



# Meaningful Refugee Participation Index Verification Report Score and Recommendations

Self-assessment report for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation  
completed by the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR)

# **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**

## **Meaningful Refugee Participation Index**

### **Verification Report**

#### **Score and Recommendations**

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## Executive Summary

The Meaningful Refugee Participation Index (MRPI) is an innovative self-assessment framework developed to measure the inclusion of refugees and displaced persons in an organization's policies, programs, and decision-making processes. This report evaluates the self-assessment completed by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Refugees initiative team, critically assessing their compliance across five main categories and offering strategic recommendations.

The findings highlight significant opportunities for improvement in integrating refugee voices into organizational frameworks and philanthropic initiatives. Immediate and mid-term recommendations aim to bridge identified gaps and foster sustainable, inclusive practices.

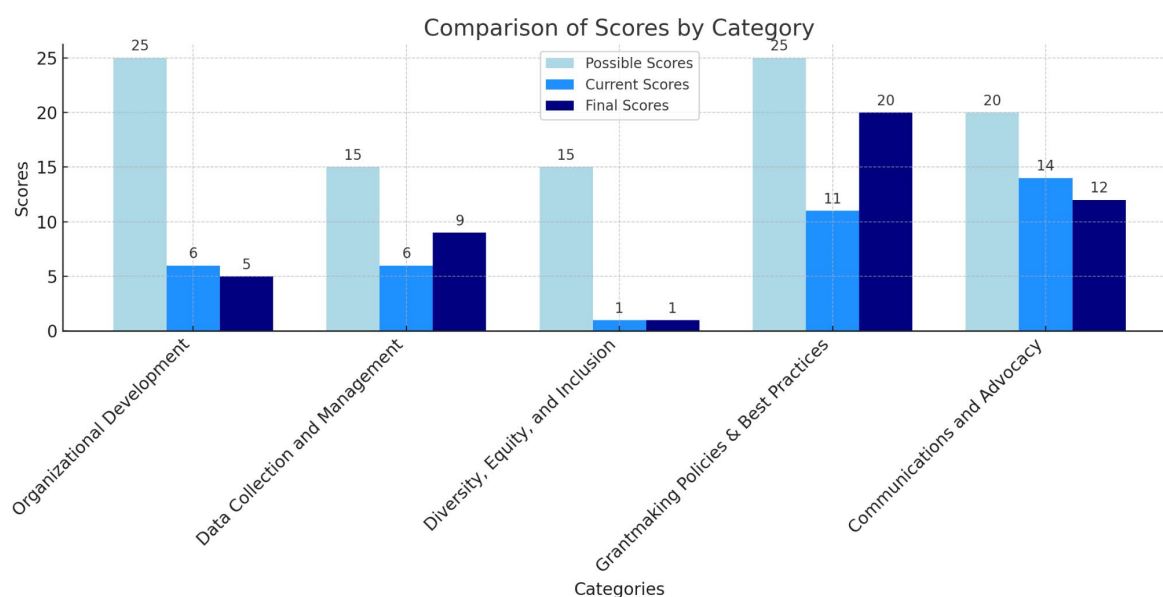


Figure 1: Overview of the Hilton Foundation's scores

**Final Scoring:** The Hilton Foundation achieved **47 out of 100 points**, demonstrating notable strengths in Grantmaking Policies (20/25 points) and Communications and Advocacy (12/20 points). These scores reflect the Foundation's ability to implement structured, tangible processes, such as flexible funding models and public advocacy efforts. However, significant gaps remain in areas like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (1/15 points) and Organizational Development (5/25 points), which require strategic focus and resource allocation to align more closely with MRPI criteria

## Key Findings

Starting with the key findings is essential for analyzing the score achieved. This analysis can identify the areas where the Hilton Foundation demonstrates its greatest strengths and, more importantly, pinpoint growth opportunities.

This approach will support the Foundation in becoming a philanthropic organization that prioritizes and centers the refugee communities it serves, with a clear and strategic view of

what is needed and what tangible actions can help fill existing gaps. will translate into a higher score the next time the self-assessment tool is utilized.

Here are the five key findings after the analysis across the five categories:

**Broad Engagement Yet Limited Depth:** While the Foundation has scored high in two categories, there are also areas where the score is minimal. This indicates a clear intent to ensure meaningful refugee participation, but institutional barriers hinder progress in achieving this goal.

When contrasted with interviews conducted with organizations supported by the Foundation, most recognize the Foundation as a flexible donor that prioritizes the expressed needs of the communities it supports. They highlight that the Foundation avoids imposing its agenda—valuable and positive traits when establishing an equitable partnership.

- **Example:** While some strategic plans include refugee-related objectives, clear execution frameworks remain underdeveloped. We can look at category one organizational development, where no institutionalized processes are in place yet, or the Strategic plan does not include the standards for Refugee Participation.

**1. Diversity and Equity Challenges:** Scoring **1/15 points**, the Foundation's efforts in DEI highlight good intention, but reveal the limited representation of individuals with lived refugee experience in leadership roles.

When we examine DEI, it emerges as one of the areas with the most significant potential for growth. While DEI is a well-established narrative in the United States of America, emphasized across nonprofits and large corporations alike, its focus is often on racialized individuals, members of the LGBTQ+ community, women, and other marginalized groups. However, there is a lack of an intersectional perspective that considers these identities in combination with the experiences of being a refugee, asylum seeker, or internally displaced person.

Using this intersectional approach across the Foundation, and not only within the Refugees initiative, will allow the Foundation to quickly obtain the points that this category offers but also will enable:

- The recognition of the overlapping identities of refugees—such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and displacement status—ensures that strategies address the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities.
- Increased representation, including individuals with lived refugee experience in leadership and decision-making roles, fosters more authentic and relevant policies that better address community needs. This will later be translated into enhanced Community Trust. Building a visible commitment to DEI creates trust with refugee communities as they see their realities and voices reflected in organizational priorities and actions.

By integrating a DEI perspective with a focus on intersectionality, organizations like the Foundation can strengthen their role as inclusive leaders, advancing equity while effectively addressing the needs of refugee communities.

- 2. Data Utilization Gaps:** With a score of **9/15 points**, data practices need better alignment with refugee priorities.

While the scores from the first two items in the Data category are very high, there is room for improvement in the remaining items, particularly in Monitoring and Evaluation. During interviews with partners, we observed that while they value the flexibility of the funding, they find the reporting process burdensome and, at times, complex. This feedback highlights an opportunity to streamline reporting requirements to more effectively align with partner capacities and needs.

**“It seems to me that they are the only donor whose discourse goes hand-in-hand with their actions (in terms of participatory approach).”**

**“They can do better in making parameters for their beneficiaries and that we know what things are flexible and what things are not (about flexibility regarding the projects).”**

#### **- Refugiados Unidos**

We also believe the Foundation would benefit from continuing to implement monitoring processes with external support from refugee-led organizations on how to incorporate specific indicators in grantees reports and propose new modalities in the reporting process, among other solutions. Such initiatives would provide expert guidance to help the organization further develop its capabilities and strengthen its position as a philanthropic leader working with refugees.

- 3. Flexible Grantmaking Processes:** Achieving **20/25 points**, the Foundation’s grant structures demonstrate strong progress and room for flexibility and innovation to empower Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs).

This high score reflects the organization’s strengths in implementing multi-year funding agreements and forming equal partnerships with RLOs. These approaches provide stability and autonomy for RLOs to address dynamic challenges effectively.

Expanding these efforts to include unregistered RLOs and increasing participatory decision-making could help close the remaining gaps. Unregistered RLOs often play vital roles in refugee communities, but face significant obstacles in accessing funding due to their lack of formal status. Expanding funding mechanisms to accommodate these organizations demonstrates a commitment to equity and inclusivity, ensuring grassroots initiatives are supported regardless of bureaucratic barriers. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that the Foundation could work as a convening partner in the territories where they support more than one RLO, facilitating dialogue among them to find ways to work together.

There is also an excellent opportunity to strengthen participatory decision-making. For example, advisory panels comprising individuals with lived experience could be formed. RLO representatives could be involved in grantmaking committees to foster transparency and shared accountability and reduce the power imbalances between donors and recipients.

By adopting these strategies, the Foundation can not only address existing gaps but also pioneer a transformative funding and decision-making model that genuinely centers on refugee-led solutions.

- 4. Inconsistent Advocacy and Communication:** The Foundation's advocacy for refugee priorities scores **12/20** points. Public support for refugee-led initiatives could be amplified by establishing and publicizing a detailed advocacy plan that outlines how it is aligned with refugee priorities as well as the Refugees Initiative's objectives. The plan should include clear goals, targeted messaging, and measurable outcomes.

There's also an opportunity to leverage digital and social media. Digital platforms could be utilized to highlight refugee stories, advocate for systemic change, and mobilize public support. This could serve as a channel to reach diverse audiences and raise awareness in a global context where the refugee community is targeted and instrumentalized by anti-rights movements

Successful efforts include the organization's participation in global advocacy platforms and strategic public endorsements of refugee-led initiatives. Expanding these efforts by increasing visibility in international forums and strengthening partnerships with refugee advocacy groups could significantly impact the Foundation's role as a leading voice for refugee support.

Not less important is cross-sector collaboration, where the Foundation could build alliances with other philanthropic organizations, corporations, and international agencies to advocate collectively for refugee priorities, amplify advocacy efforts, pool resources, and broaden reach.

By implementing these actions, the Foundation can enhance the consistency and reach of its advocacy and communication efforts, solidifying its position as a leader in championing refugee priorities.

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## Findings Per Criterion

This chapter provides an overview of the analysis conducted to identify each category's main strengths and weaknesses. To achieve this, we considered each item, its verification source, the information provided by partners, and our qualitative analysis. This approach allowed us to identify trends that shaped the key findings.

## *Analysis methodology*

- **Document Review:** Strategic plans, governance structures, and budgetary reports were analyzed to assess alignment with MRPI standards.
- **Partner Feedback:** Interviews and surveys with a total of 6 different partner organizations provided qualitative insights into how the Foundation's efforts are perceived on the ground.
- **Verification Sources:** Each item's validity was cross-referenced with supporting evidence, such as meeting minutes, training attendance records, and budgetary breakdowns.
- **Trend Identification:** Combining the above data allowed us to identify patterns and trends that informed the classification of strengths and weaknesses in the Organizational Development category.

This comprehensive approach ensures the findings are evidence-based and reflect the Foundation's current state.

### **1. Organizational Development (Achieved 5/25 points)**

#### **Strengths:**

- **Clear Strategic Inclusion of Refugee-Related Priorities:**

This strength was identified by reviewing organizational documents, including strategic plans and mission statements. These plans explicitly reference the importance of refugee participation and include objectives addressing refugee-specific challenges.

Additionally, feedback from partners highlighted that the Foundation emphasizes the inclusion of refugee voices in its broader strategic vision, reflecting alignment with its philanthropic goals.

- **Training Programs Addressing Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Practices:**

This strength was found in records of training programs offered to staff and stakeholders. These programs included modules on diversity, equity, and anti-discrimination, aiming to foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

Partners acknowledged the value of these initiatives, stating that they contribute to greater awareness and sensitivity toward refugee issues among foundation staff and collaborators.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- **Limited direct refugee involvement in governance structures:**

A review of governance frameworks and board compositions identified this weakness. The analysis revealed minimal representation of individuals with lived refugee experience in decision-making roles, indicating a gap in empowering refugee voices at the leadership level.

Interviews with partners further reinforced this observation, with several expressing the need for more inclusive governance practices that allow refugees to shape policies and programs actively.

- Insufficient allocation of financial resources (<5% in many cases) for refugee-focused programs:

Financial documents and budgetary allocations indicated that less than 5% of the Foundation's total resources were directed toward refugee-focused programs, which falls short of the best practices recommended by the MRPI.

Partners highlighted this as a challenge, suggesting that more resources must be allocated to achieve meaningful outcomes for refugee communities.

## **2. Data Collection and Management (Achieved 9/15 points)**

### **Strengths:**

- Systematic data collection to inform programmatic decisions:

This strength was identified through an analysis of data management practices. The Foundation has established systems for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from partners and funded programs.

Partners reported that this systematic approach provides a solid foundation for decision-making and enables adaptive strategies based on real-world outcomes. Evidence includes survey tools, partner reporting templates, and case studies demonstrating how data has informed program adjustments.

- Budgetary transparency efforts:

The budgetary documents reviewed showed clear tagging of refugee participation, leadership, and inclusion expenditures. These practices demonstrate the Foundation's commitment to transparency and accountability in resource allocation.

Partners noted the foundation's openness in sharing financial data, such as sharing the budget amounts, which fosters trust and collaboration. Verification sources include shared budget reports and financial disclosures related to funded initiatives.

### **Weaknesses:**

- External monitoring processes are inconsistently implemented:

The review of external monitoring frameworks revealed variability in their application. While some programs had third-party evaluations, others relied solely on internal assessments, leading to inconsistent oversight and feedback quality.

Interviews with partners highlighted this as a challenge, with some expressing the need for more objective, independent evaluations to ensure compliance with refugee participation standards and identify improvement areas.



**“It would add to the organization (Hilton Foundation) to have people with lived experience as refugees or migrants as part of their decision-making processes.”**

-Juntos se Puede

- Refugee input is underutilized in shaping the Refugee initiative’s strategic objectives.

Analysis of partner feedback and program reviews indicated that while refugee concerns are collected, their integration into strategic planning remains limited. Refugees are often consulted, but their priorities do not always translate into actionable objectives or program adjustments.

This gap was reinforced by partners who suggested that more structured mechanisms for incorporating refugee perspectives into strategic decision-making are needed. Evidence includes limited reference to refugee input in strategic documents and a lack of formalized channels for continuous refugee engagement.

This mechanism could look like a sounding board of people with lived experiences, or partnering with an organization such as APNOR for constant feedback in the Foundation’s refugee program processes.

### **3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Workplace (Achieved 1/15 points)**

#### **Strengths:**

- Recruitment efforts aimed at workforce diversification:

This strength was identified through a review of hiring practices and partner feedback. The Foundation has implemented efforts to diversify its workforce by encouraging applications from underrepresented groups and creating pathways for inclusion in its hiring processes.

- Evidence supporting this includes job postings explicitly inviting individuals from diverse backgrounds to apply and reports showing incremental increases in workforce diversity metrics.
- DEI training programs are widely implemented.

The Foundation has established regular DEI training sessions for employees to raise awareness and foster inclusivity within the workplace.

Verification sources include training attendance records, session content, and employee feedback, highlighting the perceived value of these programs in promoting a more inclusive environment.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Scarce senior-level refugee representation:

An analysis of organizational structures revealed that individuals with lived refugee experience are minimally represented in senior and decision-making roles. This indicates a significant gap in elevating refugee voices to positions of influence within the organization.

Interviews with partners and stakeholders echoed this observation, emphasizing that leadership representation is critical for driving meaningful change and ensuring strategies are grounded in real-world refugee experiences.

- Limited support systems addressing the unique challenges of refugee employees:

The review of workplace policies and feedback from employees highlighted a lack of targeted support systems for refugee staff, such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, or resources addressing specific barriers like language skills or legal status complexities.

Partners noted that while the Foundation promotes diversity broadly, it has yet to address the intersectional challenges faced by employees who are also refugees. This gap hinders their ability to fully integrate and thrive within the organization.

#### **4. Grantmaking Policies and Best Practices (Achieved 20/25 points)**

##### **Strengths:**

- Emerging equal partnerships with Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs):

This strength was identified through an analysis of grant agreements and partnership models, which show the Foundation's increasing focus on collaborating with RLOs. The Foundation has begun adopting practices that treat RLOs as equal stakeholders rather than mere beneficiaries.

Evidence includes co-designed projects, shared decision-making processes, and feedback from RLO representatives who highlighted the Foundation's respectful and inclusive approach to partnership-building.

- Demonstration of commitment through multi-year funding initiatives:

The Foundation has provided multi-year grants to several RLOs, ensuring financial stability and enabling them to plan and implement long-term strategies.

Verification sources include funding agreements and budget allocations that reflect the Foundation's move toward sustained investment rather than short-term, project-specific funding. Partners praised this approach, citing the predictability of resources as critical for addressing evolving refugee needs.

##### **Weaknesses:**

- Limited adoption of innovative grantmaking approaches for unregistered RLOs:

While the Foundation has made strides in partnering with RLOs, the Foundation's grantmaking policies exclude direct funding to unregistered organizations. This creates barriers for grassroots initiatives, which often lack formal registration but play a pivotal role in refugee communities.

Feedback from partners highlighted the potential of flexible verification processes, such as using community endorsements or simplified grant applications, to support these unregistered organizations more effectively.

- Refugee ownership in participatory grantmaking remains low.

Despite progress in fostering partnerships, there is limited evidence of refugees actively engaging in decision-making processes for grant allocations. This indicates a gap in promoting refugee ownership and leadership within the grantmaking approach.

Stakeholder interviews revealed that while refugees are consulted in some cases, their input is not consistently integrated into final funding decisions. This undermines the participatory principles of refugee-centered philanthropy.

## **5. Communications and Advocacy (Achieved 12/20 points)**

### **Strengths:**

- Highlighting refugee empowerment in communication strategies has positively influenced public perception by presenting refugees as active contributors to economic and social success. These strategies have also enhanced donor engagement, as storytelling and evidence of refugee-led achievements resonate strongly with philanthropic goals. Expanding these efforts to include more multimedia content and partnerships with media outlets could further amplify this impact.

The Foundation has employed storytelling and public communication strategies to present refugees as active contributors to economic and social progress. This approach has positively influenced public perception and enhanced donor engagement by aligning with philanthropic goals.

Evidence supporting this strength includes campaigns, publications, and case studies showcasing refugee success stories and emphasizing inclusion and empowerment.

Feedback from partners confirmed that these communication efforts resonate strongly, drawing attention to the achievements of refugee-led initiatives and fostering a deeper connection with donors and stakeholders.

- Advocacy for inclusive funding mechanisms.

The Foundation's public advocacy for inclusive funding mechanisms demonstrates a commitment to equitable access for RLOs. This has been reflected in statements, partnerships, and initiatives aimed at influencing funding practices within the broader philanthropic sector.

Verification sources include public endorsements, advocacy campaigns, and records of collaborative efforts with other organizations to promote inclusive funding policies.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Inconsistent public support for refugee-led initiatives in international fora.

While the Foundation has engaged in global advocacy platforms, its presence and public support for refugee-led initiatives in these spaces have been inconsistent. This limits the foundation's ability to fully leverage its influence to elevate refugee voices on the global stage.

Stakeholder feedback highlighted missed opportunities to publicly champion refugee-led solutions during key international events, reducing visibility and potential impact. The interviewed partners mentioned Global Refugee Forum pledges designed and proposed by CSOs as an example.

- Limited procedures to evaluate commitments from global advocacy platforms.

The Foundation lacks robust mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of its commitments made during international advocacy efforts; rather this is conducted on an ad hoc basis. Without systematic monitoring, it is challenging to track progress, assess these commitments' effectiveness, or identify improvement areas.

Partners and stakeholders noted the need for clear evaluation frameworks to ensure accountability and transparency in the Foundation's advocacy initiatives.

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## Recommendations

### Short-Term (1-2 Years)

1. **Governance Inclusion:** Address the current shortfall of **5/25 points** by increasing refugee representation on boards and decision-making bodies.
  - Develop mentorship programs to prepare candidates with refugee backgrounds for leadership roles.
  - Develop and implement at least one grant decision making mechanism that includes refugee voices/input.
2. **Data Alignment:** Improve from **9/15 points** by standardizing tools for collecting and utilizing refugee input in strategic planning.
  - Increase funding for development of M&E systems for refugee led organizations
  - Introduce digital platforms for real-time feedback collection given by partners, sounding board to the Refugee Program staff at the Foundation.
3. **Advocacy Strengthening:** Strengthen advocacy efforts, currently scoring **12/20 points**, by formalizing procedures to evaluate and uphold international commitments.
  - Partner with advocacy groups to amplify refugee voices and publically track impact/success
4. **Flexible Grantmaking:** Enhance flexible funding mechanisms to address gaps reflected in the **20/25 points** achieved in this category.
  - Increase timelines of grants
  - Develop plans and potential solutions for unregistered organizations
  - Continue to refine templates and feedback mechanisms, including reporting templates

## Mid-Term (3-5 Years)

- 1. Hiring:** make a consistent effort to have people with lived experiences as part of the Foundation, whether in the Refugee Program or in another capacity, but someone who can bring their full potential.
  - 2. Decision Making:** The Grant decision-making process systematically includes refugee representation and influence on grants made.
  - 3. Sustainable Funding:** Increase multi-year, unrestricted grants to RLOs, prioritizing funding for organizations in and led-by individuals from the Global South.
  - 4. Holistic Monitoring:** Co-develop with refugees external monitoring frameworks to assess refugee priorities in the Refugees initiative's programming and strategy.
  - 5. Communication Strategy:** Invest in multimedia campaigns to amplify refugee voices and success stories and advocate on priority issues as defined by refugees
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## Closing Comments

The Foundation's MRPI score of 47/100 points reflects an important moment in its journey toward fostering meaningful refugee participation. This score highlights the Foundation's dedication to inclusion and its efforts to address critical areas of need. While there is room for growth, the achievements to date demonstrate a strong foundation on which to build.

The recommendations in this report are designed to help the Foundation, especially its Refugees initiative, align with MRPI principles and position itself as a global leader in philanthropic efforts centered on refugee empowerment. By focusing on expanding participatory decision-making, streamlining processes and enhancing advocacy, the Foundation has the potential to set a new standard for inclusive philanthropy.

Looking to the future, we are excited about the opportunity to continue working with the Foundation. Together, we can build on these findings, refine strategies, and create transformative solutions that place refugee communities at the center of decision-making. Collaboration, innovation and commitment will be key drivers as we work toward achieving the Foundation's goals and making a lasting impact.

We are grateful for the Foundation's trust in undertaking this assessment. APNOR's role as a consultant is to provide analysis and act as a partner in your journey. We look forward to continuing this relationship, offering guidance, and supporting the Foundation in becoming a benchmark for inclusive and impactful philanthropy.

The path forward is one of growth, collaboration, and hope. Together, we can create a future where refugee participation is achieved by actively hearing refugee voices and shaping the solutions that impact their lives. The Foundation is well positioned to lead this charge, and we are confident that the steps taken now will yield transformative results for years to come