



civil liberties & public policy

building the movement for reproductive freedom

Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps (RRASC) Intern Final Report

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Throughout the summer of 2014, Project South: The Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide, had a ten week initiative that employed organizations across the U.S. to mobilize for change through grassroots organizing. The kick off weekend of the “Unite to Fight” summer organizing drive institute lined up perfectly with my first week at Project South, allowing my ten weeks to follow directly alongside their allowing for an action packed summer and fellowship.

Unite to Fight Weekend- Atlanta, GA

My first day of work was also the opening day for their “Unite2Fight” Drive. The institute consisted of organizations and activists from across the South coming together to take classes and workshops on how to put their organizing goals for the summer in a larger prospective on how different movements can build solidarity and make stronger impacts on a national/regional level. The first person I was able to get to know was an activist named Aleta. As we assembled packets for conference go-ers, Aleta told me about the brilliant work she did on the Troy Davis trial. It meant a lot for me to hear that story because while his life is more than that moment, his murder is one of the first things that told me that their needed to be a change in the South and that things were unjust on multiple levels. Aleta is now working as one of the lead organizers on the Free Marissa (Alexander) Now! Campaign because she has committed her life to fighting for justice and the freedom of others. As I met the team I would be working with all summer, I also met the people we were working for, people who are organizing across the south. It was exciting to meet organizers from Texas to West Virginia who were intentionally making plans to fight alongside one another in order to make summer impactful. The people in attendance were all passionate about

their front lines and by gathering, they showed the importance of intersectionality and communication.

Standing Our Ground- Jacksonville, FL

I was the point person for booking the hotel rooms and coordinating the drivers, as well as keeping attendance to make sure all the students arrived on time. It was really interesting to discover my own leadership style within that space, and in a different town, surrounded by different community members and organizations. The main purpose of Project South's attendance was for the youth involved in a summer camp program at PS to host and lead a Youth Assembly during SisterSong's Standing Our Ground Week. While there were a few adults in the room, it was truly led by the youth. Not one word was spoken by any staff member except when specifically asked. My role that day was to take notes throughout the assembly, watching as the two different groups spent time talking about the relationship between Marissa Alexander and Trayvon Martin. Most of the time I was thinking to myself, "wow, I wish I was this cool when I was their age!" I was deeply impressed and intrigued by what they were saying. Not only did people step up and share when asked but they made room for one another to speak in a safe and judge free zone. While Project South supports many movements, the youth work they do in their own community and space are the most important and beneficial.

Grant Writing & Donor Databases

There are two practical skills that I am very thankful I was able to learn and practice: writing grant proposals and working on donor databases. Many jobs are looking for development and fundraising people who are experienced with donor databases, which is really intimidating because there are very few programs and gathering experience is not a simple task. For a working structure, knowing the constituency of those in direct need and those funding are important to track and know. Donor databases come in many forms and take time to get to understand. I am thankful that the operations manager spent time with me, teaching me how to use their system and how to gather the data it held within it. I have not had first hand experience with a database before, but I know that it would be exciting to have a position in development, so that real time experience really helped my cultivate knowledge. The data I was able to find allowed for me to assist with writing a grant that would fund programs on a long-term bases.

The time I spent editing and formatting a huge grant proposal was tight. I have written mock grants before in my classes but having the reality of a very last minute/ in real life proposal was much more stressful! Buckling down in the office, having to be focused and poignant and caring, all in a very small time frame made the process exciting but hopefully next time I can start sometime before the Monday before a grant with a Thursday deadline.

The Southern Movement Assembly- Atlanta, GA

The culminating moment of my fellowship was during my last week, as it was also the end of the organizing initiative I started out on. The plan for the SMA was to make a 2-year plan of action for all the organizations across the south that allowed for support across front lines, but also across regions. The more solidarity we can build for one another's organizations, the better! The moments where I was able to participate and not running around, I could feel the power in the conversations. There were eco-justice activists figuring out how to support farmworkers, youth hosting an all-ages cypher, and so many other little pieces of different communities moving as one. The idea of networking that may have previously made me afraid was shown in a new light. People power is the greatest resource the movement has and getting to know and trust each other is key to a fuller long-term program. The plan for the next two years hinges on acknowledging Ferguson now, the upcoming anniversary of Katrina, and the deepening crisis of poverty, and responding to it. Nothing can truly be separated from one another personally or politically.

The SMA demanded my time and energy but I could feel the ways that I had grown in my short time with Project South. The leadership at Project South exemplifies the ways that different forms of leadership styles are important and that they are each important to strength in structure. I was able to learn different ways of collaboration from the different personalities and I saw the different ways they interacted with the attendees of the assembly. For a final moment, the SMA allowed me to see the micro and macro aspects of long-term grassroots organizing.

Overall, I am pouring over with enthusiasm for Project South and feel excited to stay on as an administrative intern for the University Sin Fronteras. My time will be spent building structure and accountability at the main university campus in Atlanta to be modeled at the three other locations: Detroit, Puerto Rico, and San Antonio. The different skills I was able to learn from my ten weeks will be extremely helpful as I take a more self-directed role. I am happy that through the RRASC program I could show my skills as an organizer and activist on many front lines of struggle and that it made a platform for me to show that. Even if I was not asked to stay at Project South, I know that being a RRASC fellow would show that I have had on-the-job training and real world experience beyond any other internship. I am thankful for this experience and encourage other fellows to pursue their time at Project South if they are interested in learning about struggles across a wide range of strategies and issues.

More information on the RRASC internship program: clpp.hampshire.edu/RRASC