



**Karolinska
Institutet**



HOUSE OF GOVERNANCE
AND PUBLIC POLICY

*Politics and Diplomacy for Health
Fellows' Program
2025*

Evaluation Report



Introduction

This Evaluation Report of the Politics and Diplomacy for Health Fellows' Program 2025 aims to assess the overall impressions and potential impact of the program on participants' skills development, understanding of the political economy and tools for political analysis, and network building.

The evaluation was conducted through a comprehensive survey to evaluate improvements in the skills participants aimed to enhance, improvements in confidence across the programmatic themes, the application of these skills in their professional settings, satisfaction with the network and relationships built, and contributions to the program. The response rate was 23 out of the 25 participants who participated in the full program.

Summary

Participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the program with an average scope of 4,6 on a scale of 5 and their goal achievement and expectations also rated 4,6. With a rating of 4,8 participants are very likely to recommend the program to a colleague.

Participants valued the program's experiential components, noting that simulation exercises and practical methodologies enabled learning through "doing." Walk-and-talks, small-group discussions, and pairing exercises deepened peer learning and reflection, while preparatory homework—such as exploring the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs—served as a kick-start to connect with fellows and introduce new topic areas. The closed retreat setting in Sigtuna created an immersive environment that maximized focus and engagement, and informal interactions over meals, and one-on-one conversations strengthened the cohort network and fostered collaboration.

High-caliber, diverse faculty and fellows from multiple sectors and geographies enriched discussions by sharing real-world experiences. The diversity of participants, combined with the seniority of speakers and facilitators, provided rich perspectives and valuable mentorship opportunities. Personal career stories demonstrated vulnerability and offered honest insights into navigating challenges.

Participants also highlighted how building trust, and entrepreneurial thinking broadened their perspectives on global health leadership, and they praised the practical, non-theoretical lectures that were anchored in real-life examples, making concepts immediately applicable.

To enhance program even further, fellows sought more diversified role-playing scenarios and richer pre-work materials. Providing core readings or briefing packets on each simulation topic would level the playing field and drive more realistic interactions. Embedding problem-analysis exercises before lectures, where fellows propose solutions and then compare them with real-world outcomes, would sharpen situational judgment and creative thinking.

Finally, integrating a cohesive recap of key lessons à la start-up retrospective would make learning more interactive, memorable and aligned across the program's thematic modules.

"Not to exaggerate, but I'm convinced this programme has been life-changing for me. I'm more determined than ever to focus on global health for the way forward - it's the field where I find meaning, motivation, and energy. I leave with many ideas on how to take this forward, and the timing of this inspiration couldn't have been better. I feel blessed and grateful for the opportunity and look forward to seeing where this first step will take me next."

"I think you are on to something really important. You are building the future of global health. Please keep up the good work and I am happy to contribute if useful in any way in the future."

"I thought you managed to successfully achieve a very difficult balance during the in-person week. Encouraging everyone to be challenging, while creating a bond and feeling of trust among the group. No small task, and I think people left feeling very connected as a group, having only spent 4-5 days together."

"The venue, food and logistics were exceptional. Having just done a Masters at a London university I was also appreciative of how good the online resources were."

"I thought the way Gunilla and Anders facilitated the week was a highlight. It was really lovely to see how the group evolved, and no one was allowed to dominate the conversation. I thought it was heading in that direction in the early days so it was very skillful to build the rapport in the way you did"

"This has definitely the highlight of 2025..."

The program as a whole

Skills developed in the key programmatic themes and examples of skills application

Across the cohort, fellows unanimously reported that the program sharpened their negotiation and diplomacy skills, and they have already woven these lessons into their professional practice.

One participant is now responsible for designing a DrPH global health diplomacy curriculum, integrating negotiation frameworks, case studies, and simulations drawn directly from the Masterclass.

Others described how an assignment on the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs not only kick-started peer connections but also supplied concrete examples and content for both academic courses and workplace seminars. These applications underscore how theory from the program has migrated into real-world agendas and teaching syllabi.

Many fellows found that the course's emphasis on critical analysis and intentional decision-making transformed their approach to complex challenges. They credit their strengthened ability to identify areas of agreement, and to minimize points of contention, with enabling more productive debates.

One alumnus recounted leading a cross-regional civil society and Member State statement at the UN's High-Level Political Forum, skillfully balancing formal UN procedural rules with off-table relationship-building to secure eleven signatories. Others noted that simply reminding themselves to "keep the bigger picture in mind" has improved both their personal interactions and organizational outcomes.

Presentation and facilitation techniques also emerged as clear gains. Fellows who led the private-sector storytelling exercise now apply those methods—crafting narratives arcs, leveraging data, and designing interactive workshops, briefing donors, and structuring stakeholder engagements. Shifting from lecture-centric formats to workshop-style modules has raised participation levels and made content more memorable for their students and colleagues alike.

The program's deep dive into formal versus informal decision-making resonated strongly, prompting participants to invest more deliberately in trust-building and network maintenance. Inspired by candid reflections from faculty like Peter Piot and Joy Phumaphi, many have increased one-on-one outreach to move negotiations forward outside official meetings. This heightened sensitivity to "where real momentum gathers" has already translated into smoother collaborations with diplomatic missions, private-sector partners, and civil society actors.

Transformative leadership and the art of seizing windows of opportunity also feature prominently in alumni feedback. Hearing senior leaders frame failures as learning moments equipped fellows to navigate uncertainty more confidently. Several described adopting a more entrepreneurial mindset, challenging assumptions and reframing setbacks as strategic pivots.

While participants acknowledged that true mastery of negotiation, geopolitics, and trust-building unfolds over years rather than a week, they agreed that centering these themes in the Masterclass was pivotal.

Even simple insights, like the importance of “taking a decision” or engaging nonconforming voices to find common ground, resonated with participants. Collectively, these applied outcomes demonstrate that the program’s core areas are not only learned but put into practice immediately, spanning academic design, policy negotiations, teaching methods, and leadership approaches across diverse global health arenas.

The value of peer support and the importance of resource persons

Participants unanimously celebrated the peer network of fellows as one of the program’s greatest assets. From day one, an excellent, diverse cohort spanning diplomats, midwives, civil servants, private-sector leaders and academics, created a generous, open environment where everyone freely shared their day-to-day realities, career trajectories and sector-specific insights. That diversity deepened each fellow’s understanding of global health challenges, from the mechanics of UN negotiations to the frontline stresses of community health work, and even unexpected backstories—like the influence of organized crime in certain health contexts.

Structured group activities and informal touchpoints anchored this collaborative spirit. Assignment teams met in advance to rehearse role plays and co-author briefing packets, walk-and-talk pairings fostered candid one-on-one conversations, and coffee-break dialogues sparked cross-sector problem solving.

After the residential week in Sigtuna, the cohort’s WhatsApp group became a vital lifeline—sharing job postings, publications, event invitations and ongoing career mentoring. Many fellows credit this channel with sustaining momentum, as members continue to pose questions, offer feedback and mobilize opportunities.

The tangible benefits of peer support quickly surfaced in participants’ work. Exchanging real-world case studies and troubleshooting negotiation tactics sharpened participants’ analytical toolkit, while open discussions with private-sector colleagues challenged long-held assumptions and inspired new collaborative models. Cross-regional exchanges enabled critical lessons that would have been invisible in a more homogeneous group.

To build on these successes, participants proposed formalizing the peer network through quarterly virtual or in-person reunions, a mentor-buddy program pairing fellows with faculty or alumni, and more deliberate “matchmaking” sessions to introduce new cohorts. Embedding these structures before, during and after the Masterclass would ensure that the rich connections forged in Sigtuna continue to flourish, translating into lasting professional support, deeper learning and sustained collaboration across the global health community.

When it comes to the interaction with the resource persons or faculty, participants found it exceptionally valuable because they could address their own questions rather than passively receive pre-set content.

Walk-and-talks created a relaxed setting where leaders not only shared candid career stories but also paused to explore each fellow’s aspirations, leadership journey, and challenges. These informal encounters made senior experts approachable and helped demystify the complexities of global health diplomacy by grounding lessons in personal experience.

Fellows were inspired by hearing senior practitioners recount moments of doubt, failure, resilience, and ultimate success. Their shared vulnerabilities underscored that true leadership

encompasses overcoming personal hurdles and reinforced that impactful diplomacy and advocacy demand both technical acumen and human connection.

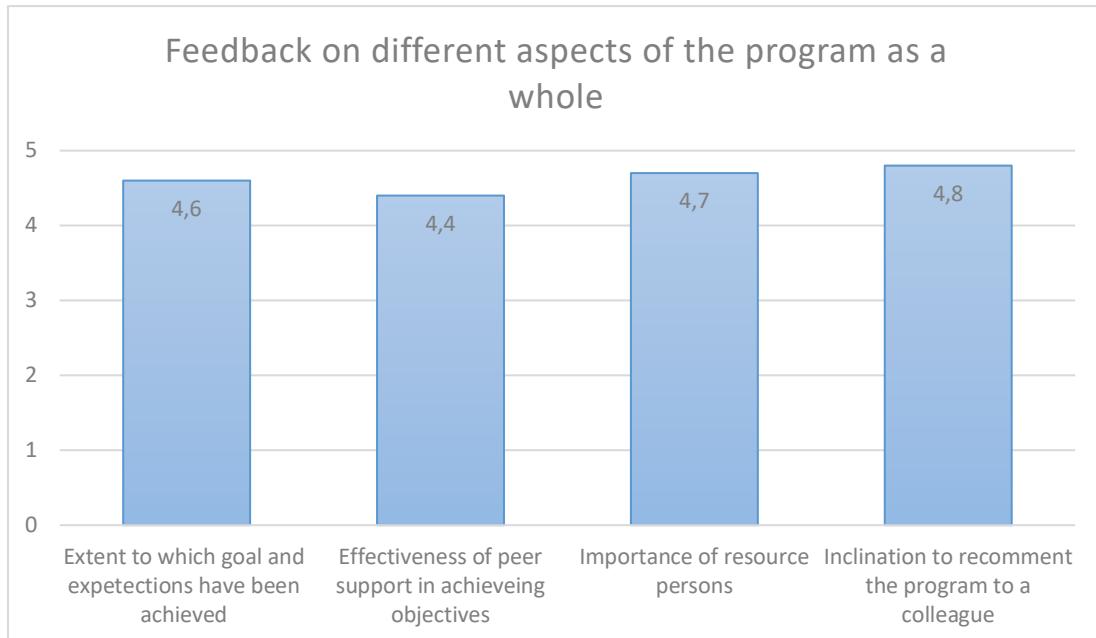
The combination of direct engagement and authentic storytelling has already translated into tangible benefits for fellows' work. By fostering small-group discussions and sustaining follow-up through intimate gatherings, these external engagements have seeded enduring collaborations, practical frameworks, and a more empathetic approach to global health leadership.

Professional network building

Participants praised the professional network forged through the program, with many highlighting the WhatsApp group as a vital channel for ongoing dialogue. Through this chat group, fellows across continents share work updates, articles, speaking invitations and job opportunities, creating a dynamic forum for both career mentoring and real-time intelligence sharing.

Early in the Masterclass, spontaneous collaborations emerged from conversations with peers during walk-and-talk sessions. Even those who have since settled into new roles anticipate reengaging regularly at global health events, using the cohort's diverse expertise to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and accelerate project planning.

Beyond informal exchanges, concrete partnerships have blossomed. Participants report collaborating on specific initiatives, curating plenary speakers, and co-hosting high-profile side events at UNGA. Participants are planning briefings that will draw on faculty expertise and others have formed strategic alliances within the network. Fellows underscore that this network remains one of the program's most durable assets.



As the above figure shows, the participants give different aspects of the program as whole high ratings and are to a high degree inclined to recommend the program to a colleague.

The Online workshops

The importance of the Online workshops, in relation to the program as a whole, received an average score of 4,4. Participants praised the online workshops for their strong emphasis on practical “how” over theoretical “what,” noting that Anders and Gunilla excelled at creating an open, collaborative atmosphere where faculty shared candid, real-world insights.

The sessions were appreciated for their excellent presenters, well-curated content, and moments of small-group reflection to deepen learning. Many valued the focus on career-journey narratives, digging one level deeper than a typical interview or podcast could provide.

At the same time, fellows identified opportunities to boost interactivity and refine the pacing of the sessions. Bundling multiple sets of audience questions occasionally led to individual queries being overlooked. Pausing after each round to confirm that every question is addressed could solve that issue. Two-hour sessions felt long to some, who suggested trimming them to 90 minutes. Breakout rooms and icebreaker activities were flagged as underused tools that could help strengthen peer connections, especially early in the series, and make the virtual format feel more engaging.

Looking ahead, several respondents proposed adding supplemental workshops both before and after the in-person Masterclass. A “Diplomacy of the Future” module—covering AI, digital media, and innovation, and ideas for speakers were shared. Others urged scheduling two post-residential gatherings for deeper reflection now that participants know each other better. Finally, integrating a futurist perspective throughout the online series could help weave a cohesive narrative and ensure virtual sessions both prepare for and build upon the Masterclass experience.

The Masterclass

With an average score of 4,8, the Masterclass met the expectations of the participants to a very high degree. The food and logistics rated 5 on average (one respondent gave a 4 rating while the rest gave a 5).

The most impactful lessons of the Masterclass

Participants converged around communication as the Masterclass’s foundational skill, including improving narrative and storytelling techniques and mastering concise, audience-focused messaging. That emphasis naturally extended into negotiation, and the “give-and-take” essence of negotiations was raised, whether unlocking formal agreements or seizing informal entry points. Learning to map stakeholders, build allies, and “just do it” in the face of bureaucratic paralysis equipped participants to drive change rather than wait for consensus.

Leadership surfaced as a living practice anchored in personal values, resilience, and vision. Hearing senior faculty speak candidly about failures and crossroads taught that true leadership demands vulnerability and the courage to decide under uncertainty. Fellows embraced the mantra that “failure is part of growth,” learned to spot windows of opportunity during stable periods, and reaffirmed that transformative leadership spans sectors—from politicians and entrepreneurs to researchers and community advocates.

The Masterclass also reframed how politics and governance intersect with health diplomacy. Participants recognized that decision-making rarely begins at the negotiating table but in the informal corridors of power, where trust and relationships matter most. They took away concrete lessons on identifying points of entry into complex institutions, leveraging networks

across regions, and balancing global structures with local realities. In uniting these lessons—communication, negotiation, resilient leadership and informal diplomacy—fellows emerged better equipped to navigate and shape the future of global health.

The highest rated sessions

Participants most frequently highlighted the intimate evening session with Anders and Gunilla as their single stand-out experience. Their “fireside” storytelling wove together personal values, resilience in the face of setbacks, and candid career reflections that crystallized the Masterclass’s core lessons on leadership under uncertainty. Many described it as a defining moment—an extraordinary blend of friendship, vulnerability, and practical wisdom.

Beyond that, sessions by a handful of speakers repeatedly earned top marks. Thoraya Obaid’s account of carving her own path in 1950s Saudi Arabia and leveraging personal setbacks as catalysts for change left a deep personal resonance.

Dr. Hanan Al Kuwairi’s virtual presentation of crisis leadership under resource constraints and Joy Phumaphi’s exploration of power imbalances in health negotiations were also singled out for their real-world relevance.

Mark Dybul’s “Private Sector and Political Leadership for Health” talk, especially his walk-and-talk extension, was praised for its bold, solution-oriented approach to public-private collaboration. Other frequently lauded contributors included Magda Robalo’s grounded case studies, Elhadj As Sy’s candid diplomacy insights,

Alvaro Bermejo’s honest reflections on advocacy, and the strategic foresight offered by Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli and Ren Minghui. Collectively, these sessions rated highest for both inspiration and practical takeaways.

Improvement of confidence levels in the six program themes and competences

Participants reported that the Masterclass boosted their confidence across all six thematic areas, with many pointing to public speaking and communication as the most transformative skill gain. Through hands-on exercises—such as 15-minute mock interviews and storytelling workshops—fellows felt more at ease voicing their ideas, tailoring messages to different audiences, and framing complex content in clear, human terms. These communication skills have already translated into stronger pitches for agile public-private partnerships, more persuasive internal advocacy on tariff and aid-cut negotiations, and more intentional engagement in both formal meetings and informal corridors of power.

Leadership and diplomacy also emerged as areas of professional growth. Participants described shedding self-doubt by watching senior faculty navigate crises without roadmaps, seize windows of opportunity, and anchor decisions in deeply held values. The program’s candid discussions on failure, resilience, and vision helped fellows embrace uncertainty rather than fear it, strengthening their conviction to “just do it” and to identify the right forums and allies for influence.

Many noted a clearer understanding of where real decisions happen—beyond the negotiating table—and feel more capable of mapping stakeholders, nurturing long-term relationships, and steering governance processes at global and regional levels.

While most themes saw broad confidence gains, participants acknowledged pockets where they still seek growth, particularly in entrepreneurship, private-sector engagement, and media training. A few fellows noted that familiarity with global health politics and decision-making

varied by type of career, and expressed interest in deeper, practice-oriented support for these areas.

Nevertheless, the consensus is that the Masterclass laid a robust foundation: the combination of expert insights, peer exchanges, and immersive simulations has left them better equipped to apply negotiation tactics, lead transformational initiatives, and communicate with both clarity and conviction in their daily work.

Pacing and format of the masterclass

Participants agreed that the Masterclass's pace and structure struck a generally successful balance between depth and dynamism. Fellows appreciated the fully packed agenda, mixing lectures, garden talks, role plays, and evening discussions to maximize value in a single week. Many described the schedule as "intensive but worth it," noting that well-timed breaks, group walks and evening storytelling sessions reinforced learning while fostering informal connections.

At the same time, several suggestions emerged to refine the format. Participants asked for longer blocks on high-impact topics, especially communication and formal versus informal decision-making, and felt some role-play exercises ran too long for their impact.

They recommended more interactive formats, such as fishbowl discussions, small-group "speed dating" conversations, and one-on-one or peer-pair check-ins, as well as morning icebreakers that both recap the prior day and deepen personal connections. A few also proposed freeing up post-dinner slots for unstructured networking rather than formal sessions.

Finally, fellows highlighted logistical tweaks to enhance inclusion and continuity. Allowing non-European attendees an extra day to arrive and adjust or extending the program into a twelve-month framework with parallel project work, would help consolidate skills in real time. Overall, they found the Masterclass's cleverly designed format both engaging and adaptable to varied levels of experience.

Walk-and-Talks and discussions in pairs

Participants overwhelmingly praised the walk-and-talk sessions as one of the Masterclass's most memorable and effective formats.

By grouping fellows with faculty members for an unhurried stroll, participants found a more relaxed setting to raise questions they might have hesitated to ask in a formal lecture hall. Many noted that the fresh air and scenic surroundings helped ideas flow more freely, making it easier to share personal challenges, troubleshoot real-world problems, and exchange candid reflections on leadership, negotiation and resilience.

Beyond the intellectual benefits, walk-and-talks fostered genuine human connection. Fellows described how these conversations-built trust quickly, whether unpacking difficult supervisory relationships with Ren Minghui or delving into women's leadership with Gunilla.

The informal nature of the dialogue encouraged vulnerability—participants felt comfortable revealing imposter syndrome, discussing family dynamics or comparing career hurdles—and came away feeling more supported and understood by both peers and mentors. Some felt that the pair discussions were not needed during the masterclass as these emerged naturally during the week.

Proposals for additional program themes

Participants identified four key areas for enriching the curriculum. First, they recommended dedicating modules to technological and data-driven diplomacy, exploring artificial intelligence, digital media strategies, and the use of public health analytics to inform negotiations and build trust in an increasingly connected world.

Second, fellows called for deeper leadership and organizational management training, paired with a candid focus on personal wellbeing. They suggested sessions on team leadership, entrepreneurial mindsets, and practical resilience tools, including mental-health support and work-life balance strategies for professionals juggling global travel and family commitments.

Third, the cohort urged more strategic policy content that addresses today's challenges. This could include hands-on negotiations over instruments like the International Health Regulations and the Pandemic Treaty, workshops on resource mobilization in a constrained aid environment, and case studies of governments investing in NCD prevention, climate adaptation, and food-system health.

Finally, participants emphasized equity, community engagement, and regional collaboration as critical themes. They proposed integrating South-South partnership frameworks, tools for bridging local-to-global advocacy, inclusive diplomacy practices that center underrepresented voices, and media engagement techniques for designing effective public-health campaigns.

Additional or different tools, readings, or expert interactions that could enhance the program's value?

Participants offered a range of proposals to deepen learning and sustain engagement beyond the week-long Masterclass. Many suggested establishing semi-formal alumni networks—through quarterly online or in-person workshops—where fellows present recent work, exchange feedback, and mentor each other.

Pairing exercises with faculty proved so valuable that extending mentorship into the months following the course (for example, structured small-group check-ins or one-on-one office hours) would reinforce skill application and foster lasting connections. In addition, inviting fellows to contribute briefcase-study presentations or problem-solving sessions before and after the residential week would keep the cohort actively involved and bridge virtual and in-person components.

Several respondents urged broadened geographic and stakeholder representation among experts and readings. Latin America/South America, the Pacific and Southeast Asia were highlighted as underrepresented regions; bringing in diplomats, health ministers or civil-society leaders from these areas would enrich multilateral discussions with alternative policy narratives.

Experts from the World Trade Organization—such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala—and panels of community health workers, First Nations representatives and disability-equity advocates could add frontline perspectives on negotiation, resource allocation and humanitarian health. These voices, combined with deeper dives into the political economy of aid reduction and transitions to mutually respectful partnerships, would reflect the full complexity of twenty-first-century diplomacy.

A stronger emphasis on innovation, technology and communication was also recommended. Dedicated sessions on artificial intelligence, digital and social media diplomacy would help participants anticipate emerging governance challenges and public-opinion tactics.

Supplementary readings on youth-led activism, network building and strategic media engagement, alongside quizzes or discussion guides to reinforce comprehension, would advance participants' ability to craft narratives, leverage data and shape public debate.

Some felt that an expanded communication toolkit, including crisis-media simulations and interview-style role-plays, would bolster their confidence when engaging journalists, policymakers and private-sector partners.

Areas for future improvement

To some participants, several activities felt less engaging after long days, with garden talks, Sigtuna tours, and post-dinner structured sessions cited as areas of fatigue. Many participants desired even more real-world experience. Technical platforms such as the Slack channel and Canvas saw low engagement due to usability challenges, indicating a need for streamlined digital tools.

The schedule's intensity, with short breaks and little time allocated for group preparation, hindered to some extent deeper absorption of material. Participants also identified regional representation gaps, particularly from Latin America and South America, the Pacific and Southeast Asia. Finally, some recommended improving cohesion across program elements to tell a clearer, sequenced story of global health concepts.

To enhance experiential learning, the participants recommended that the program should introduce real-world site visits, immersive simulations, and case-study field exercises. Incorporating modules on concrete methods, such as advocacy tactics, strategic communication, and techniques for maintaining health on the global agenda, would address calls for more practical guidance.

It was suggested that the organizers should further clarify participants' target experience level, focusing on early- to mid-career professionals, to better align session complexity and peer cohorts. Maintaining the closed retreat format and continuing preparatory homework assignments will preserve the immersive atmosphere and foster early connections.

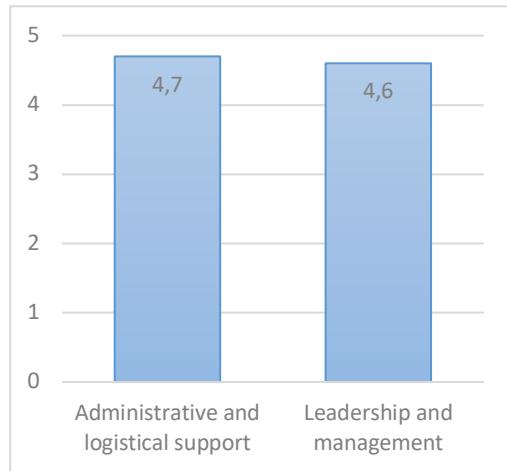
Program management, administrative and logistical support and cost

As shown by the figure below, program leadership and management as well as administrative and logistical support worked well. There are some lessons learned in relation to payment processes and visa management, what has already been implemented in the planning for 2026 years program.

Most participants agreed that the program fees represented excellent value for money. They praised the tiered pricing model—particularly the reduced rates for public-sector, NGO, LMIC, and civil-society fellows—which many described as “incredibly reasonable” and “thoughtful” for ensuring diverse participation. Attendees highlighted that the quality of the in-person week, including outstanding faculty, immersive learning, top-tier accommodations, and exceptional meals, far exceeded the cost.

Several civil-society and grassroots activists said they would not have been able to attend without the discounted rates, underscoring the program's commitment to inclusivity at a time when funding for rights-based advocacy is under pressure.

A minority of respondents raised practical concerns around payment logistics and private-sector fees. While large organizations comfortably covered the full rate, some private-sector participants struggled to secure corporate sponsorship or were only offered partial support. One fellow who transitioned jobs during the enrollment period described the higher “commercial” fee as hard to justify amid competing professional-development demands. To address this, participants recommended clearer guidance on payment options—allowing individuals to self-sponsor or seek external backers—and advanced notice of ancillary costs like transport between Stockholm and Sigtuna to help with budgeting.



“This has definitely the highlight of 2025...”

“Thank you for a very respectful atmosphere you curated for us. Thank you for being intentional and leading the course with the aim of making sure that it is not theoretical.

“I thought you managed to successfully achieve a very difficult balance during the in-person week. Encouraging everyone to be challenging, while creating a bond and feeling of trust among the group. No small task, and I think people left feeling very connected as a group, having only spent 4-5 days together.”

“It was my pleasure to attend the program. I learned so much and had a great experience. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.”

“I thought the way Gunilla and Anders facilitated the week was a highlight. It was really lovely to see how the group evolved, and no one was allowed to dominate the conversation. I thought it was heading in that direction in the early days, so it was very skillful to build the rapport in the way you did”

“Excellent course and highly recommend it”

“The food was amazing. And the sauna!”

“Thank you so so much - I wish I could do it every year!!!”



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