National Network of Abortion Funds

This summer, I interned full-time at the National Network of Abortion Funds, a national nonprofit organization that works to reduce barriers to abortion access. The Network primarily does this work through bringing together and supporting abortion Funds that raise money in order to financially assist those who cannot pay for an abortion. Some Funds also provide practical support by helping with associated costs, such as transportation, lodging, and food. As a Program Intern, I worked in the administrative office and had the opportunity to learn an incredible amount of knowledge about reproductive health, rights, and justice issues, that which I did not know were still highly relevant today.

Projects and Skills

As a Program Intern, the skills I used the most were my Microsoft Office skills and my project and time management skills. For the most part, everyone in the office works independently while periodically checking in with their coworkers and supervisors. My projects were all based within Microsoft Office, with a heavy emphasis on spreadsheets and documents. Except for the few tasks that my supervisor Kim asked me to prioritize, I set my own deadlines and prioritized my workload myself. This worked out quite well; my supervisor often commented on how efficient I was and the Executive Director complimented me on how much I contributed to the Network during my internship.

In the end, I completed a sizable list of projects. In the beginning of my internship, the Network was in the final preparation stage for its annual National Organizing Summit, which is a three-day conference where Fund members can learn, network, and share ideas. For two weeks prior to the Summit, I helped prepare program folder materials, nametags, and other logistical tasks. At the Summit in Denver, CO, I ensured that the workshop and plenary rooms had all the necessary materials. I took notes on workshops and made sure that attendees knew where they were going. After the Summit, I became the point person for processing travel reimbursement forms and for soliciting and analyzing evaluations. I also hand-wrote over forty long thank you notes to session facilitators.

From the evaluations, I compiled three reports: the Summit evaluations internal report, the workshop evaluations report, and the Summit wrap-up email. In the Summit evaluations internal report, I analyzed responses and found trends from an overall evaluation that participants filled out on paper and online. This six-page report was written so that the Summit Task Force, the Network board, and Network staff members could read what attendees considered to be the Summit's strengths and weaknesses. For the workshop evaluations report, I compiled data from the evaluations of individual sessions. I determined how well the sessions were scored, including the average score of each question and an average overall score for the workshop. I also summarized the major trends seen in comments and quoted exceptional comments in full. This report ended up being around 26 pages long, and I emailed each facilitator the results of their sessions. Finally, the Summit wrap-up email was written for Fund members, particularly those who were unable to attend the Summit. It included how many people attended, recaps of some sessions, and more. Including attachments, I ended up writing over seven pages for this email.
After I finished the post-Summit work, I worked on two more projects: a 501c3 group exemption guide and a members-only site new user guide. The 501c3 group exemption guide was my personal project that I proposed, and it explains how Funds can become a 501c3 organization through the Network’s "umbrella" group exemption status. It is designed so that staff members can better understand how to work with Funds to obtain a 501c3 status. The members-only site new user guide was written because the Network is transitioning to a new website. I took an existing one-page "getting started" guide, written by the host website software company, and expanded it into a five-page guide, designed particularly for the less-tech savvy Fund members.

From all my projects, the three most important skills I developed were 1) report and technical writing 2) data analysis and 3) policy analysis. In writing so many reports, I clearly developed the first skill well. My data analysis skills come from compiling the data from the evaluations, and I am interested in enhancing these skills in the future. My policy analysis skills came from learning about the Hyde Amendment and actually from having access to the Twitter feed on the members-only website. Various reproductive justice organizations all over the country posted legislation updates and blog posts, which helped shape my critical thinking around policy. In a conversation with Ibis Reproductive Health staff at a brown bag lunch, we discussed the possible implications of copay-free prescription contraception in a scheme for over-the-counter contraception, and the staff said that the questions I raised identified the hot questions they themselves were trying to answer. This experience affirmed my desire to continue to learn more about policy work.

**Highlights, Difficulties, and Improvements**

The highlights of my internship were attending the Summit and learning from my coworkers. At the Summit, I was able to attend workshops and plenaries, and this was how I dove into the world of reproductive justice. I gained a foundation of knowledge about the Hyde Amendment and other issues within the Network, such as the struggle to balance advocacy and direct services, to collect and use stories ethically, and to empower those served by Funds. Preparing for and then working the Summit also taught me who some of the major players are in reproductive justice work. It was at the Summit that I learned about NARAL, for example, and after the Summit, I was able to recognize some of the bloggers and advocates appearing in my reproductive justice news and blog stream. I often found myself thinking, "I wish I knew who these people were before I went to the Summit!" because only after the Summit did I connect people to work I could see online.

Another significant portion of my learning arose from my outside conversations with coworkers during downtime and in just learning about the different lifestyles available to people. One of my female coworkers was married to a man, but the two of them had no children. Another coworker of mine is single and has lived in at least three cities in the past couple of decades, working with different nonprofit organizations. Both of these coworkers showed me alternatives to the lifestyle I was taught to seek but have strongly resisted, which is to find a job, get married, have kids, and live in one place while working one job for thirty years. I think that exposure to these different life paths is just as important to women’s liberation as all the good work being done; knowing that people can diverge from the standard path and lead fulfilling lives is extremely liberating.

Talking with my coworkers also gave me an idea of how people viewed the office dynamics and the board. People did not always feel that the office was running as efficiently as it
could, and I heard this during lunch breaks as people decompressed. It was important for me to see how the staff dealt with their stress and used each other to talk about their difficulties. Once they returned to the office, however, everyone still worked well together. This reaffirmed for me that even if two people do not like everything about each other, they can still work together professionally and be respectful. I learned a great deal in watching how the office managed its dynamics and stress.

In the beginning, I had difficulty answering the office phone, likely because I was afraid of not knowing the answers or what to say. Due to prior experience at a suicide hotline, I was especially nervous about speaking with women who needed abortion funding, even though I would only be referring them to our national case manager. When my supervisor assigned that responsibility to me, I hesitated to answer the phone, and more experienced interns would have to do it. When one of the interns kindly reminded me that this was my responsibility, I finally gathered my courage to answer the phone so as not to burden other people. At that point, it was hard for me to keep all of the phone etiquette in my head until the Executive Director had a friendly conversation with me about it. This was difficult for me at first partially because I did not have the call-training documents until after I had learned the etiquette through experience. If I could approach this learning process again, I would have been more proactive about finding the training documents and taping them up near the phone.

I would have also liked to have pushed harder to have my Summit reports go out. Due to vacation scheduling and preparing for the end of the fiscal year, my supervisor was often busy, and I did not receive approval to send out my workshop evaluations report until about a month after I had finished it. This frustrated me because I knew it reflected poorly on me as an intern. I should have offered to do the task much earlier. In the same vein, my supervisor did not have time to look over my 501c3 group exemption guide or to send out my Summit wrap-up email. This is mostly due to the fact that the fiscal year ended while I was finalizing these projects, and my supervisor got pulled in to accounting work. I think if I had advocated for myself a little more, however, I could have at least seen my Summit wrap-up email sent out before I finished the internship.

**Preparation and the Future**

Entering my internship, my academic studies had prepared me well. I am a Public Health and English double major, and I have also completed the Citizen Scholars Program (CSP) at UMass Amherst. CSP is a two-year social justice program with a service-learning component. My internship drew heavily on my public health and social justice knowledge, particularly from the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies course I took as a CSP elective. My projects also ended up heavily utilizing my writing skills, as I proofed and wrote many documents and reports.

When I first started my internship, I knew it would be beneficial to me in that I would learn a great deal and gain valuable work experience. I believed in this enough to turn down a different job that offered much more money but less learning. The benefits and relevance of this internship far exceeded my expectations, in that I did not predict how passionate I would become about reproductive justice issues. This passion has a tremendous amount of value to me as a student of social justice, because I have long been passionate about social justice but not about a particular issue. I have a background in food security and mental health issues, but reproductive justice is something I now feel empowered and radicalized enough about to act upon.

I can say that this internship has been highly influential as I consider my career goals and life path. The interests that my internship pointed me to solidifies for me that I want to pursue a
career in health policy and that I want to do practical work, rather than research or teach. As someone who struggled to put together academic and career goals for years, I credit this internship with my ability to say now that I want a Masters of Science in Health Policy and Management. This internship has pointed me to some more immediate goals as well; in the near future, I want to learn grant writing, become more masterful at Excel, and continue to develop my skills in data and policy analysis.

**Final Impressions**

Overall, my internship was a great experience. The workload was appropriate to my skill set so that I never felt completely overwhelmed with projects but I also never felt useless due to lack of tasks. Striking this balance allowed me to do my projects well and to learn along the way. As for my placement site, I felt extremely satisfied. Even though the office dealt with some internal issues, the Network is still an organization that does great work in providing direct services while also engaging in advocacy.

I consider reproductive justice to be a realm of social justice, where social justice is applied in addressing reproductive health. I think I have always understood this nebulously, and becoming more fluent in reproductive justice jargon helped me solidify and communicate this understanding of the intersections between the two. Along the way, I also honed my ability to communicate the difference between reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice.

For potential future interns, I would suggest just one thing, which is to actively set goals constantly throughout the internship, including daily, weekly, or internship-long goals. This will help ensure efficiency as well as learning, particularly when it comes time to select a personal project. Constant goal setting will also make the intern more proactive, even if that intern is already skilled in this area.