While I had a summer internship in 2016, I consider my time with Family Equality Council (FEC) to be my first “real” internship experience, from finding a place to live, commuting to work, and having a regular schedule. My previous experience with nonprofits had been more on the educational side, which meant I was excited to jump into an organization oriented more around community building. The two areas that FEC engages with are events/programming and policy. The policy side of FEC encompasses the legislative work that they do in creating policy briefs and being involved in legal advocacy for the LGBTQ community. The events and programming side involves several large fundraisers around the country that allow FEC to host multiple events for families to meet and find families like their own. During my time with FEC, I helped to host one of their biggest events, Family Week, an annual gathering of LGBTQ+ families in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Throughout the week, Family Equality Council hosted over thirty different events. These included three regional gatherings, one of which comprised over seven different regions, nine affinity gatherings, six parent workshops, and three day camps for children. Parent Café sessions were facilitated by ten different partners, including Miriam Adams from Merrill Lynch, author Sarah Pragar, and school professionals Zack Snider, Ph.D., Johnny Cole, and Marla McCulloch. The final number of families attending was 381, but there were additional families in Provincetown taking part in Family Week programming who did not officially register. Ten families joined for Cape Cod LGBTQ Family Day, a single day event for families on the Cape. With some families only joining for the day and many other families registering for COLAGE (Children of Lesbian and Gays Everywhere) programming, the rough estimate is at least 450
families participated overall. Families traveled from twenty-six states and D.C. as well as five other countries (Canada, France, U.K., Germany, and Belgium).

Aside from myself, there were nine other programming and events interns working with FEC for Family Week. FEC has over forty different events during the week, and each intern was assigned to various events as well as two major projects. My most significant projects included creating the program book for Family Week as well as the post-Family Week survey and gratitude process. For the program book, I was responsible for all of the content, including creating a finalized schedule of events, soliciting ads from local business as well as managing previous relationships established with businesses, and copy editing the final product. For this portion of my duties, I used my effective organizational skills as well as the ability to multitask. I heavily employed my written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills not only in producing the content, but engaging with donors and sponsors about their willingness to advertise.

During the latter half of my internship, I created a survey for families to provide feedback on specific events during Family Week, while also gathering their demographic information. Using the data from these surveys, I wrote a report for the week summarizing feedback and compiling visual representations of the data. For this portion of my internship, I had to employ a high degree of familiarity with Excel spreadsheets and word processing systems.

The gratitude portion of the project involved reaching out to all of those who supported the week in some way, most through donations and sponsorship, and sending out personalized thank you emails expressing our gratitude.

The events that I was directly in charge of included the Cape Cod Families Picnic, Whale Camp, Dads' Gathering, Beach Campfire, Whale Watch, and the Transgender and Gender Non-
Conforming Gathering. In general, these events involved communication with the site hosting the event and coordinating necessary donations. For the Cape Cod Families Picnic, we had a grant that allowed us to provide free lunches and waived registration for families from the Cape to join us for the day. The Dads' Gathering is a happy hour event hosted by a restaurant for all self-identified dads to mingle while their children played on the beach. The whale watch was just that, a boat full of LGBTQ families that went on a whale watch, which I was able to join. It was my first whale watching experience and we did see three whales up close. The Trans Gathering was similar to the Dads' Gathering where parents had the chance to mingle and network, while we hosted activities for their children.

My two biggest events were the Beach Campfire and Whale Camp. Whale Camp was one of the three day camps previously mentioned where we partnered with the Center for Coastal Studies and created a curriculum for the children to learn all about whales. I found that portion to be the most educational because I too learned all about the diet of whales and different species of whales.

Beach Campfire is a huge event where all of the families fill up a beach on the National Seashore. This event involved by far the most coordinating out of any other event. FEC provides s'mores for the event, which meant we had chocolate, marshmallows, graham crackers, and ziploc bags donated. We coordinated the delivery of all of these items as well as the assembly of s'mores bags. We were also involved in the logistics as the National Seashore has several restrictions and we had to balance their rules with the ideas of our sponsor for the event, Disney. Disney provided some programming during the event as well as some goodies. This has been by far the largest event of which I have been in charge, so it’s safe to say one of the biggest skills that I refined this summer was event coordinating.
The highlight of my internship was being Cookie Monster for one day during Family Week. One of our sponsors was HBO Kids and they sent a representative from Sesame Street as well as the Cookie Monster costume, but no actor. I volunteered to wear the suit for two of our events. One was the Littles' Gathering, which was a daily event for children under four to be active in the park. The second event was another day camp, where kids watched Sesame Street and did a relevant craft. I took photos with all of the children in the park, which allowed me to realize the impact that our programming has for these kids. There were days in the office after writing the millionth email that I started to lose sight of what our work meant beyond the walls of the office. Being in the suit, and throughout Family Week, I realized how invaluable these experiences were to families who sometimes came from regions where they were the only LGBTQ family.

The most challenging aspect of my internship was living alone, especially living alone in a large city. I lived with an alumna from my school, but she would come home late and be gone for weeks to Maine, so I essentially lived alone. For several years of my life, I have shared a room and now in college, I share a room again. I have always thought of myself as someone who would enjoy having a room of my own, but I discover that I value having others nearby. I found it difficult and lonely at times to be in a large empty house. My schedule was so busy between commuting, working out, and cooking that I never made it out of the house on weekdays. My office was in Somerville, but I lived out in Brookline. On the train, it would take me up to an hour each way to commute to work. Even though it was rough at times, I value having had the opportunity to live alone and know definitively that it is not for me.

Another thing that I learned about myself this summer was that I like cooking a great deal, but that it takes me a long time to cook. My biggest source of self-care this summer was
going home and cooking what I wanted to eat. I asked my mom for several recipes of food I grew up eating and would try to make them for myself. I also enjoyed baking and spending time creating treats for myself that would have otherwise been very expensive. I also learned how to budget, prioritize eating at home, and limit the number of meals I ate out.

Most importantly, I learned that I appreciate a working environment where people are committed to the mission of the organization and understand the impact that their seemingly menial tasks have beyond the office. Family Week was a special event because not only did families come together, but so did the entire fourteen person FEC staff. I had support for some of my events from the CFO of the organization, and I met everyone who worked for FEC. I found my internship to be such a unique experience that I was able to understand how a seemingly small team could be behind a national nonprofit. I believe FEC is an important aspect of the work involved with reproductive justice as they support communities beyond basic access to family planning. The fight for reproductive rights has essentially been about access to birth control or the right to choose, but reproductive justice is about the creation of community and providing support to the community. I now feel more solidly that I would like to attend law school, as a law degree is something I could leverage outside of the courtroom by working in a nonprofit.

My advice for future interns is not to be afraid to ask for help. Working at a nonprofit is not about how much work one person can accomplish, but about people working together toward a common goal. Feel free to reach out to staff members with questions and don't be afraid to use opportunities where you don't know everything to learn.