

Project Report on Leadership Placement with Future Advocacy

Summer II Leadership-in-Action Report

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Introduction

In my second summer as a Laidlaw scholar, I undertook a Leadership-in-Action placement with Future Advocacy, spending four weeks in Brussels, Belgium and two weeks in London, England. The placement took the form of an independent leadership project and spanned from May 6 to June 14, 2024. Future Advocacy is a non-partisan agency that employs expertise in campaigning, research, and communications to support non-governmental organisations and social movements in creating positive change. Future Advocacy works on a diversity of issues and sectors, including child protection, men's health, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the agency operates across the advocacy lifecycle, from narrative building to government lobbying to post-campaign evaluation. My Leadership-in-Action placement came on the heels of my Summer I research report entitled *Evaluating Olympic Sustainability through the Policy of Paris 2024*. This research experience affirmed my interest in pursuing a Leadership-in-Action placement generally in the field of sustainability (environmental or otherwise). My placement with Future Advocacy allowed for the continuation of this while also complimenting my personal background in advocacy and diversifying the issue areas on which I worked. The present report offers a review of the week-by-week work I completed as a volunteer with Future Advocacy and the progress I made in creating lasting change via my SMART goals.

Project Timeline

Week One

I began my work with Future Advocacy on Monday, May 6 in the organization's Brussels (EU) office. My first week of work was primarily dedicated to familiarizing myself with the organization's people and culture as well as the organization's portfolio of projects. In line with

the former objective, I arranged one-on-one meetings with the organization's eight employees spread across the Brussels and London offices. I used these meetings to get acquainted with my new colleagues and the work they oversaw (from research assistant to campaigns manager to human resources officer). I also received a debrief on Future Advocacy as a whole, learning about the organizational structure, its objectives and key results, its branding, and its "secret sauce"—an advocacy playbook. In line with the latter objective, I read through project proposals and briefings for the various campaigns that Future Advocacy had been working on in the lead-up to my placement with them. These projects included: a European Union campaign on virtual child sexual abuse materials; a foreign policy research project anchored on Africa's Sahel region; a training program for a water rights organization; and a government lobbying project concerning investment in data systems. Following my orientation, I began working on the Sahel foreign policy project, conducting desk research on the feminist foreign policies of several donor countries, including Canada, Luxembourg, France, and Germany. The project had been commissioned by women's rights activists from the Sahel region of Africa who sought Future Advocacy's support in encapsulating the current policy landscape in order to strengthen their government advocacy.

My first week of work was challenging as it accompanied a new living environment, new people, new linguistic setting, and long distance travel. I received immediate support from my coworkers in combating these challenges, who devoted time in the first week to supporting my transition to Brussels. A highlight of the week was my attendance at an informative panel and networking event hosted by Meta concerning the EU's regulation of online child sexual abuse materials. During the event, I spoke to European parliamentarians, tech executives, and NGO leaders about the legislation's political journey thus far.

Week Two

My second week with Future Advocacy (Brussels office) saw a deeper dive on three of the organization's projects to which I would devote the majority of the rest of my placement: 1) the EU child sexual abuse regulation, 2) the Sahel region report, and 3) the Artificial Intelligence advocacy training module. Firstly, I began to attend meetings as a representative of Future Advocacy within a broader coalition of organization's working towards the EU child sexual abuse regulation. One such meeting included a coalition policy briefing on the impact of AI on child sexual abuse materials. Additionally, I undertook a legal research assignment in which I reviewed EU regulations to determine possible pathways for the regulation to be amended. To support this research, I visited the Parliamentarium, the European Parliament's visitor centre and museum. Secondly, I continued and completed my desk research on the feminist foreign policies of donor countries for the Sahel region project. I reviewed English and French government publications to assess the ambition, scope, and on-the-ground progress of these countries' foreign policies, with particular attention paid to the Sahel region. I compiled my findings into a note-taking document and spreadsheet that would form the basis for a chapter of the project report. Furthermore, I attended an InfoPoint Conference hosted by the European Commission titled "Promoting public and private sector dialogue for digital financial inclusion" to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Sahelian countries. Thirdly, I attended various team brainstorming sessions to commence work on a training module for how to incorporate Artificial Intelligence into advocacy. I was assigned to the visual content generation portion of the training and began to explore possible tools in this area, including Canva AI, OpenAi, invideo AI, deepai, and ChatGPT. I then began to develop an internal report of the features of these content generation tools and their potential utility for advocacy work. As someone with no

previous experience in the AI space, this was an illuminating and challenging task that fell well outside my comfort zone.

Week Three

In my third week at Future Advocacy (Brussels office), I worked primarily on two projects: 1) the Sahel region report and 2) the Artificial Intelligence advocacy training module. Firstly, having completed the desk research on donor countries, I pivoted to research the on-the-ground realities of the Sahel region countries. I focused this research on the general economic situation, the general political situation, and the standing of women and girls. I found that many of the Sahel countries faced similar struggles of political unrest (namely coups), rising poverty, and poor outcomes for women and girls as a result. I completed research briefings for Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, and Mali. Secondly, I made significant progress on my assigned portion of the AI training module. I completed my report of the various content generation tools and presented it to the wider team for feedback. Ultimately, I decided to move forward with Canva AI and Runway AI as the two main content generation tools. I then downloaded these tools to familiarize myself with the technologies and began to prepare demo advocacy materials for the training. In an intersection of these two projects, I was tasked by the Sahel project manager to find and test an AI tool for multilingual interview transcription. I concluded that tl;dv was the best software for reliable English and French meeting transcription services and provided training to my team members on how to employ the tool. At the end of the third week, I met with my supervisor to conduct a deeper dive on the progress I had made to achieve the objectives set for my placement. Out of this reflection, I decided to seek out more opportunities from Future Advocacy's London-based employees to support their projects and began to turn my

attention to some non-project-based work, including preparing for the upcoming Campaign Exchange event and brainstorming for a blog post on the organization's website.

Week Four

In my fourth week at Future Advocacy (Brussels office), I devoted most of my time to two projects and one event: 1) the EU child sexual abuse regulation, 2) the Sahel region report, and 3) the Campaign Exchange. Firstly, I attended and helped moderate two days of workshops for the broader coalition working on the EU child sexual abuse regulation. The workshops enlisted outside expertise to provide training on crisis communications and narrative building for campaigns. I contributed both to the exercises of the workshops and as a note-taker. The workshops were a fascinating glimpse into how to use framing, media relations, and storytelling to push for greater protection of children on the internet. Secondly, I moved onto the final phase of my work on the Sahel region report by prepping for and shadowing interviews with local activists of the Sahel region. I was tasked with creating interviewee briefs for 11 activists, outlining their personal biographies and the focus of the organizations to which they were affiliated. After taking notes in these interviews, I then summarized the key points brought forward by each of these activists. These briefs formed the basis for the final section of the Sahel region report that emphasized local knowledge and input. Thirdly, I assisted in the logistics of the Campaign Exchange, an event hosted by Future Advocacy to bring together Brussels-based campaigners from a wide variety of issue areas to share knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned. The event featured four presentations from local and EU-level campaigns and was a highly informative glimpse into advocacy for social change. It was followed by a networking event where I had the chance to speak to many talented campaigners. The end of the fourth week concluded my time in Brussels and so I made the preparations to relocate to London, England.

Week Five

My fifth week at Future Advocacy (London office) began with an introduction to the city of London, including trips to the major landmarks and museums. I made the decision to spend time at the London office in addition to the Brussels office in order to work in-person with the coworkers who oversaw the AI advocacy training module. I was exposed yet again to the challenges of settling into a new city but I benefited greatly from experiences and connections unique to London. Following my orientation to the London team and London office, I worked primarily on 1) the Artificial Intelligence advocacy training module and 2) a blog for the Future Advocacy website. Firstly, I took the research and hands-on experience I had built with the AI tools to develop a 35-slide training presentation on using AI image and video content generation to support advocacy. I then developed a speaker's guide to accompany each slide of the presentation, expanding on the slide's content in order to equip my coworkers to present the slides themselves. These two products were the culmination of my five weeks of work on the AI advocacy training. Secondly, I drafted a blog for the Future Advocacy website regarding the previous week's Campaign Exchange. The blog summarized the presentations of the event's four speakers to synthesize five takeaways for how to run an effective campaign. The five takeaways were: 1) there is no easy disruption to the status quo, 2) compromise is a difficult but necessary tool, 3) versatility is your strength, 4) don't get ambushed by your opposition, and 5) we really are stronger together. The blog was published on the Future Advocacy website on July 5.

Week Six

My sixth week at Future Advocacy (London office) was dedicated to tying up my six weeks of work and focused on three items: 1) the Artificial Intelligence advocacy training module, 2) an African campaign for safe and effective medicines, and 3) chairing a team

meeting. Firstly, I conducted a run-through of my AI advocacy training module for a test audience of campaigners. I presented the slideshow I had created using my speaker's guide and performed a live demonstration of the AI image and video tools I had selected. Afterwards, I fielded questions from my coworkers to ensure that they had full knowledge of my work and felt confident to eventually present it themselves. Secondly, I stepped in for a coworker to develop the messaging materials for a campaign promoting safe and effective medicines in Africa. This work included cataloguing stories from news articles of victims of unsafe or ineffective medicines, collecting and reformulating powerful statistics to be used in the campaign, and synthesizing possible messaging angles into a presentation for the client. I then had the opportunity to meet with the client and learn about their advocacy for the health and safety of Africans across the continent. Thirdly, I undertook the responsibility of chairing the weekly team meeting. I began the meeting with a presentation on my advocacy background in the Fridays For Future movement, how that compared to my work with Future Advocacy, and the lessons I would offer the organization upon my departure. I then maintained the agenda for the rest of the team meeting. At the end of the meeting, I made my preparations to bid farewell to the Future Advocacy team and to finish my LiA placement.

Objectives & Achievements

SMART Goal One

Create a one-hour workshop on the use of Artificial Intelligence for sustainable development campaigns – I will work with my supervisors in the organization to catch up on their existing work, survey work being done by organizations around the world, assess the needs of NGOs through interpersonal connections, and then develop and present a workshop that will empower these organizations.

I was successful in creating a one-hour workshop segment on the use of Artificial Intelligence for content generation as a tool of advocacy and campaigning. I proved capable of filling knowledge gaps among the Future Advocacy employees who did not have significant previous experience with content generation tools. In the end, I created an elaborate powerpoint presentation and a detailed speaker's guide that will enable Future Advocacy to offer this workshop going forward into the future. I am confident that this product will enable non-governmental organizations, charities, and grassroots social movements to better employ cutting-edge visual content to advance their advocacy goals.

SMART Goal Two

Employ my experience in advocacy, research, and campaigning to support 3+ NGOs and gain a greater understanding of the causes they work on – I will plug into the existing support offered by Future Advocacy to at least 3 of their organizations to employ my skills and to take an in-depth dive into the causes of focus (including men's health, child protection, and sustainable development data).

I successfully employed my experience in advocacy, research, and campaigning to support 5 NGOs. To the Sahel region campaign, I employed my research and communication skills to provide briefs on donor countries, Sahel countries, and interviewees. To the EU child sexual abuse materials campaign, I employed a wide variety of capacities to fill the gaps of the organization, including legal research, note-taking, and networking. To the African campaign for safe medicines, I called upon my background in media and communications to build out messaging materials. Finally, I supported Future Advocacy's work with a water rights charity and a men's health charity to complete small tasks (developing a resource guide and editing a report) as needed. One of the most enriching components of my experience was the opportunity

to work in issue areas for which I had little to no expertise, using my skills and background to gain in-depth understanding.

SMART Goal Three

Inspire lasting benefits for these organizations and their methods of campaigning – I will develop and maintain relationships with the organizations before/during/after the workshop, personalize my work to the real needs of these groups and to the resources that already exist, and solicit feedback on the workshop to determine areas for future improvement in the years-long project.

From the beginning, I set out to ensure I was creating a lasting impact at Future Advocacy by outlining goals with my LiA supervisor (found below). My supervisor and I agreed that the completion of these goals would translate to such lasting impact. During the six week placement, I arranged 30 minute check-ins with my supervisor every Thursday to provide and receive feedback on my work. On week 3 and week 6, these check-ins were extended to 60 minutes in order to go more in-depth on this feedback. I am confident in the lasting relationship I have forged with Future Advocacy as the organization has commissioned me to continue working with them in August and September (separate to my LiA placement).

Additional Goals Set with LiA Supervisor

Following the meeting with my LiA supervisor at the end of my six-week placement, we agreed that I had successfully achieved the following goals set on my first day with Future Advocacy:

- Gain a strong understanding of how to do impactful advocacy;
- Gain an understanding of the breadth of Future Advocacy's work;
- Chair a Future Advocacy team meeting;
- Attend a networking event/moment;
- Develop a piece of research for a project;

- Develop a piece of research for Future Advocacy internal use;
- Draft an article for blog;
- Shadow project meetings.

Conclusion

Six weeks, eight coworkers, two offices, five NGO clients, and innumerable lessons in leadership. My Leadership-in-Action placement with Future Advocacy was an immeasurably rewarding experience in which I built personal and professional competencies and delivered real-world impact in a handful of issue areas. I am very proud to have worked for and learned from underserved communities—I promoted policy protection for victims of child sexual abuse materials across Europe, empowered the lobbying efforts of grassroots women’s rights activists in the Sahel region, and amplified the stories of those advocating for safe and effective medicines in Africa. At each step along the way, I gained new perspectives from novel and challenging environments. I bolstered my advocacy, messaging, communications, research, and interpersonal skills. I learned the ins and outs of European Union and United Kingdom political institutions. I heard from powerful voices leading the charge for children’s rights, men’s health, water access, and a great plethora of other issue areas. I would like to thank Future Advocacy as a whole for investing in my growth and welcoming me so warmly to their team. I would like to extend particular gratitude to the organization’s Founder and Director Olly Buston and to my LiA supervisor, the Senior Advocacy and Campaigns Consultant Iona Cable. Finally, thank you to the Laidlaw Foundation and the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Program for providing the material and personal support needed to enjoy this experience so fully.