

MEMORANDUM



To : 2014 and 2015 WILPF US Board of Directors who attended the Houston retreat

From: Heather Harker, Third Sector New England
Sarah Bursky, Third Sector New England

Date: March 9 2015

Re: Summary Highlights and Decisions of the 2014/2015 WILPS US Transitional Board Retreat in Houston, TX, Feb 27 - March 2.

Attending: Ann Fleischli, Fran Foulkrod, Deb Garretson (by phone), Odile Hugonot Haber, Mary Hanson Harrison, Millie Livingston, Robin Lloyd, Peggy Luhrs, Barbara Nielsen, Candace Perry, Nicole Scott, Melissa Torres, LaShawndra Vernon, Heather Harker (TSNE), Sarah Bursky (TSNE), Paula Herrington (WILPF US Interim Director).

This summary covers the major discussions and highlights from the recent 2014/2015 WILPF US transitional board retreat in Houston, TX, scheduled as part of the organizational assessment process underway with Third Sector New England (TSNE). Members of the outgoing Board and 2015 incoming Board met from February 27 until March 2 for a four-day retreat at the Northwest Forest Conference Center in Cypress. The agenda was developed and facilitated by TSNE Consultant Heather Harker, and was supported by TSNE associate Sarah Bursky and WILPF US's Interim Director, Paula Herrington. Board members acknowledged that they arrived at the retreat with insufficient context for the TSNE organizational assessment report and TSNE acknowledged that more advance communication could have been sent to the whole Board providing broader context for the process and work to be undertaken.

The intention of the retreat was to allow the outgoing and incoming Board members of the WILPF US Board of Directors an opportunity to focus on improving Board governance and the general functionality of the national organization. It has been a difficult time in the history of WILPF US, with recent years characterized by infighting among the membership, declining membership and funding, and perceived violations of trust from those in leadership positions. Though recent years have been difficult, programming across the country remains strong, and the energy and passion for the mission of the organization infuses the commitment of the program and issue committees and the branch level work. This is the "heart" of WILPF US.

Opening the retreat, the Board had a difficult conversation around whether non-Board members should be allowed to participate in the retreat. All acknowledged the sense of mistrust that has grown out of past closed Board meetings/retreats, and recognized the policy that official board meetings are open to membership. After much debate, it was determined that equity in participation was also a value crucial to WILPF US, and that because accommodations had not been made to include all members, in person or remotely, the Board could not allow only one non-Board member to participate who had the ability to travel to attend. Additionally, the Board

acknowledged that a) issues such as these need to be handled in advance of the meeting, b) recent challenges required that the Board be able to have a sensitive conversation and come to consensus around issues of its own functioning to address the critical issues facing WILPF US, and c) the underlying value of transparency and member engagement is core to WILPF US and that, during the May 2015 Board meeting the Board will take up a discussion around whether (and for what circumstances) retreats will be closed in the future.

Vital to progress at the retreat was the acknowledgment that there were “multiple truths” within the organization and that achieving one narrative to which all agreed was not possible. Instead, the focus would be on building a cohesive Board movement towards renewal. TSNE staff shared that the tendency is for the internal life of organizations to mirror their external reality. Thus, it is not a surprise to see WILPF US’ internal dynamics when one considers that the world at large is ripe with terrorism and war, and Congress is stalled in procedural blocks. The Board – and WILPF US as a whole - would need to be intentional in building a culture consistent with its values of peace and freedom (and democracy) in order to counter the dominant narrative and culture. There is desire to build a culture of direct feedback and hold each other accountable to respectful and inclusive behaviors towards each other, staff and members.

Board members acknowledged a need to “lead from a place of inquiry”, asking questions (especially regarding intention) instead of responding immediately (particularly when things are conveyed over email), to build trust.

There is agreement that a top priority is to heal the relationship with JAPA and WILPF US, to recognize the liability risks, and to make choices on next steps that are based on organizational values. Board members recognized the need for the WILPF US and JAPA relationship to evolve beyond the pain of the past few years. As a first step, accountants representing WILPF US and JAPA had met to begin to review records. Lines of communication have been opened. The two organizations are now working on outlining next steps, and although all are anxious for this to move forward, the process will require time and patience.

The Board is committed to increase the engagement of members in all WILPF operations and programming. One avenue for this can be with the mentoring of new members into the organization. In order to support the “heart” of WILPF, Board members agreed to commit money for infrastructure (IT, communications, staffing), financial support for branches, and to identify campaigns beyond the upcoming Centennial events.

Paula Herrington outlined the fiscal state of the organization. This is the fourth year in a row with declining funding and there is a narrow window to turn things around. Based on current cash flow projections, WILPF US will be in the negative by \$7,956 in July 2015 and \$118,364 by the end of the calendar year. (These are dollars beyond what is already anticipated to come in during this fiscal year.) If the diversification and increase in revenue do not happen, then there is real risk that WILPF US will not continue to exist in its current form.

Expanding and diversifying the funding base will be critical to success. The Board recognized its fiduciary responsibility to the organization, as distinct from the responsibilities of members, but also that member engagement in these issues is vital.

The Growing WILPF campaign has given the organization a 2-year window (with 18 months remaining) of focused fundraising to rejuvenate WILPF financially, and can be a platform to develop a more sustainable organization going forward. The Board’s specific role in fundraising

needs to be clarified, and better pathways for information sharing between the National and branch levels would allow for all to be better poised to speak with the media and to funders. The Development Committee plays a vital role in the future by engaging in more comprehensive planning. The Finance Committee also plays a role in managing budgets and cash flow to reflect organizational priorities and programs, in close partnership with the Interim Director.

In light of this, the Board discussed potential staffing going forward. All were agreed that staff capacity would be critical to more robust communications, ongoing financial reporting, and fundraising going forward. Several scenarios were explored, one involving shared leadership by co-directors, a scenario that TSNE explained requires having a high level of trust to succeed. It would be important to identify to whom the staff reported; it would not work to report to the full board or full membership. Board members also acknowledged that their behaviors, and alignment (or lack thereof, as may be the case) create challenging context within which staff must work. Aligning Board expectations is also key to the success of any future staffing structure. A small team will work with TSNE and Interim Director Paula Herrington in the coming weeks to craft a proposal to go to the Board. It is also essential that WILPF US has the financial wherewithal before it moves forward with hiring staff.

The Board explored issues of diversity and equity in relation to WILPF US. Board members shared mistrusts based in historical oppressions and also more recent organizational incidents that were exclusive in nature. In summary, in order to be a truly inclusive organization, Board members would need to address change at three levels: 1) Interpersonal, in engaging in peer-to-peer learning and asking questions, 2) Organizational, addressing policies and taking on issues and platforms of interest to historically oppressed communities, and 3) System level, that to build a peaceful and free society the organization must engage all women and work with all communities. Intentionality and trust are vital to this effort. It was acknowledged that you “can’t undo racism but you can change yourself.”

As part of the retreat, on Saturday morning Feb 28, Board members held an event in partnership with Dr. Beverly McPhail, Director of the Women’s Resource Center at the University of Texas, Houston. Younger and older WILPF US members came together and Maria Jimenez, Lillian Care, and Raul Edwards spoke about human trafficking along the border and human rights. Board members returned inspired by the work of the Houston leaders and members, about the potential to be active on new issues of interest to younger communities and communities of color (in addition to issues of interest to the more historical WILPF US member cohort), and returned with a greater sense of possibilities.

The following are action items following from the above agreements:

Board Level Action Items:

1. Communication to go out to members following the retreat
 - a. Invitation to attend next Board meeting (March 24, 2015 – telephone meeting)
 - b. TSNE report to the Board, asking ‘does this reflect what we covered at retreat?’ on March 9, 2015. TSNE Memo needs to acknowledge complexity of issues facing WILPF US and announce next Board meeting dates (see below).
 - c. Paula Herrington will send email to Board and general members with update on JAPA, including the accountant’s meeting and where WILPF US is in process. TSNE memo to be attached to this email. (by Wednesday Mar 11 2015)

2. Upcoming Board meetings: The Board has made a commitment to meet monthly during this Centennial, transitional year. Also, it was agreed to publish the upcoming Board meeting schedule in advance so that members can plan to engage (increased transparency). Call-in numbers will be sent by the Board president with the board packets prior to the meetings.
 - a. Schedule is as follows:
 - i. 3/24/15 (Agenda follows below)
 - ii. 4/14/15 (SHORT meeting focusing on update on delegation from Hague AND Growing WILPF US. The hope is that the delegation update inspires folks regarding Growing WILPF US. There will be a monthly financial report as part of packet but not necessarily for discussion.)
 - iii. 5/19/15
 - iv. 6/16/15
 - v. 7/21/15
 - vi. 8/18/15
 - vii. 9/15/14
 - viii. 10/20/15
 - ix. 11/17/15
 - x. 12/15/15

3. Monthly financial reports to continue. Millie Livingston, Treasurer, is responsible for this working with Interim Director Paula Herrington and Finance Committee. Inaugural Finance Committee meeting with new Treasurer will be March 17 in the a.m. Pacific Time.
 - a. Staff generates/edits financial reports
 - b. Finance Committee reviews/requests additional financial reports as needed by Board
 - c. Finance Committee working with Interim Director to bring recommendations to May 19 Board meeting re: expense management
 - d. Finance Committee will be reconstituted: Treasurer – Millie Livingston, Development Committee chair - Fran Foulkrod, US International Board Member - Melissa Torres, Personnel Committee chair – Nicole Scott, Nominating Committee chair - Barbara Nielsen, Mary Hanson Harrison - President (an ex officio member on every committee) and relevant staff – Paula Herrington, Interim Director.

4. Agenda items for 3/24 Board meeting
 - a. Draft policy on database access (Barbara N)
 - b. Revised IT proposal addressing feedback/questions/concerns (Fran)
 - c. Financial report (Millie/Paula)
 - d. Staffing proposal (Nicole/Candace with TSNE consultant)
 - e. Time at end for member questions comments (ask for questions to be sent in advance)

All proposals and policy recommendations to be sent in advance, and to include Interim Director and Board members, so that all can review prior to discussion.

branch/program work to be held 1x/year facilitated by program chairs (Odile and Deb). It will be announced during March program call and will happen June 2015. This meeting is anticipated to be the “Member Meeting” envisioned by the Pennsylvania statutes and is a meeting with all Board members to be present, just as they are required to be present for all noticed Board meetings.

6. Ann to draft position memo for Board re: inclusion of members at retreat (and Board meetings) to be reviewed at May Board meeting (to allow for focus on time-sensitive items at March meeting).
7. Development committee to bring brief update to March 24th meeting AND to begin deeper work of:
 - a. Exploring specific Board member commitments on fundraising efforts within context of specific proposal/request for Board member engagement in fundraising (short-term)
 - b. Recommend short-term fundraising activities
 - c. Design and implement *collaborative* process for long-term cohesive plan including defining role of Development committee in relationship to Growing WILPF
 - d. People will send committee member ideas to Fran. Will revisit who is officially on the Development committee. Some on the email list are unresponsive. Should include people who have fundraising experience.
8. Small team to work with TSNE to create proposal for well-defined staffing roles and Board expectations. The team will include: Nicole and Candace working with TSNE: Heather, Paula, and Sarah.
 - a. Bring something to Board March 24th for initial input (likely not final version)
 - b. To determine: What are values guiding this?
 - c. Additional questions: Ombudsman? Org chart? Not have to be hierarchical? Can be organic? Shared leadership?

Areas that the Board agreed need to be addressed in the future:

- Need to stay focused on short term priorities and recognize what things are longer term
- US Rep to International Board nominations and election needed; discussion of At-large Board member position.
- A need to recognize the impact of emotional reactions of readers when conveying information, and to be sensitive to what, how, and to whom information is conveyed
- In recognizing the need to rebuild trust all around, nothing is ‘confidential’ about this retreat and general members’ questions can be answered.
- Essential to include the Interim Director in Board deliberations because her role in transition is to support Board decision-making and leadership.
- A need to address in the future the role of individual members in interacting with staff, how to balance member requests with need for effective staff boundaries. A similar discussion regarding Board members not directly in a supervisory role will also be needed.
- Board needs to discuss lease expiration at May board meeting and align around next steps. This to flow sequentially from March Board meeting discussions regarding staffing positions and financials.
- Need to pull together all WILPF US policies (which are to be reviewed/approved by

Board) and operating procedures as a part of creating an effective infrastructure for the organization going forward, with the Interim Director as the center point for gathering these materials on behalf of the Board. These can be packaged to serve different purposes, such as Board member orientation packets, and guidance for administrative operations.

- Longer term priority (after 2015): Establishing a committee to look at WILPF US mission, vision and how we have evolved through the years, and in relation to International, and – with member input – determine what resonates for WILPF US’s future.
- There is recognition that the WILPF “Membership Council” arose during a time when part of the WILPF US system ‘broke down’ from the members’ perspective. The Membership Council is a diverse group of members, with differing opinions within it. There may be a need and appetite within WILPF US for membership channels and the Board may want to create one. However, the Membership Council makes its own decision about its future.

In Conclusion

Board members began to build trust in Houston. The Board affirmed its capacity for generosity and sisterhood. These relationships will be vital to moving forward and creating a time of renewal for the organization. WILPF US can choose to move beyond the pains of the past by not attempting to find one “truth” in the historical narrative but by working together to build on its collective passion for the issues. Coming out of the retreat, the Board has the opportunity to build on its agreements and grow what was begun in Houston.

This is a particularly important time in WILPF US’s history. The future of WILPF US is truly in the hands of its general members and the Board it has elected. The cumulative impact of individual choices will determine the future of WILPF US, in that every choice each individual makes in how to speak, what frame to use, what assumptions are made, and what tone to use - will make a difference in WILPF US’s ability to rebuild trust. These choices, focused internally, will determine the organization’s long-term ability to build the peaceful and socially-just world it envisions.