

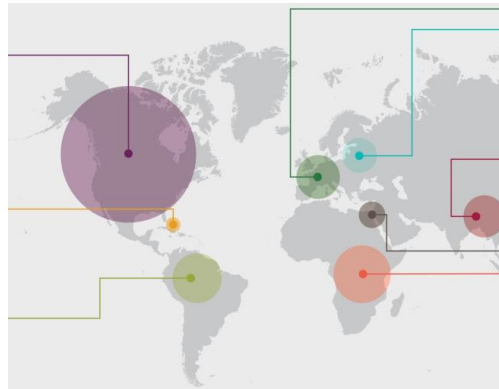


## IHRFG at 20

*By Sarah Tansey, Program Associate, Membership and Communications, IHRFG*  
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Happy new year, and happy anniversary! The International Human Rights Funders Group turns 20 in 2014. My own tenure with IHRFG has been comparatively brief. I joined the team in March 2013, after working with the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network in Washington, DC and then Project Vote Smart in Montana. Looking through IHRFG's archives, I'm struck by how our community of human rights grantmakers has changed over the past two decades – and yet how many themes have endured.

IHRFG has held dozens of conferences, telebriefings, and informal networking sessions since [it began in 1994](#). Questions of learning and evaluation are everywhere – indeed, they form the basis of [IHRFG's upcoming San Francisco institute in January 2014](#) – but they prove especially challenging when we look in the mirror. What can we learn from the trajectory of diverse issues IHRFG members have explored over the past 20 years?



We decided to go straight to the source. We dug up boxes of files, delved into our archives (both electronic and physical), and looked through agendas and newsletters from IHRFG in days of yore. In addition to cleaning up our folders – thereby checking one New Year's resolution off our list! – we gained a better picture of how our network has evolved.

IHRFG has grown from a small group of funders to a diverse, global community of grantmakers, expanding from 77 foundations and 114 individuals in 1999 – largely based in North America – to over 300 foundations and 1100 individuals based in 45 countries today. What jumps out from the pages of our “archives” is that our members continuously challenge one another to consider new areas and innovative funding strategies. While specific issues continue to emerge, I notice certain themes that crop up consistently.

As environmental issues have evolved, so has IHRFG members' exploration of them. Climate change, for example, was the subject of our [July 2008 conference](#) and our [recent institute](#) in New York. The focus has moved from a broad look at human rights and the environment in 2003 to examinations of specific issues last year such as [resource rights](#) and [fracking](#).

Another consistent theme has been grappling with providing support in conflict settings – a question which we will re-open in our [conference](#) later this month. The challenges of funding in transition contexts was the subject of a networking session back in 2003 on delivering help amid horrendous rights abuses, a [telebriefing in 2010](#), and it is the focus of a [recent report](#) from the Institute for Integrated

Transitions and the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, to be discussed at our conference.

Terrorism emerged as a theme within IHRFG soon after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. IHRFG members convened an education session on human rights in the aftermath of the attacks and have continued to explore its legacy through, for example, a 2005 conference session on funding rights with a “war (on terror) on,” our 2011 New York conference plenary entitled [Human Rights Philanthropy and the Ten-Year Legacy of 9/11: Where from Here?](#), and an [upcoming panel](#) at our San Francisco conference on civil liberties and national security surveillance.

Amid countless (and fascinating) specific issues, broader questions about the future of the human rights movement stood out to me as well. At our [closing plenary](#) in New York last July, members led a [lively discussion](#) of whether – in light of changing global dynamics – funding holds the greatest leverage with local grassroots organizations or traditional international NGOs. This builds on sessions dating back to 2004, when IHRFG looked at views from around the world on the direction of human rights efforts.

One question constantly reappears in these discussions: How can grantmakers best deploy funding to advance the human rights movement? IHRFG members may never stop asking this. From a 2001 session on collaborative funding models, to the release of [Advancing Human Rights: Knowledge Tools for Funders](#) and [upcoming plenaries](#) on engaging new actors and bi-lateral donors, IHRFG members continue to seek new ways to coordinate and support one another’s work.

This was my first archaeological dig, and it proved fascinating. At our conferences as well as in this *In Focus* section, we’ll continue to explore the last two and the next two decades of the human rights movement, human rights philanthropy, and the International Human Rights Funders Group. Twenty years of programs and resources have given me a glimpse into the amazing work of our members, along with broader shifts in the human rights and philanthropic fields. So from a relatively new face in the network: thank you! I’m eager to see what lies ahead.

*What else stands out from the past two decades? What do you foresee for the next two? Share your thoughts at [#IHRFGat20](#) or on [IHRFG’s blog](#).*