



# **civil liberties & public policy**

**building the movement for reproductive freedom**

## **Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps (RRASC) Intern Final Report**

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This summer I spent nine weeks interning at the National Network for Abortion Funds (NNAF) at their main office in Boston, MA. This multi-faceted non-profit organization works to support activists in abortion funds across the country and beyond to affect change and help women now. Through creating a comprehensive support network, NNAF actively seeks to discover the struggles and needs facing women and Funds everyday in order to better improve the support offered. In addition, NNAF manages the George Tiller Fund, which supports women seeking late term abortions, and provides transportation costs, as well as funding for women who reside in states that do not have an abortion fund. NNAF also plays a great part in advocacy work and is actively at the forefront of the All Above All Campaign that unites organizations across the country in the fight to lift bans denying abortion access in the U.S.

With eleven staff members, both working remotely and in-office, NNAF works extremely hard to fulfill the demands of a national organization with a limited staff. However, with a group of dedicated, determined, and hard working members, they successfully and effectively continue to make a difference in the lives of women across the nation as well as overseas. With so much going on everyday within the organization, my immediate worry was that I was going to have a more traditional internship experience with not much personal attention while only fulfilling tasks that no one else had time for and didn't want to do. However, I could not have been more wrong. During my time at NNAF, I was given meaningful, necessary, and interesting tasks, my opinion was considered and valued, and I had a constant support system, allowing me to gain tools for both the reproductive justice field as well as the professional world in general.

Within this internship, I had two supervisors. My main supervisor, Idora, was the Operations and Development Associate. She was in charge of all logistical work for the office and about a forty percent of my time was spent supporting her. Although it was not hands-on activism and much of it was tedious data entry, it offered an amazing

opportunity to learn the inner workings of NNAF. I saw how we personalize every thank you note sent to donors, what tactics keep them coming back, how to format and what to include in newsletters in order to best display the work we were doing, and so on, all serving as an amazing career development opportunity. My largest project for Idora was to enter hundreds of clinic invoices that were left undone because no one in the office had the time to spare. It was tedious to say the least, but I soon realized that not only was I learning how these invoice processes worked which connected my understanding of how women were given funding and what the inner workings of clinics were, but I also knew that every invoice I entered into the computer represented a woman in need that got the help she deserved.

My second job was taking over the referral process. Since I was the first line of defense on most of the calls coming into the office, I was the first person to respond to women seeking funding for their abortions. At first, this proved to be an extremely nerve-racking experience. I had a script to go by but was continually warned that there was no way to anticipate what I would find on the other end. These women were all in extremely stressful situations and therefore all reacted differently to the information and support I had to offer. Some were crying, some very stern, others just needed someone to listen to their story. It was my job to be that nonjudgmental and loving voice on the other end of the phone. What made it most difficult for me was my inability to see any of their faces and therefore, gauging what kind of support and what kind of person they needed me to be at that moment proved tricky. I work best with people one-on-one and in person and therefore, I can best understand people when I can perceive their whole being, facial reactions, body language and all. Over the phone, laughing can sometimes seem like crying and silences can be misinterpreted as wanting the conversation to end. The only way I truly got comfortable with it was through experience and even then, I still did not know what to expect. In the end I did have a few very intense calls that I did not entirely know how to talk through afterward, however, I discussed this with my supervisor and am confident there will be some sort of protocol in the future through more staff and supervisor support as well as self-care methods.

Idora also acted as an emotional support with weekly check-ins and a constant dedication to making sure I was getting everything I possibly could out of the experience. She set me up with short interviews with everyone in the office and continued to ask me if there was a field in which I wanted to do more work within. I truly felt professionally supported and cared for.

For my second role, I worked with Tiffany, the Member Support Coordinator, who was the direct contact between the Funds and NNAF. In this role, I helped organize tasks for future conferences, transcribed interviews with activists, updated the Fund database, managed Fund due payments, created web surveys, and other odds and ends. However my favorite part was my Fund Spotlight project. I had expressed my interest in expanding my work to people in the movement outside the office, and therefore, I was given this project. I got to interview a Fund of my choosing, one that I thought was doing particularly inspiring work within the current political climate, and write an article for the website showcasing their dedication and activism. It was the main

opportunity I had to speak directly to the activists, again it was only over the phone, but it was truly amazing to hear firsthand what was going on in the field.

Prioritizing, multitasking, and not procrastinating were the three skills that best translated into this full work environment. I was acting as direct support to these incredibly busy women and therefore, the faster and better I could complete my work, the easier I made their lives. However, it was not a hectic environment and I was greatly supported in prioritizing what they needed to be accomplished and in what order. I learned how to tailor my writing to certain audiences in certain locations. For example, I had never written a promotional piece for an organization's website before and therefore learned to craft and frame what I was writing to fit the NNAF voice. One of the biggest skills I gained was a deeper understanding of Excel and other Microsoft programs. I had a basic knowledge of these programs but my understanding expanded greatly after completing many projects in Excel.

I truly appreciated what NNAF accomplished because it was thoughtful and smart work being done by thoughtful and smart women. They supported people by listening to them directly and finding solutions that made an effective impact on those people's lives and work. Besides being passionate about the issue of reproductive justice, my time within the organization allowed me to internalize and support their methods. It was truly amazing and inspiring to see both long and short term solutions being worked on not only through what they accomplish on a daily basis, but through their dedication to always keep the conversation going, whether that be during lunchtime discussions (they always eat together) or designated times for discourse in staff meetings. They were committed to maintaining a critical understanding of the issues within reproductive justice and how they connected cyclically and intersectionally to other topics such as racial and economic justice. This translated into understanding and intelligent work. My academic studies in Social Thought and Political Economy prepared me greatly for the intersectioning of social issues found in this work, however since I rarely took a reproductive justice track, I came into this internship partially blind of the issues this country was facing. My supervisors however, gave me great resources to keep me updated and encouraged me to take chunks out of my day to read and understand the topics we were dealing with.

As the only intern in the office and the only new employee, it was a bit intimidating joining this small and close-knit staff. However, I highly advise all incoming interns to not worry about immediately fitting into the dynamic. There is nothing wrong with biding your time and establishing your own role in the office. They greatly appreciate you and will respect your natural pace in becoming situated. I also suggest that all future interns utilize all opportunities to do work that interests you. They will give you a personal project of your own choosing, allowing you to tailor your internship to your own personal interests. I advise you to put a good amount of thought into what that project should be since it will be completely your own, take up a lot of your time, and be an amazing opportunity for you to get experience in a field that you're interested in.

I loved my summer at NNAF. Although it was spent in an office with the same eight people every day, these women soon became supportive and loving friends and I knew we were accomplishing more than I could ever quantify. I am proud of the work

NNAF is doing and the work that I did for the organization. I learned what it was like to work in a non-profit office-setting, the struggles they face, and the bonds they create. I learned about what type of worker I was, what kind of person I could be in a professional setting, and what I don't want in a future career, that being an unsupported environment that does not make self-care a priority. I did not see the push back against abortion rights that people in this field experience every day, I did not see where these women seeking help were coming from. I was removed from that world and therefore was removed from a lot of the pain. However, a fire was lit inside me that I intend to follow into my future.

**More information on the RRASC internship program: [clpp.hampshire.edu/RRASC](http://clpp.hampshire.edu/RRASC)**