

**SUMMARY**

**THE WINDS OF CHANGE FOUNDATION**

**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP WORKING GROUP**

**APRIL 19-21, 2001**

**SAN FRANCISCO**

From April 19-21, 2001, the Winds of Change Foundation brought together 38 women from various disciplinary sectors to identify and develop promising strategies to advance the field of women's leadership. The group was designed to provide an alternative forum to stimulate new dialogues, encourage collaboration and bridge gaps between academic research, advocacy, activism, and funding in this field. Bringing together people with different perspectives to speak about the same issues in an intense environment brought about a synergistic process ...On Saturday morning, the working group self-divided into two areas of interest – strategic work, and an overview of the field of women in leadership.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, the outcome of both groups focused on expanding media coverage. The strategic group focused on creating a national media consortium. The second group reviewing an overview of the field, focused on the backlash challenge of negative imagery relating to role models for women.

## **Direction #1: MEDIA CONSORTIUM**

*"I think we ended up with one idea... although there were many others...given another hour we could have been equally brilliant. [The] concept of a media consortium... came out of the fact that there needs to be some kind of coordination of the issue of media both from the point of view of who's out there to speak? What are the trends and what are the issues? What is the research? How does it get translated into usable work and language for the media? And the fact that every women's organization around the country is understaffed in media... So, we would begin the process by pulling together a meeting of representatives of networks. Looking at formal ones but also informal ones... Because we want to make sure that we bring a diverse group of people together. There are a number of interesting groups doing media work at the grassroots level in other places and other communities. We want to make sure they're at the table for that.*

*The conversation would then focus around four different areas: ...how do you bring research, coordinate [strategic efforts and events], and know what's going on but also translate it. How does it get translated into usable language and concepts that the media can use and tag onto? Who's doing it? Where is it being done? How is it being done? Number two, identify speakers because what's happening in the media now is the same people get identified to talk and that's one of the reasons why the women's movement gets identified as one monolithic thing. There are actually a number of speakers but we need to engage the*

---

<sup>1</sup>The following directives were given to the respective groups: "we'd like you to come back with one idea how you might make it work, how you might make it happen or at least get started. Secondly, who else would need to be involved? And thirdly, what kind of support would you need?" ...For the group focusing on the overview: "what are the gaps or the holes that we have identified yesterday and so far this morning or can identify in the 45 minutes. It's possible that we can't identify the gap because all of the people who need to be at that table aren't here. So, our screen doesn't see it. So who else needs to be involved? Who else needs to be at the table?"

media too. We need to make sure that they're connected to the media. Identification of trends... This was a critical piece, not everything's going to be interesting at the same time. There are trends and how then do you connect to the media. Tied to that is how do we make media ourselves? Example: what's going on in Quebec. The headlines today was not: "31 leaders meeting to talk about economics", it was "demonstrators disrupt Quebec meeting" (that's us!). Train[ing] women for media as well as building capacity within organizations. How do you do those two things together? Well, training capacity, this whole consortium, there has to be money into it. There has to be staffing. Not necessarily new organizations but some kind of staffing and some kind of structure that can be made available for this work that takes a lot of time. ...Winds of Change and... WFN ...[are] ...willing to coordinate this initial conference call." (Excerpt from transcript of the working group dated April 21, 2001.)

### **Action Items**

The Winds of Change Foundation and the Women's Funding Network are currently engaged in the background preparations necessary to insure the successful start of this initiative. We will be scheduling the first conference call for this coming Fall.

## **Direction # 2: GAPS AND HOLES IN FIELD OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

*"...We worked on the issue of gaps, knowledge about women and leadership and then who else would be at the table for these kinds of discussions working on issues of women in leadership. ...[B]ig concern: are women opting out? Are women not choosing [to enter leadership positions] (whatever level, whatever age, whatever community); do we need to take a cold hard look at that? Then one [question] that came up in the discussion [which was] very interesting...about the reverse effect of current role models of women leaders... In other words, for years and years and years we talked about women needing role models. And so now there are some women who are in positions you might think of them as role models and in the group the feeling was that in fact some of us who are role models are having an effect, the opposite of what we want. We're not attracting other people to follow but people looking at us and saying I don't need that life. I don't need the look on your face. So, the whole issue of how are role models working?" (Excerpt from transcript of the working group dated April 21, 2001.)*

### **Summary of Issues Raised:**

- "Opting out": Women might be opting out of leadership roles due to negative perceptions of women leadership experience. Role models are thus negated.
- Celebrate leadership experience: Share joys/pleasure of leadership experience as exemplary for younger leaders. Not just sharing the struggles.
- Reframe the issue of childcare. Sustained attention to limitations to women by "family." Are family issues limiting women's choices of leadership? Shifting discussion of childcare: moving the issue from "family" to "society."
- Response to Right Wing: New models of gender responsibility and new feminist models of education

- “Power”: discussion of concept and language.
- What are the different paradigms that will help raise the right issues and suggest solutions?

**Who’s missing from the discussion here:**

- Younger Women
- Women in formal positions of power in Lg. Institutions
- Women rep. New models/other successful experience of leadership (other countries)
- Women advancing women’s rights – foundation for democracy
- Politicians from community activist backgrounds, Legislators and lobbyists.
- Women leaders from diverse communities of color incorporated throughout all sectors
- Male Leaders incorporated throughout all sectors

**Action Items**

This group did not discuss strategy. In response to the focus that emerged, Winds of Change proposes the following:

In October 2001, Barnard College is hosting the “Millennium Summit: Women, Leadership and the Future.” The Barnard summit will “take stock of women’s changing role in the world and explore how best to fulfill the promise of full equality for future generations”. The summit is highlighting top-level positional women leaders. In response to the discussion that emerged from the working group, Winds of Change and the Ford Foundation are collaborating around the millennium summit to create a strategic convening for young women leaders (20-30 years old.) The issue groups we are currently considering so as to maximize the leverage from the summit include:

- Young leaders working in media for social change
- Emerging political leadership
- Leaders in the legal advocacy field

We will actively consider proposed agendas for the young women’s leadership summit and identification of individuals / organizations.

**OTHER IDEAS THAT EMERGED FROM THE WORKING GROUP**

The “Thinking Environment” established an incredibly rich context for creative ideas to emerge. Each participant drew from her personal expertise to explore possibilities for advancing women’s leadership and the changes it could create in society. Some of the ideas exchanged were as follows:

1. “Women’s Economic Project”: Using women’s economic power to influence social change for women’s leadership. The Book: write a book that helps women at large feel comfortable exercising financial and economic power; identifying ways economic power can be used to influence – both collectively and individually.
2. Building a strong women’s movement through:
  - Coordinating financial assets.
  - Connecting activists and academicians for coordination of efforts.

- Creating a directory of women leaders, which also identifies, young women leaders and women of color.
  - Establishing a collective effort of nominators and candidates for major awards (i.e., allocating staff to help identify candidates and fill out the numerous forms involved in the nomination process – as many who are in positions to nominate are too bogged down by their workload to effectively use that position).
  - Identifying and helping to run women candidates for office.
3. Create new inclusive language around feminism and women's leadership.
  4. Exploit the web; create a web ring.
  5. Expansion of any "working group": (need to include young women leaders and more women of color working on issues facing marginalized groups).
  6. Strategies that work included:
    - Using persistence and optimism, inside/outside alliances/collaborations
    - Solid data to advocate for equity
    - Building new institutions for women-oriented fields
    - Creating new language for the field
    - Supporting a multiethnic feminist environment that recognizes values and incorporates differences.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Based on our analysis of the weekend, and in keeping with our focus and goals, we are identifying and developing ways in which we can continue to best serve as a resource. (Dissemination of knowledge, sharing of resources, facilitating new connections, establishing an environment for creative thinking, identifying existing gaps through a broad spectrum....)

One of our primary goals as a foundation is the dissemination of knowledge towards social change. As such, Winds of Change is involved in preliminary discussions with the 3 Guineas Fund to explore the establishment of a web ring, and a singular location for database management which links to all the research that relates to "women in/and leadership".

### **The Winds of Change commitments for the coming year are:**

- Young Women's Leadership Summit (collaboration with Barnard College and The Ford Foundation).
- Hosting initial conference calls and assisting in establishing a national media consortium effort (collaboration with Women's Funding Network).
- Explore the establishment of a singular location for research coordination and knowledge dissemination (collaboration with 3 Guineas Fund).
- Issuing "Inside Women's Power: Learning from Leaders" joint report with the Wellesley Center for Research on Women.

- Exploring Radio series on “Women in Leadership”, leveraging the data/interviews collected in aforementioned report – highlighting the positive aspects of women’s success and accomplishments.
- Expanding our website and communication abilities so as to effectively serve as a beneficial source of information, facilitation and coordination.

## CONCLUSIONS

Winds of Change set out interested in learning if and how the Women in Leadership Working Group could serve as a network to inform and sustain the future of women’s leadership. Many individuals left inspired – giving one participant “a vision of the power available for women to reform society.” In the 90 seconds allotted to each participant, the responses were predominantly enthusiastic and positive; there were also a number of observations and thoughtful comments that emerged. We will briefly summarize the responses that emerged from the last round of reporting before the group dispersed.

We’ve identified some of the key points raised to serve as a basis for moving forward:

- Location and specific groups ...”I’m always interested in geography and how it fixes people to place so I think...one idea would be to have dinner table conversations that were geographically diverse with different women around these sets of issues...I think the dinner table was the epitome of that process actually working... I was thinking how you could really exercise locality...” playing off that was to create forums all over the country that would take place in different geographic locations and yet be coordinated efforts that can feed off and feed into each other.”
- A few would like to explore an issue-based forum for dialogue
- There seemed to be general agreement that the dialogues were stimulating, effective and creative, however in moving forward on any of the issues the constitution of the group must change. Several stated they would not like to meet with the same group again, however would like to remain involved with the process or at least continue to receive input from an ongoing similar process, which would continue to expand the groups that were brought to dialogue together.

We asked: What would you suggest as an effective format for pursuing and generating dialogues of this nature in the future? What will you, personally, take home from this weekend that will impact your work?

*The cross-fertilization aspect of the convening ...“broadened my awareness of the meaningful work being done in diverse ways... and enabled me to identify many resources and strategies that open up opportunities and provide information to women and girls.”*

*...”The small working groups...were enormously generative of exciting strategies... I think we have enough suggestions here... to really go forward on some of these issues...”*

*... "Would love to keep the conversation going...in a long term commitment to the discussion about women and leadership: cross country, cross sector, cross age groups, to keep a frank... candid and open conversation...over the long term"...*

*... "Having an open and ambiguous format has been fabulous. It's been generative and things have emerged that would not have emerged if we had a more structured format..."*

*... "Risk taking is a fine and wonderful mechanism for releasing energy and creativity. I think it's the only way that we really get to that..."*

*... "I feel I learned a lot to a degree that I cannot articulate. So I don't know how this is going to affect my work in the future. ...There were ideas I had here that I didn't start out having, and that's very valuable to me..."*

*... "I think what I take away is we really need to get women's funds together with researchers and start connecting up what our needs are for research that have practical applications"...*

*... "I loved the media task force, the web ring and the individual networks of people who are working on the same things that we are, that I know can enhance what we're doing and what you're doing, it's that cross-fertilization!"*

*... "The media consortium I think has a lot of promise in terms of having a group that comes together to do much more focused types of work..."*

*... "We've got to start thinking long term and big money...stop creating the processes that are making us do 'bake sales' and that's how funders work with organizations and vice versa..."*