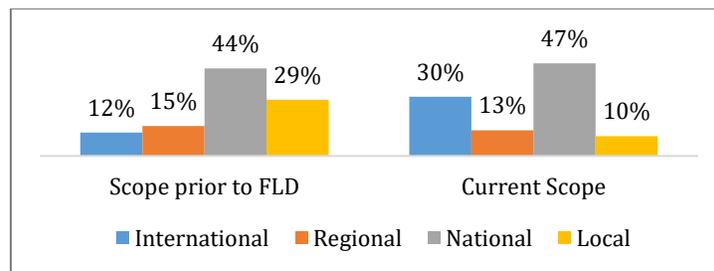


2. Outcomes in Organizations and Communities

Organizations. FLD grantees developed deeper knowledge and stronger skills related to organizational management and leadership. More than a third of FLD alumni respondents (38 percent) are working in the same organization where they were employed prior to their FLD participation, and more than half of these (51 percent) have been promoted since completing the program. **Forty percent of survey respondents reported having created new organizations, and 87 percent of these newly established organizations implement activities related to PRH.**

Most survey respondents (78 percent) indicated that their current organization conducts work that is related to the PRH field. However, the regional scope of these organizations varies. More respondents have moved to work in international organizations, while work in local organizations has significantly decreased. Interviews with grantees and other stakeholders clarified that international engagements often support efforts at the local level.

Alumni organizations and geographic scope



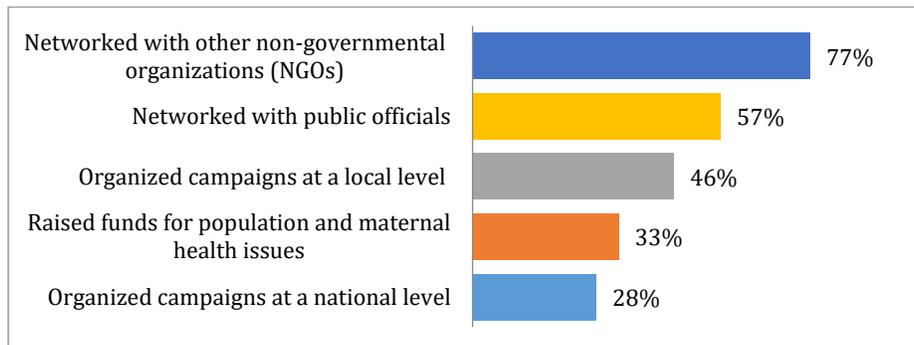
Communities. Grantees have significantly contributed to their communities, either through public education, volunteering, community leadership or advocacy, or development of legal frameworks at the local level. Prior to participating in FLD, 27 percent of survey respondents indicated that they worked directly with communities; **59 percent of survey alumni currently work with communities.**

Grantees also reported an increase in their sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable people and women. **Although 41 percent of survey respondents reported that “a lot” of their work benefitted these groups prior to the program, 74 percent reported the same currently.** This large increase speaks to the emphasis that FLD grantees are placing on their work with vulnerable populations.

3. Outcomes at the National and International Levels

National advocacy. Nationally, FLD grantees have participated in legislative action, particularly drafting or contributing to draft, laws. Examples of these include leadership on decriminalization of abortion in Mexico; involvement in the activism for Nigeria’s National Health Care Act; and membership in the committee that drafted India’s first national mental health policies. Grantees have also contributed to national debates on connections between PRH and other fields and social issues, such as religion and homophobia in Brazil. Grantees have launched academic programs, such as a professional degree program in Toxicology at the National Polytechnic University in Mexico, and designed programs that have been scaled nationally, such as a sexual and reproductive health helpline in India.

FLD advocacy at the national level



International advocacy. FLD grantees engaged in activities at the international level and influenced policy and action in the public health sector at large. A few examples include an HIV/AIDS prevention program developed by a Brazilian grantee that later inspired a similar initiative in Colombia; a film-based sex education curriculum for young people in India, which has recently been featured by the University of Chicago; and the use of FLD approaches to leadership development by alumni at WHO. As a result of his longstanding work on mental health, an FLD grantee was listed as one of the 100 most influential persons of the year by *Time* magazine in 2015. The grantee stated that his current work with WHO “is a great example of how [his] work supported by FLD and the MacArthur Foundation has led and propelled [him] to the world’s most important agency in the field.”

4. Influence on the PRH Field and the Role of Women

Contribution to PRH field. FLD grantees have significantly contributed to greater knowledge about PRH issues in their communities and countries, as well as internationally. This influence includes academic contributions, participation in activities in relation to the promotion of PRH issues, and expansion of the thematic boundaries of the PRH field.

“Thirty-three out of 78 [FLD grantees in India] are people who have made a significant mark in their work. That is a very high number by any standard....”*

FLD national adviser, India

*Author’s Note: Respondent is referring to own knowledge of FLD grantees in India, not official program or evaluation data.

According to the alumni survey, FLD grantees have produced more than 1,300 peer-reviewed academic journal articles in the PRH field since the completion of their grant. In addition, grantees have published more than 800 book chapters, 233 full publications, and more than 700 reports.

FLD knowledge footprint

1377	Peer-reviewed academic journal articles
518	Non-peer-reviewed academic journal articles
233	Academic books
804	Academic book chapters
704	Academic reports
2324	Workshops and conferences
112	Websites/blogs
872	News articles/editorials
338	Works of art and music
986	Television/radio programs or announcements

Role of women. Implementation of FLD projects empowered not only women in communities but also female grantees. Prior to the program, 16 percent of alumni respondents indicated that their work included advocacy for women’s rights. Currently, **24 percent reported their work in women’s rights advocacy.** The percentage of female grantees who worked on advocacy for women’s rights increased from 27 percent before FLD to 57 percent currently.

A Nigerian grantee established a center to promote women’s rights, providing counseling to battered women. She expanded the scope of her activities to include female empowerment in agriculture and education, loans for disadvantaged female farmers, and advocacy for larger funding for the education of girls in predominantly Muslim communities of northern Nigeria.

Lessons Learned

A number of lessons learned emerged from interviews with key stakeholders:

- **Relevance of support to leadership development.** It is important to invest in individuals, and this investment should go beyond the financial support period. According to an Indian FLD adviser, “FLD was a gem that was recognized in the country but insufficiently recognized by the MacArthur Foundation.” Grantees mentioned that there were other programs at the time of FLD, but that none were focused on PRH issues. This gap provided a unique opportunity for FLD to fulfill this need.
- **Importance of the selection process.** The Foundation country offices and partner organizations defined selection criteria to allow committee members to look for emerging leaders, beyond the obvious stars. The process was flexible in its selection of projects to allow for innovation and risk-taking. The Foundation saw selecting grantees from multiple backgrounds as important because similar programs at that time focused on only candidates from the same background.
- **Program management team.** Managing a program such as FLD required a dedicated and large team for follow-up, information dissemination, networking facilitation, capacity-building, and day-to-day support. The program team required skills in program management, leadership development, capacity-building, thematic subject area expertise, and financial management. According to some stakeholders, the FLD day-to-day support was not sufficient in some instances.

- **Money matters.** In developing countries, organizations and individuals often face the challenge of access to sources of funding. Providing funding to individuals made FLD a unique program. More than 90 percent of survey respondents indicated that this financial support was “very useful.” When the program changed this element, such as with the Emerging Leaders Development Program in Nigeria, and provided resources and training rather than the financial awards, key stakeholders noted that the outcomes were not as impactful.
- **Performance review.** Flexibility was key to the design of FLD, and over years, program staff regularly sought stakeholders’ feedback to better structure program activities. In Mexico, for example, the program staff introduced grantees’ self-evaluation to tailor support to grantees’ needs.
- **Program scope.** The broader thematic focus and flexibility of the program in initial years allowed for more applications and innovation. The narrowing of the thematic focus and subsequent research focus led to a reduction in applications in India and Nigeria.
- **Program transition.** Partner organizations with prior involvement in or knowledge of FLD allowed for a smoother transition of the program from the Foundation. The most successful transitions were gradual and allowed sufficient time for the new organization to gain a solid understanding of the program prior to assuming full management responsibility.
- **Alumni network.** FLD attempted to bring together grantees through networking during annual meetings, workshops, and seminars. These efforts helped develop a feeling of community and were important in building synergies. However, grantees mentioned that FLD fell short of building and fostering an alumni network over the long-term. Many expressed disappointment that there was no networking platform for alumni.

Recommendations

Interviewed stakeholders made a number of recommendations that the evaluation team has shared for the purpose of informing future, similar programs. These recommendations are organized based on the three phases of programming: the planning phase, the implementation phase, and the period after the program:

- **Set the vision for a successful leadership program.** There is tremendous value in mid-level leadership development programs because they rejuvenate leaders in the development sector and help to support emerging leaders. In India, for instance, FLD helped to build a new field—reproductive health and rights—and created a cadre of leaders across program implementers, researchers, and activists.
- **Adapt the program to the local context.** Any successful leadership program needs to adapt to the present environment. The development team should examine the subject/theme and develop a gap analysis with a range of stakeholders to build ownership and ensure relevance. There should also be an emphasis on retaining the culture/core values of the program while allowing for flexibility, as this was FLD’s unique aspect.
- **Expand outreach and leverage new tools for communication and community-based actors.** The program outreach strategy should go beyond those already known to the Foundation and

focus on other marginalized populations, such as those living with disabilities. Communications and outreach to inform potential candidates about the program should go beyond the immediate circles of connections to broaden opportunity and impact.

- **Engage qualified members for selection committees.** The quality of the selection committee is critical. It is important to have people from diverse backgrounds. According to a Brazilian grantee, committee members should have “*some level of experience in the area of work to make sure there is no opportunism.*”
- **Choose distinct and diverse selection criteria.** Diversity should be an important aspect of the selection process, and the definition of what is diverse continually reviewed over the years to reflect the changing environment or needs of the program. In Brazil, stakeholders credited the inclusion of affirmative action in the selection process for bringing issues affecting Afro-Brazilians out of the academic discourse and into activism.
- **Strengthen the mentoring component.** Stronger, consistent, and more structured mentoring is needed for program success. Future programs should put as much effort into matching grantees with mentors as they did with the selection process, ensuring that the pair is compatible and equally invested in the learning process. Mentors should be aware of the responsibilities that come with the program.
- **Facilitate cross-learning and networking.** It is important to have a formal network of grantees. To build a stronger collective impact, it is crucial to locate annual grantee meetings in different regions, where grantees can conduct site visits.
- **Provide post-grant support.** There should be a system for tracking alumni activities. The interviews for this evaluation helped grantees to remember their FLD years and revived their interest in connecting with other alumni. There should be ways for the grantees in-country and across countries to connect and collaborate; such connections should not just be for FLD but for all MacArthur grantees/stakeholders in a country.

Conclusion

The retrospective evaluation succeeded in identifying, comparing, and contrasting outcomes across the beneficiary countries. Data revealed that leadership development occurred in all countries, and many examples provide evidence that organizations, local communities, and grantees’ countries all benefited from FLD grantees’ activities during and after their program participation. Grantees also influenced the knowledge and practice in and beyond the PRH field and improved the rights and access of marginalized groups to reproductive health services locally, nationally, and internationally. Future endeavors related to leadership development in PRH can consider how programs such as this not only influence local communities but also potentially expand their reach to key stakeholder communities through activism, research, advocacy, or policymaking and, as such, influence the future of the field.