

# **AVAC ADVOCACY FELLOWS PROGRAM - An Evaluation: 2009 – 2019**

## ***Abridged Executive Summary – October 2020***

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AVAC commissioned an independent evaluation of the Advocacy Fellows program by Tayler Associates: *AVAC ADVOCACY FELLOWS PROGRAM - An Evaluation: 2009 – 2019*. This brief report serves as an abridged version of the Executive Summary of the Final Evaluation Report (pages 5-12). It includes the Key Findings section of the Executive Summary in its entirety with a summary of the background and methodology. Please see the full report and appendices for all details.

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## **BACKGROUND**

The AVAC Advocacy Fellows Program was founded in 2009. In the subsequent decade, there have been ten cadres of Advocacy Fellows with a total of 77 Fellows from 14 countries, the vast majority of whom have been selected from East and Southern Africa. The objectives of the program are:

- To accelerate research to rollout of proven new HIV prevention options to policy and implementation so as to help people access options to reduce HIV infections
- To nurture and expand the pool of ‘fearless’ HIV prevention advocates willing to engage with the research, influence policy, watchdog, capitalize on funding, ensure community voices are heard
- To create synergies between advocates and communities nationally and internationally to ensure that the global HIV prevention reflects community and national priorities

### **Evaluation Purpose**

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the impact and contributions – both intended and unintended – that the AVAC Advocacy Fellows Program has had on HIV prevention in the Fellows’ countries and communities, in order to consider whether the Fellowship is achieving its objectives and provide recommendations that help guide decisions for the future of the Program.

### **Scope, Design and Methodology**

The evaluation was undertaken between March and September 2020 and engaged the Alumni body and Host organizations in all 14 countries where they originate. It also targeted Fellowship decision-makers and implementers by engaging with AVAC staff, board members, advisors and donors. In the four case study countries – Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe – evaluators spoke with Alumni, their Host organizations and key stakeholders (as identified by AVAC and evaluation participants). Full details of scope, design, methodology, data, limitations and case studies are all included in the report or appendices.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

The findings of the evaluation reflect a huge body of data with 100s of data points and interview notes taken during 30 hours of interviews. They reveal the views of the various stakeholders over the life of the program.

### **Evaluation Question 1:**

#### **What was the Alumni and Host experience of the fellowship?**

Overall, the Fellowship experience meets Fellows’ expectations, the Program is beneficial to both Hosts and Fellows and the mentoring from AVAC stands out as a highlight.

Participants viewed the Fellowship Program as beneficial. In particular, the biggest takeaways for Fellows when assessing the value of the Fellowship are the financial support they receive; the access they get to key meetings/decision makers and the technical support they receive from AVAC. Hosts and Fellows concur that the project the Fellow carries out during their Fellowship year influences both the Host organisation and the wider HIV environment in each country. However, there were widely differing experiences of the Fellowship and this was largely attributed to challenges in the relationship with the Host Organisation. This relationship was seen to make or break the Fellowship experience. The feedback provided also raised some considerations regarding the programmatic approach which outlined some questions for AVAC to consider.

### **Evaluation Question 2:**

#### **What have been the long-term impacts of the Fellows Programme on its Alumni?**

Valuable connections brought about by new or extended networks and increased networking and communication skills were identified as the most common and profitable long-term benefit for Alumni.

The majority of respondents have experienced ongoing professional successes in the field of advocacy which they attribute, in part, to the knowledge and skills they developed, the support they received from AVAC and Host organizations and networks they accessed through the Fellowship. There was a much wider disparity in experience and in satisfaction with ongoing relationships which points to AVAC needing to promote Alumni partnership in the Fellowship Program to a greater extent.

### **Evaluation Question 3:**

#### **How has the program enabled alumni to contribute to long-term impacts at the organizational and community levels (both at host organizations and at organizations alumni have worked at post-fellowship)?**

The approach the Fellowship program takes has enabled Fellows to influence outcomes at organizational and community levels.

Impacts were enabled in three ways:

1. The foundational work that AVAC does through mentorship improves Fellows' confidence, ambition, scientific knowledge and technical abilities.
2. The Fellow's actual project activities shape organizational agendas which, in turn, affects communities and national priorities.
3. The link to AVAC provides recognition, legitimacy and access (specifically to AVAC networks) which allows Fellows to carry out their projects successfully.

### **Evaluation Question 4:**

#### **What contributions to the HIV prevention landscape have alumni made as a result of their Fellowship opportunity?**

Alumni perceive that they had contributed to a variety of changes to the HIV prevention landscape in their home countries.

The HIV landscapes in each country considered have certainly undergone momentous changes during the decade of the Fellowship Program. Although it is problematic to attribute these significant changes directly to the Program, there are certainly clear cases of contribution, including the Ugandan and Kenyan case studies. Overall, the activities of the Fellowship can be seen to support an enabling environment for the development of HIV treatment, care and prevention.

Country changes were confirmed by referencing evidence provided by public sources, such as Avert.org.

### **Evaluation Question 5: What is the future direction of the Fellowship Program?**

The evaluation confirmed that whilst the Program remains relevant in every country, there are areas for consideration and a number of recommendations for future Program implementation, which were grouped by common theme. The strongest calls were for:

1. Increased Alumni engagement and support: Alumni represent an unrealized potential and could play an essential role in fulfilling program objectives by:
  - a) Formally including Alumni in the selection and support of new Fellows
  - b) Ensuring AVAC initiates and continues to engage with Alumni equally and transparently post-Fellowship
  - c) Assisting and supporting Alumni to formally work together in networks and coalitions
2. Improved Host engagement: Possible changes to the Host approach need to be considered, including how the Host is engaged by AVAC, how communication between all the partners takes place, and how the Fellow fits into the Host organization or the Host 'buys in' to the Fellowship.

There were several other recommendations concerning management of the Fellowship project itself, Fellow selection into the Program, strategy and coordination within the local context, the scope of the Fellowship, Host-related considerations, and issues brought out through the Case Studies.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The AVAC Advocacy Fellows Program is beneficial to participants, and has durable impacts on the Fellow, both personally and professionally. By influencing the Fellow at a personal level, the Fellowship contributes to changes in the HIV landscape at organizational, community and national levels. The Fellowship Program therefore remains relevant in all countries of operation but should take on certain recommendations in order to build on the significant gains already evidenced and increase its effectiveness in each context.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Evaluators concluded that the program had many reputable achievements in its first decade, but that there remained opportunities in all the countries AVAC currently works to continue or advance the program by updating its design in several ways:

1. Promoting Alumni partnership in the Fellowship Program
2. Enhancing the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework
3. Integrating the Fellowship into national agendas and frameworks
4. Promoting Host partnerships in the Fellowship Program
5. Supporting Post-Fellowship Development
6. Increasing Transparency
7. Enhancing Project Management

*Note: Recommendation details are found in the full report on page 77*

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