



Baku International Youth Forum 2019: Interfaith in Action

*ACWAY Forum IV
IX International Summer School of Multiculturalism*

**15-21 July 2019
Baku, Azerbaijan**

INTERNAL SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by Sara Rahim,
ACWAY Forum 4 Project Manager
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Purpose

A Common Word Among the Youth (ACWAY) is a global youth movement that brings together young changemakers from diverse backgrounds who are committed to interfaith action and peacebuilding. ACWAY seeks to increase the understanding of different faiths and cultures, promote peace and coexistence, and develop the skills and capacity of young changemakers to take local action on issues within their own communities. ACWAY has held past forums in Morocco (2015), Australia (2016), Sudan (2017), and most recently, Azerbaijan. This report summarizes the 4th Forum's program, evaluations, and offers recommendations for future ACWAY programming.

Location & Venue

With a deep and rich history of multiculturalism and coexistence, ACWAY's 4th Forum took place in Azerbaijan. Taking place in partnership with the International Summer School of Multiculturalism, the first 3 days of the program consisted of the ACWAY training and days 4-7 consisted of the Summer School portion, with site visits and excursions around the country.

The Forum itself was held at the Baku Congress Center from July 15-17, 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan. All 3 days of the Forum were held in partnership with the Baku Multicultural Centre. Days 4-7 (July 18-21) consisted of visits to the towns of Oguz, Shaki, and

Qabala. Participants stayed in double occupancy rooms at the Modern Hotel in Baku and Afra Hotel in Oguz.

Who Attended?

After a competitive application process that ran from March 30 – April 20, 2019, we received over 1100 applications for new ACWAY fellows to attend the Baku Forum.

In total, we selected 50 ACWAY Fellows. However, 47 ACWAY Fellows from 33 countries were represented at the Baku International Forum.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

Day 1: 100 attendees

Day 2: 90 attendees

Day 3: 80 attendees

Days 4-7: 60 attendees

At A Glance:

- 14 new ACWAY Members from application process
- 8 existing ACWAY members
- 4 new ACWAY members recommended from host
- 15 friends of Azerbaijan
- 6 members of the ACWAY Planning team
- 27 members aged 18-25 years
- 20 members aged 26-35 years old
- 20 males
- 27 females
- Over 10 faith and secular traditions represented
- 33 countries represented

Program

With the Baku International Forum serving as ACWAY's Fourth Forum, a special emphasis was placed on skill-building and training for ACWAY participants. As we have often seen in interfaith forums, the structure is often outdated; focusing on academic lectures or panels that lacks faith/gender/age diversity. Furthermore, the approach to interfaith engagement has often been limited to dialogue; without planning for activities or action. These are all challenges that ACWAY seeks to change through its emphasis on building the capacity of young interfaith leaders to deliver action projects.

During program development, the ACWAY planning team sought to create an opportunity for participants to contextualize the concepts of multiculturalism and interfaith harmony into practice. Over the course of the Forum, participants engaged in skills-based workshops and critical dialogue around interfaith action: this included discussing challenges, lessons learned, and best practices.

The main objectives of the ACWAY forum were as follows:

1. Share experiences and examples of how young people can put multiculturalism and interfaith peacebuilding into practice;
2. Deliver a skills-based, outcomes-driven program that allows participants to contextualize the course themes into action;
3. Provide a platform for dialogue concerning the actual topics of multiculturalism and implementation challenges;
4. Develop a growing network of international changemakers who are equipped to deliver multicultural and interfaith activities in their own communities.



During the Forum, ACWAY delivered multiple trainings and sessions, including:

- ACWAY Project Planning sessions (ACWAY team)
- Dialogue for Peace training (KAICIID)
- Context Matters: Doing Interfaith in Diverse Spaces (ACWAY Fellows)
- Religion and Conflict Resolution (Dr. Brian Adams)
- Open Space (ACWAY Fellows)
- An Intergenerational Conversation Learning in & Looking Forward (ACWAY Team)
- Religion, Technology, and Youth: The Future of Interfaith (ACWAY Fellows)
- Respectful Cross-Cultural Engagement (Dr. Brian Adams)

Baku International Multicultural Centre also offered several programs, which included:

- Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan
- Meetings with local civil society leaders
- The role of youth in intercultural dialogue
- Spreading terrorist and violent extremist content through technology
- Various excursions and site visits
- “Present your Nation” Cultural Night
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In particular, a special emphasis of the Forum was placed on multiple ACWAY Project Planning sessions to allow for participants to learn from each other, engage in critical dialogue and plan for their specific action projects. Participants shared their local project ideas on Day 3 of the Forum.

ACWAY also emphasized relationship building as a critical piece of its programming. The heart of ACWAY is not only action, but collaboration. Each session opened with an ice breaker or teambuilding activity, and the week allowed for ACWAY fellows to connect, build linkages, and collaborate on project ideas.

Partners & Sponsorship

The Baku International Youth Forum would not have been possible without the generous support from the following partners and sponsors:

- Stirling Foundation
- Baku International Multicultural Centre
- Young Friends of Azerbaijan
- Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
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Media

- All participant photos are being uploaded to the Google drive linked here: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1JybRDRy_M4C80BWZxEaY6pr96Y5O8ScH

- Professional photos, video, and all media are in the process of being shared from the host to our team.
- Media footage of the week can be viewed on Baku Multicultural Centre's YouTube channel, linked here:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpMfkbBWDWA_cEjH40R-TmiOfE3F1Cwc

Evaluations

In order to best accommodate for the participants needs, the ACWAY Planning team issued two separate post-forum surveys via google forms to allow for participants to evaluate the programming, venue, accommodation, and excursions. **Over 60% of the participants completed the surveys.**

A few evaluations of the sessions are as follows:



- ACWAY Project Planning sessions
 - Relevance: 90%
 - Usefulness: 90%
- Context Matters: Doing Interfaith in Diverse Spaces:
 - Relevance: 96%
 - Usefulness: 92%
- ACWAY Open Space:
 - Relevance: 82%
 - Usefulness: 80%
- Religion, Technology and Youth: The Future of Interfaith
 - Relevance: 94%
 - Usefulness: 85%

TESTIMONIALS

Selected participant comments:

- *“The forum and cultural activities were amazing. I never felt so at home in an event like I did on this one, since it motivated me to keep going and gave me inspiration from other people to enhance projects that I already have and create new ones.”*
- *“I loved my time in Azerbaijan! Special thanks to the organizers who did 100% amazing work! Perfect lectures, incredible tours, convenient accommodation and tasty food-all these things became possible as a result of organizer`s sincere wish and efforts. I loved the atmosphere of unity and tolerance between the tour members!”*
- *“The mix of plenary sessions, interactive sessions and visits has been perfect.”*
- *“I loved how diverse the ACWAY forum was and how the diverse ideas were all considered throughout all the sessions.”*

Forum Highlights:

- *“It was an informative forum getting to understand the works around interfaith/multiculturalism, how to plan and carry out a project, monitoring and evaluation process.”*
- *“Learning about project creation and implementation. Getting the opportunity to develop the foundations for our own projects in the venue. Meeting with people in the same field and learning about how they implemented their own projects.”*
- *“For me it was the activities, where we could interact with others, get to know them better and share our story. For me it was the most important because it made me feel part of a family and very welcomed. I felt like I was in a safe environment where people were supporting me and my ideas. That was the best =)”*
- *“I would like to highlight the presentations given by active ACWAY fellows. They are a great source of inspiration for me! It is very nice when there is less theory but more practice! Another thing which I would like to mark are the Cultural Nights. It is a perfect way to learn more about each other`s countries and wipe out the barriers between us!”*
- *“The highlight of the forum for me was learning 3 things: 1) Bring people in instead of pushing them out. 2) Before you can do good, be a good person. 3) See the humanity in others.”*
- *“The project planning sessions for ACWAY were the most useful. In addition, the times we were able to chat about real issues faced in different communities around the world were very engaging and enlightening conversations.”*

Has your attendance at the Forum benefitted you? How?

- *“YES - in that it has been an educative, learnt a lot from other people and collaborated young people from around the world...it has taught me to be more tolerant and respect other people.”*
- *“It definitely has. Not only did it allow me to connect with other like-minded individuals and learn from them, but it has allowed me to tap into sources of creativity and project planning that I did not know that I possessed.”*
- *“My prior knowledge and intuitive understanding of intercultural exchange has been challenged and was enriched by many new experiences and learnings. I will be able to draw a lot from these in the future. Both my professional career as well as my volunteer work will greatly profit from that.”*



Recommendations

After an internal team debrief and reviewing evaluations from the ACWAY participants, the following recommendations are offered for future Forums:

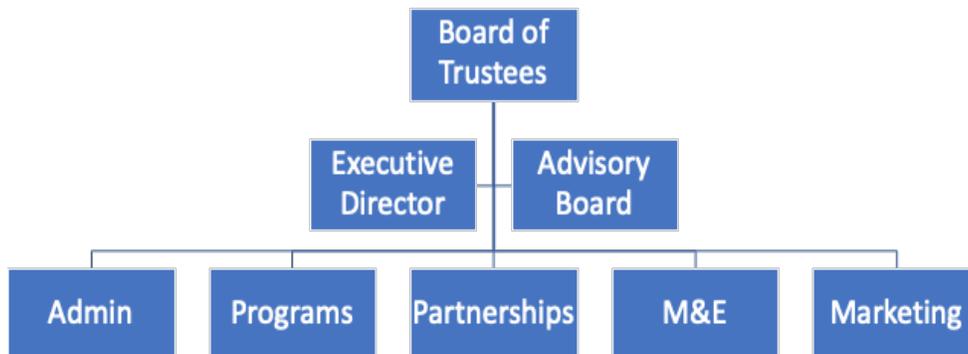
- I. Forum Programming
 - a. Given the experience of incoming participants, conduct a needs-assessment of all attending participants to best design and tailor future programming topics.
 - b. Establish clear objectives and outcomes of each session.
 - c. Designate future sessions to capacity building on the topics of fundraising, development, and managing challenging relationships.

- d. Allow more open space for ACWAY participants to share their experiences.
 - e. Highlight which sessions require English proficiency and which sessions are open to all language levels.
 - f. ACWAY planning team should participate in the selection of local participants.
 - g. Delegate facilitators in advance of the Forum and request slides.
 - h. Review local programming that is delivered by the host to ensure it is inclusive and nonpartisan.
 - i. Develop a Media Release/Consent form and share with participants beforehand so they approve if they want to be filmed or photographed.
 - j. Planning team should host internal meetings and debriefs in the morning and night, and should fully integrate with the full group during meals and the Forum. Optics matter!
 - k. Organize a Post Forum Action plan in advance to maintain the momentum in between forums.
- II. Venue, Accommodation, & Meals
- a. Limit the use of plastic, and allow for refilling reusable water bottles. Spaces should be more environmentally friendly.
 - b. Allow each participant to have their own room key and their own bed (even if they are sharing a room).
 - c. Provide adequate vegetarian and vegan food options.
 - d. Venue and Hotel should have strong WIFI for business purposes.
- III. Excursions
- a. Provide context to all social or cultural excursions (a brief explanation on the way to a site rather than just taking us there).
 - b. ACWAY Team members can serve as Liaison to any site visits.
- IV. Travel & Logistics
- a. Streamline the flight booking and visa process with an established and affordable travel agency.
 - b. Ensure that all participants receive any transit visas well ahead of their travel dates.



Next Steps

During the 4th Forum, the ACWAY Planning Team hosted two internal strategic planning sessions to focus on the organization's future structure, goals, and programming. The following structure was established:



Moving ahead, the Executive Committee will consist of 5 departments:

- Administration
- Programs
- Partnerships/Finance
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Marketing/Communications

Each department will develop a 1-year engagement strategy, and the Executive Committee (consisting of department heads) will organize and attend monthly calls for the next 6 months. The next Forum target date is expected to be during the last quarter of 2020 (October - December).

Our emphasis will now be placed on building the capacity of ACWAY internally (through partnerships, media, and programs) and engaging existing members in between Forums.

ACWAY aims to spend the next year strengthening its financial capacity through building relationships with partners, donors, foundations, and other organizations.

In terms of programming, we also seek to develop community action grants for active ACWAY fellows to apply to. We will finally create an alumni network and develop smaller regional meetings for fellows in between Forums. ACWAY will also launch quarterly newsletters as well as a webinar series on a variety of topics including fundraising, UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, gender, and other social issues. The purpose of these webinars is to engage fellows, continue capacity building, and allowing for collaborations via online meetings in between official forums.



While ACWAY's internal structure and strategy is still being developed, we have established the following high-level goals for the next 18 months:

2019

- September
 - Update ACWAY Member Database
- October
 - Implement Marketing Strategy
 - Develop our partners and fundraising strategy
 - Share Call for Community Action Grants with ACWAY network
- November - December
 - Review Action Grant Applications
 - Announce Selected Grantees
 - Launch Newsletter and first Webinar

2020

- January
 - Launch Updated Website
 - ACWAY Project reports due
- February
 - UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Campaign: #TakingtheLead
- Ongoing
 - Regional Meetings
 - Skill building Webinars and Quarterly Newsletters
- October - December
 - ACWAY 5 Year Anniversary Campaign

We look forward to building on Forum 4's success and strengthening ACWAY as an organization and global youth movement.

Financial Report

The financial report will be shared separately as we finalize the remaining invoices and payments.

Should you have any questions about the content of this report, please email me at SaraRahim06@gmail.com or contact our Executive Director rawaad@acway.org.

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