

# Evaluation Matters: IWP Case Study on Learning



Author Emmy Pérez takes notes during a generative word exercise with the dancers in Cartagena, Colombia.

## THE EVALUATION

**Why:** This process evaluation examined how the program could better serve U.S. Embassies by determining why Embassies participate in the IWP, how the program helps meet Embassy mission goals, and how Embassies engage with IWP alumni.

**What:** The evaluation addressed the following four questions:

1. To what extent are Embassies aware of the IWP?
2. How can ECA and IWP better support the Embassies' use of the IWP?

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## THE PROGRAM

The ECA Evaluation Division conducted an evaluation of the International Writing Program (IWP). The IWP at the University of Iowa connects well-established writers from around the globe, brings international literature into American classrooms, introduces American writers to other cultures through reading tours, and serves as a clearinghouse for literary news and a wealth of archival and pedagogical materials. While the main focus of the IWP is its flagship Fall Residency program – in which established and emerging creative writers work on the production of new literary work while at the University of Iowa – there are other classes, tours, and programs: (1) Between the Lines (BTL), a summer exchange for teenage writers from the United States and overseas; (2) Lines & Spaces, reading tours and workshops abroad facilitated by American writers; and (3) Distance Learning Creative Writing Courses, online classes using digital platforms to develop the skills of writers around the world. Established in 1967, IWP has hosted more than 1,500 established foreign writers in residence from more than 150 countries. IWP has an annual program budget of \$740,000 to implement programming for ECA.

## KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Key findings and conclusions from the evaluation include:

- » **Program Implementation.** Embassy staff were highly satisfied with the IWP overall and the impact it had on participants. While they shared some administrative challenges, Embassies felt IWP was implemented well and reported positive relationships with ECA and the grantee staff. Areas for improvement included the need to create a better information flow between Embassies and ECA, decrease the burden of the application process, and increase clarity within participant selection.
- » **Alignment with Mission Goals.** IWP aligns well with Embassies' overall mission goals, in particular supporting non-state narratives and free expression in repressive contexts, as well as creating interpersonal relationships and strengthening literary culture.
- » **Additional Programming Requests.** Embassy staff expressed an appetite for more literary programming (especially youth-centric programming) and an expansion of the IWP to include other forms of expression such as graphic novels, hip hop verse, online content, and spoken word poetry.
- » **Alumni Engagement.** Embassy staff stressed the need for follow-up programming for IWP alumni through mentorship, online continuing



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## THE EVALUATION

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3. To what extent do Embassies believe IWP aligns with their broader Mission goals?
4. What follow-on activities do Embassies arrange post-program to encourage long-term engagement and multiplier effects?

**Who:** ECA's Evaluation Division worked in partnership with the District Communications Group (DCG) to conduct the evaluation.

**When:** August 2019 through January 2020

**How:** The Evaluation Team conducted in-depth interviews with University of Iowa staff, personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates representing a range of highly engaged and less engaged Embassies across five regions, and current and former IWP Fall Residency participants. The Evaluation Team also conducted an online global survey of all U.S. Embassies and Consulates.

**How Much:** \$55,849



American essayist Dr. Gerald Early speaks about nonfiction with women at the Akilah Institute in Kigali, Rwanda.

education programs, and the strengthening of existing alumni networks.

- » **Positive impacts on relationships with foreign officials.** In general, AFCP programming has had positive, but varied, impacts on the relationships between U.S. Embassy/Consulate staff and their national government counterparts. The extent of the impact, however, is not known definitively because of a lack of consistent data.

### INTEGRATING RECOMMENDATIONS

- » **Develop FAQ Documents.** ECA will add an FAQ page to the FY2021 solicitation as a new innovation for the next IWP grant cycle. This FAQ will help standardize and clarify the program guidance that U.S. Embassies receive about IWP, including areas such as: application standards, programming priorities and themes, and roles and responsibilities around alumni engagement.
- » **Expand Literary Offerings.** IWP has been working with ECA's Arts Envoy Team on a pilot program that introduced a new genre of creative writing courses to U.S. Embassies. IWP implemented four cohorts of virtual classes on Speculative Fiction/Science Fiction writing. ECA is hoping to add additional funding to the IWP FY21 grant to implement additional sections of this course with posts in French- and Arabic-speaking countries.
- » **Expand alumni follow-up programming.** IWP recently hosted the first BTL alumni event. It was a virtual workshop on Spoken Word - which included collaborating with another ECA grantee partner, Meridian International.
- » **Strengthen program monitoring and evaluation.** IWP is one of the programs piloting ECA's new Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework. The MODE Framework includes a standardized Bureau-wide Results Framework with goals, objectives and indicators designed to track program performance and the direction, pace, and magnitude of change for ECA programs, leading to strengthened feedback mechanisms resulting in more effective programs.