

Steps Toward Designing a WILPF US Program Strategic Plan

Process:

In October 2015, a small group of members active in the national program committee and the national issues committees, plus two long-time active members, as well as several other members, a supporting staff member, and consultant gathered in retreat in Des Moines, Iowa, to review and brainstorm ideas and concerns about program activities, and interests of WILPF US Section. In early January 2016, a small working group, consisting of Laura Dewey (Detroit Branch), Odile Hugonot Haber, (Ann Arbor Branch and national Program Committee Chair), Barbara Nielsen (San Francisco Branch and national Advancing Human Rights issues committee co-chair), Lamia Sadek (US Section Managing Director), Mary Jane Schutzius (St. Louis Branch), and I, Maureen N. Eke (at-large and national Program Committee Chair) began meeting weekly to organize documents generated during the program retreat, feedback from various committee chairs, branch representatives, and individuals into a cohesive, at least, useable draft document to present to the general membership. The document would serve as a catalyst for discussion and inspiration as we think about program priorities. We began with a suggested first goal for review throughout the section.ⁱ

I wish to thank my WILPF sisters for their patience, commitment, and hard work in getting what seemed at some point a formidable task into a now recognizable and actionable document. Our work together is a clear indication of true collaboration. Thank you all! Working with more than 80 pages of material, we coordinated efforts and concluded that the suggestions we received focused on two dominant areas: 1) program and 2) development. A third area with minor emphasis was communication, but, it intersected with the two dominant areas.

Because the conversation at the Des Moines Program retreat was overwhelmingly about how to give us more visibility and coherence, especially by highlighting our work and improving communication among us (between WILPF National and branches, among branches, between

issue committees and branches), the working group focused on one of the devised “retreat goals” with the most suggestions and for which we also received a lot of feedback: *Goal #3: Advancing Peace, Justice, and Human Rights*. This goal also naturally reflects WILPF’s founding principles, and commitment, as well as traditional and on-going foci. It articulates and embodies the organization’s vision and goals. Given the organization’s current fiscal needs and an ongoing dysfunctional communication structure, the working group focused on producing a realistic and useable draft plan proposal for review and discussion within the general membership. We are cognizant of the diversity of our objectives—some short-term and immediate, others long-term and/or ongoing. The working group, therefore, believed that WILPF US as an organization would be better served by an uncomplicated and implementable Program Strategic Plan draft document with a distillation of suggestions from the retreat and our follow-up review, offering the following for our consideration within the general membership:

- a) A clearly defined goal;
- b) A set of clearly mapped out objectives and accompanying actions;
- c) Suggested activities to help us implement the actions and objectives;
- d) A time frame, where necessary, for achieving the stated “Goal” and objectives
- e) Identified responsible parties;
- f) Identified costs, if possible; and
- g) Indication of some dissemination strategy

The current draft document is the result of several hours and weeks of collaborative work by the working group. An important and informing objective for us has been to create the sense of WILPF US regional or national campaigns around issues, events, and policies that have significance for our work. We believe that, if adopted by the general membership in some form, this draft Program Strategic Plan will help to nurture collaborations among branches, between issues committees and branches or individuals around selected or identified issues, either over a defined period of time or on anniversaries or events’ days. By working together on given

issues or events, we will be able to sustain some media visibility locally, regionally, and nationally. Consequently, we hope to reach new members and/or bring to the foreground WILPF's leadership in peace and human rights advocacy, nationally, and internationally.

Where we are:

The program retreat follow-up working group has shared the document with the WILPF US Board and Program Committee. We presented it during the 2016 new board's first meeting on March 22, 2016.

What we hope to achieve through this document:

We are cognizant that branches have suggested issues or topics in which they are interested and that some branches and individuals are working on some of these topics. But, we also recognize that poor communication and lack of collaboration among us have not helped us to highlight our work effectively. As we indicated briefly, above, we hope that this Program Strategic Plan document will help us to initiate a new way of working together through strong collaborations, resource sharing, and improved communication.

As part of this new approach to programming, we have proposed the following under **Objective 5: Periodically, identify, in collaboration with Issue Committees** current issues/topics for targeted campaign & develop a coordinated series of actions on such identified topics/issues by Branches and individuals in order to create an atmosphere of a regional, local, or national synchronized campaign with a unified language and position. Such structure would give WILPF US visibility by drawing media attention to our activities and leadership in peace and human rights advocacy.

As such, we encourage branches to work in collaboration with one another or with Issue Committees and individuals interested in similar issues, thus creating a climate of Program Issue "campaigns" sustained over a period of time as determined by branches and their partners. For instance, branches can work on localized, short-term issues, such as stopping the

adoption of a destructive environmental practice or policy in their community. Branches can also collaborate with individuals and Program Issue Committees on long-term issues, such as the passage of H.R. 1976, US ratification of CEDAW or working on cities for CEDAW.

We believe that collaborating with other groups is crucial for building a movement, a nationally coordinated campaign and for giving us visibility. A campaign should have the goals of raising public awareness on targeted issue(s), getting members of the public to take action, networking with other organizations, and increasing WILPF's regional and/or national visibility and membership.

Our role as Program Chairs will be to provide organizational structure by helping to disseminate information about our programs and identified national campaigns, prepare resource materials, and build a repository of shared resources that will sustain us and our work.

What you can do:

In order for the general membership to move forward this proposal of constructive action and activism within the suggested structural framework of some comprehensive program goals, we (the working group) are seeking constructive feedback from all members on the draft document, highlighting how it could be improved but also made more actionable. We believe that every voice counts and collaborative ownership of our program focus and activism, even in the first steps of review towards clarification and new action, is crucial. As such, although in many ways it would be idyllic for the review, discussion, and consultative processes to be undertaken instantly, we know that is not realistic. The first tentative schedules had included about three weeks for member review. We know that such is impractical, especially since the best way that branches often can discuss issues of importance is to have circulated information in advance of a periodic branch meeting and then meeting in person to collaborate and question and pursue answers. So we are hoping that members in branches will circulate this memo and the draft plan document and then meet in a branch meeting, hopefully, before Wednesday, May

4. Interim questions can be sent to Odile and/or me, the Program Committee chairs. When you have been able to make a firm assessment, please also send that feedback to us, using our emails, shown below.

Maureen N. Eke: eke1mn@cmich.edu; Odile Hugonot Haber: odilehh@gmail.com

Timeline:

Please return your comments, suggestions, ideas, and input no later than Tuesday, May 3, 2016.

Tentative working group meeting plan:

May 11: Working group meeting;

May 18: working group meeting

May 24: Program meeting

June 1: Working group meeting; share updated draft with members after this meeting

Closing:

We hope that our work will provide us with a strong coherent structure and initiate better collaboration among us. We also hope that this document will inspire and encourage enriched conversations among us. We look forward to your interest and input as we move this discussion of our program priorities and goals forward.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Maureen N. Eke, Program Chair, eke1mn@cmich.edu

ⁱ At the time this program retreat follow-up review group began its work, Barbara Nielsen was chair of the national Nominating Committee and Laura Dewey was a member of that committee; the 2016 board term election cycle had on the ballot Laura Dewey as unopposed candidate for Nominating Committee chair as the service period for

the term of service of Barbara's tenure as Nominating Committee chair was ending. The 2016 board term national board includes Laura Dewey as the new Nominating Committee Chair for a three-year term and me, Maureen Eke, elected as Program Chair for a three-year term, as well.