This summer I spent ten amazing weeks working full time at the National Network of Abortion Funds (NNAF) in Boston, Massachusetts. NNAF is a worldwide, non-profit organization that works with local abortion funds to raise money for abortions for low income women. Local funds may partially or fully cover the cost of an abortion, depending on the client’s needs. Some funds may also cover the costs of practical support, like transportation or lodging. My duties as an intern mostly consisted of administrative assistance, but the work varied depending on the necessities of network staff. Working at NNAF greatly enhanced my understanding of reproductive work and deepened my commitment to reproductive justice.

I began my internship in mid-May, approximately one month before NNAF’s National Organizing Summit in Oakland, California. The summit was an opportunity for fund volunteers, reproductive justice activists, and allies to come together to network and attend workshops which would provide them with new skills and tools to assist people seeking abortions, as well as revitalize volunteers for the cause. For the first five to six weeks my duties were mostly focused on preparing for summit, and there was a lot to do. When I began I had small tasks such as looking up restaurants in the Oakland area, answering phone calls, and updating the registration form. This allowed me to adjust to working in an office environment and at the network. I was also trained to take phone calls from people seeking funding, which was critical. Eventually my tasks grew to include putting together summit schedules for the staff, board, and speakers, as
well as locating and sending important materials to the hotel and maintaining contact with a local printer. At the summit I worked on behind the scenes preparation, such as making sure we had all the materials we needed for each workshop, checking in the fund members as they arrived, and note taking during workshops.

Skills that came in very useful for working at NNAF were my knowledge of Microsoft Office, time management, and ability to work independently. Everything from display table mock ups to summit registration to workshop evaluations required some knowledge of Microsoft Excel. Knowing basic spreadsheet formulas was very helpful. A lot of the work prior to summit falls under a deadline, so all tasks should be completed quickly and efficiently. Furthermore, because the office staff is small and everyone has important, specific jobs, a lot of intern work has to be done independently. The staff is very supportive and will answer any questions and demonstrate how something should be done, but it was important that I was able to pick it up quickly and take it on myself. The main issue I had was a personal flaw that was pretty easy to overcome – I have a shy personality, so at the beginning I was not completely comfortable asking for help with certain tasks. Luckily for me the staff and my supervisor, Tiffany, were really friendly and supportive and had no problem explaining how things needed to be done. They made me feel comfortable asking questions, and eventually I did not hesitate to ask for help.

Although my internship was great, I think one thing I would have done differently to make my internship experience more meaningful was to complete a personal project. Tiffany and I had talked about a personal project for the summer, and my idea was to find out how college students could get more involved in abortion funds. Prior to the summit there was just way too much to do to focus on my individual research and so it never became a priority for me. During
my last week Tiffany arranged for me to speak with the Board President and a member of local fund in the Five College area. They were super helpful and gave me a lot of information regarding how to support funds as a college student. They also gave me contact information for other funds with resources, like volunteer outreach strategies, that will be helpful for promoting abortion funding on campus. Abortion funds are so uniquely different and I wish I had made an effort to get insight from more of them.

I cannot believe I am saying this, but taking a computer science class was not a complete waste of time! I may not remember everything from CompSci 106, but what I learned about using Microsoft Excel was immensely helpful for doing office work, since so much of the work depended on the program. Knowing spreadsheets in not necessary, but was definitely helpful and allowed me to complete my work much more quickly. Working with NNAF gave me a lot of insight into what is actually means to work in reproductive justice, but having some prior experience was useful, particularly when doing the workshop evaluations. The intention of the summit is to provide new resources for expanding reproductive justice in abortion funding. The evaluations let NNAF know which workshops accomplished this goal, and how they can be improved for future summits. Having previous knowledge of reproductive justice from my women, gender, and sexuality as well as sociology classes was very helpful for analyzing workshop evaluations because I had a good idea of what comments and criticisms NNAF was looking for. Although this is knowledge that can be obtained outside of the classroom, having taken those classes was personally helpful for me as it greatly aided in my ability to analyze the evaluations and write a thorough report. Working with the network provided ample opportunities to connect my knowledge from the classroom to my understanding of what reproductive justice activism means and why it is important.
When I began my internship I was really looking forward to seeing what career opportunities were available in reproductive justice. I was considering a career in public advocacy and policy, but had no idea how to break into the field. Working at NNAF gave me a peek into the world of abortion funding. What I learned is that abortion funding is heavily reliant on volunteers and it takes a long time for funds to begin hiring paid staff members. A position as a program director entails so much work that a person would need to get paid to do it. I was able to attend a workshop during the summit that was very informative about how funds make the transition from all volunteer to paid staff. Compared to the amount of volunteers who do abortion funding, career staff members are limited. However more and more positions are becoming available, and this summer the Boston office was doing hiring for a couple of open positions, which gave me a chance to see what they look for in a potential staff member. I still do not know what I will be doing in my post graduate life as far as a long term career, but I did build useful skills in my internship. Regardless of what I end up doing as a career, I know that I definitely want to volunteer for an abortion fund and donate to funds in the near future.

I am so glad I got to get acquainted with the National Network of Abortion Funds this summer. I have always been really passionate about abortion access – every time I hear about the latest legislation that is being used to undermine reproductive rights I want to get up and do something about it. During my time at the network I was introduced to equally passionate activists who were making important strides to maintain abortion access. A lot of people believe that abortion rights began and ended with Roe v. Wade and do not see how those rights are frequently cut by anti-choice legislators, the profound effect this has on people’s lives, and how low income people are usually the targets of this legislation. Abortions funds are essential for helping low income people exercise their rights, and the network brings these small funds
together to enhance their power. While nothing is ever perfect, the network is always genuinely interested in learning more and trying to be inclusive of all people. I could not have asked for a better organization to work with.

I would highly recommend future interns think about working at the National Network of Abortion Funds. The work the network does is really important and will strengthen your commitment to social and reproductive justice. As an intern you will get to talk to people seeking funding. While it is not always easy (some calls are actually hard to take) it makes you feel like you are really changing someone’s life. The staff is so supportive and friendly. They do not see you as an intern who is just there to help out; they are genuinely interested in making the most out of your internship. You will get an opportunity to meet inspiring activists from around the world – I am a new fan of Monica Roa. To get the most out of your internship, try to make a goal or project for yourself early on. If you are serious about it and put effort into it, everyone will be more than happy to help you accomplish your goals. Finally, get in contact with your supervisor prior to beginning your internship. Find out what will be happening in the next few weeks and decide on a date that works for both you and your organization. I began my internship the week after finals, but because Summit was just five weeks away it gave me time to adjust to the work environment before things got really busy.