My summer at African American Women Evolving was an enlightening experience in many ways. AAWE is an amazing organization that collaborates with other organizations on issues surrounding reproductive rights for women of color. Its impact on its community and women of color in general is significant.

During my time at AAWE, I worked on a variety of projects and had the opportunity to experience the day-to-day operations of a small non-profit organization first hand.

Working with a small organization influenced every aspect of my summer internship experience. The day-to-day staff consisted of myself and three other women, one of whom was the CEO. This gave me a unique perspective from which to view non-profit work. Unlike larger non-profits where upper management may or may not be involved in the day-to-day activities of interns, at AAWE I was given direction from all levels of staff and management. In addition I attended all staff meetings and had the opportunity to observe different work, management and communication styles, as well as the different ways those styles overlap and coalesce to create an effective work environment.

One of the major projects I worked on this summer was a massive overhaul of the AAWE reproductive rights training manual; a daunting task! Editing, re-writing and re-organizing the manual gave me a great deal of insight into the inner workings of AAWE and the reproductive rights movement, as well
as adding to my own reproductive rights education. One of the more difficult aspects of reorganizing the manual was the responsibility inherent in deciding what to keep and what to get rid of to provide the most effective reproductive rights education to those who would go on to educate others. My level of knowledge which was neither expert nor novice put me in a unique position to assess what an individual entering training might need or want to know about reproductive rights and what information was absolutely necessary to pass on to others.

Another project I worked on this summer involved the AAWE Black Church Initiative and Beauty Salon projects. Both of these projects were in their beginning stages and were represented mainly as outlines and brainstorming sessions. While at AAWE I helped to define geographic parameters of the project and compiled comprehensive lists of area churches and salons where outreach efforts would be most effective.

I also did a great deal of work surrounding AAWE’s new space, which they had just moved into when I arrived and their new focus of providing more geographically centralized outreach. These tasks covered a wide range and included ordering new address specific supplies, unpacking, and finding innovative ways to get to know the neighborhood and brainstorming about the most effective ways to provide outreach to AAWE’s new neighbors.

My academic experience with issues surrounding African-American and women’s rights prior to my arrival at AAWE was also very helpful. Having past experience with the injustices experienced by women and people of color in
regard to social and political issues really helped to inform my opinions about AAWE and its place in the reproductive justice movement. In addition, my experiences at AWWE helped to inform and narrow my ideas regarding my own career path. My time at AAWE was truly one of personal growth!

While there are many more quantifiable experiences I have from my summer at AAWE, the aspects of my internship that impacted me the most were not specific projects, but AAWE itself. AAWE is an organization in possession of a phenomenal wealth of information that I had the privilege of having nearly unrestricted access to for an entire summer. Having such access illustrated to me the incredible importance of AAWE’s work and mission. An internship should not be a pre-requisite for obtaining information about reproductive rights. This information should be readily available to everyone, regardless of want or need, and organizations like AAWE are working everyday to make that ideal a workable reality.

One of the biggest lessons I took away from AAWE was to continue my practice of asking why. Too often those who question common practice are dismissed as hysterical or untrustworthy. My summer with AAWE imbued me with the strength to keep questioning, even when my questions are met with denial or resistance.