The International Women’s Forum of Washington, DC brings together some of the most accomplished women in America’s capital city who lead in diverse fields and who share a common purpose in engaging and promoting women in leadership. Founded in 1982, the Forum was created when Alexandra Armstrong and Susan Davis brought together a group of 35 women who were pioneers at the top of their respective fields to connect, share success and failures, and have some well deserved fun.

The group has grown to nearly 250 leading women in politics, business, law, government, medicine, industry technology, the arts and sciences, and is an affiliate of the International Women’s Forum (IWF)—the only organization of its kind in the world today representing women leaders in diverse fields whose mission is to further dynamic leadership, leverage global access to and maximize opportunities for women on five continents.

Annual programming includes opportunities for members to network, connect, and exchange ideas. The programs are substantive, interesting and fun, and often highlight individual members’ areas of expertise. Examples range from a behind-the-scenes look at the U.S. Supreme Court with Justices Ginsburg and O’Connor, to a featured presentation about the U.S. Mint with its Director and IWF-DC member, Henrietta Holsman Fore, or a summertime lunch at Ris prepared by its executive chef and IWF-DC member, Ris Lacoste, and co-hosted by author Kitty Kelley.
Creating a Global Forum

In 1982, Elinor Guggenheimer of New York and Eleanor Holmes Norton of Washington, D.C. founded The National Women's Forum. Originally founded in New York, the Washington D.C. Forum was created shortly after, and quickly grew to include some of the most influential women in the nation. The founding members of the D.C. Forum instituted the policy of reciprocity that allowed the Forum to become a national, and then international, organization.

From its early days, the Washington, D.C. Forum has played a standout role in the development of the international forum. Susan Davis of Washington, D.C. served as president from 1985 to 1987 and was the catalyst for taking the organization global when it was incorporated as the International Women's Forum (IWF) in 1987. Another influential IWF member, Carol Cox Wait, served as IWF president from 1995 to 1997. Today the IWF includes affiliate forums in 26 nations.

The International Hall of Fame

Davis also played a key role in creating the International Hall of Fame and was instrumental in making this annual program and global fundraiser a huge success. Jean Head Sisco, an IWF-DC member, chaired the Hall of Fame Committee and contributed greatly to this success through her international reach and contacts and her fundraising for the organization and this program.

The Hall of Fame is designed to honor and recognize leading ladies across career and country boundaries. Honorees include women like Margaret Thatcher, Audrey Hepburn, Betty Friedan, Sally Ride and Heidi Klum.

For its first fifteen years, the members of the DC Forum resisted any formal structure. Alexandra Armstrong functioned as de facto president, running the organization out of her office and providing the support needed to keep the group functioning. When the DC Forum finally agreed to elect officers, name committees and take the other steps an organization must as it grows and matures, Alexandra Armstrong helped shape the process that resulted in Linda Rabbitt becoming the first elected president of IWF-DC.
writing a
History of Influence

1980

1982 The National Women’s Forum was founded by New Yorker Elinor Guggenheimer and Eleanor Holmes Norton of Washington, D.C.


1984 The National Women’s Forum was officially incorporated.


1985 Washington, D.C. hosted the first gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Sandra Day O’Connor and Sally Ride).

1986 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Clare Boothe Luce, Coretta Scott King and Margaret Thatcher).

1987 Susan Davis took the women’s forum global and this year, it was incorporated as the International Women’s Forum (IWF).

1987 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Helen Hayes, Mathilde Krim, Corazon Aquino).

1990


1993 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame, where Elinor Guggenheimer was awarded the IWF Founder’s Award.

1993 Carol Cox Wait, Lou Kerr and Carolyn Golding obtained a government grant of $500,000 that started the successful International Fellows Program.

1995 – 1997 Carol Cox Wait of Washington, D.C. served as president of the IWF, and initiated a program to grow the international enterprise.

1999 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Madeleine Albright, Dr. Ellen Li, Annie Leibovitz).

2000

2005 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Khatol Mohammadzai, Condoleezza Rice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg).

2011 Washington, D.C. hosted the gala for the International Hall of Fame (induction of Madam Chen Zhili, Heidi Klum, Nandita Das and Anna Fendi).

Marsha Johnson (Southern Company) & IWF Leadership Foundation Fellows & Alumnae at the 2005 World Leadership Conference & Gala.

Catalysts for the IWF Leadership Foundation Fellows Program

Carol Cox Wait and Carolyn Golding of Washington, D.C. worked with Lou Kerr of Oklahoma to obtain a government grant of $500,000 that kick-started the globally successful International Fellows Program in 1993. The program empowers young women leaders to break through the glass ceiling in any field.

In the early years, the Fellows program was heavily dependent on fundraising by Jean Head Sisco and Carol Cox Wait, drawing on IWF-DC for support. A grant from IWF-DC, the death of Jean Head Sisco, and a very generous matching grant from Arizona member Jeanne Herberger gave birth to an endowment campaign that eventually raised $5 million. There are now seven named endowments for the Foundation and three of those were created by or named after IWF-DC members: Jean Head Sisco, Margita White and Federal Fellows.

On the Board is the latest contribution made by IWF-DC

In 2012, due to the generous financial contribution made by IWF-DC member Linda Rabbitt to the George Washington University School of Business (GWSB), a unique joint venture between the GWSB and the IWF was launched, designed to prepare women leaders to become successful candidates for and directors on corporate boards.

Hosting the World

Over time, the International Hall of Fame was included in the World Leadership Conference Gala. Washington D.C. hosted the first three galas, setting the precedent for this gathering of the world's most influential women. Since then, the IWF-DC has hosted the gala another five times.
The Development of IWF’s Global Headquarters

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the International Women’s Forum and Leadership Foundation have had the benefit of enormous support from the Washington, D.C. Forum through the years. Originally housed in the offices of IWF-DC members, the global organization still receives much of its funding and support from D.C. members.

“IWF-DC Vice President and former President Jenna Dorn presenting at the 2011 World Leadership Conference.

IWF Presidents

Alexandra Armstrong  
Chairman  
Armstrong, Fleming and Moore, Inc.

Holly Cannon  
Principal  
Beveridge & Diamond, P.C.

Suzanne P. Clark  
Chief Executive Officer  
Potomac Research Group

June L. DeHart  
Partner  
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP

Jennifer L. Dorn  
President and CEO  
National Academy of Public Administration

Michela English  
President and CEO  
Fight For Children

Linda D. Rabbitt  
CEO and Founder  
Rand Construction Corporation

Rita Shapiro  
Executive Director  
National Symphony Orchestra

Ann S. Stock  
Vice President  
Institutional Affairs  
John F. Kennedy Center