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Sillerman Master's Fellowship
Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy

Summer Internship Reflection

I applied to the Sillerman Master's Fellowship program in order to acquire hands-on skills, understand state-based health policy, and experience first-hand how philanthropic organizations can induce positive change. The Sillerman Center connected me to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, where I secured a placement as an intern for the summer. During this time, I floated between their grantmaking and policy areas, evaluating grantees, proposals, research, and events. From here, I was able to closely observe the philanthropic process while educating myself in state policy and function.

One of the first processes I observed was a learning community for the Connecting Consumers with Care grant area. Here I saw the process in which a foundation supports its grantees by bringing them together to share information and best practices. This shaped my understanding of a good funder-grantee relationship. By bringing them together, the Foundation could gather and disseminate information by having grantees communicate with each other and form relationships. We were able to find patterns in the issues grantees faced, and they were able to help each other figure out ways to overcome similar conflicts by sharing what has worked for them. These meetings served not just to educate and disseminate results to the grantees, but also to receive feedback on what the Foundation can do to better support its grantees. I saw a similar process in conducting site visits, with both the Connecting Consumers with Care and the Strengthening Voices for Access grant areas. The preparation, implementation, and follow-up of these visits taught me how to better communicate, assist, and form relationships with grantees. It was here I found that my teachers weren't just the Foundation, but also the grantee organizations as well. They demonstrated their results but walking us through their methods, such as leveraging institutions, laws, and politicians, to wrapping around their patients to holistically deliver them to their full potential. Here, the Foundation taught me that the experts were always the grantees, and that the funder does not take a patronizing role.

This is further reinforced during the Community-Based Organizations event held by the Foundation. This event was proposed because the Foundation sensed growing tension between the medicalization of social services and community-based organizations that already serve low-income and vulnerable populations. The event was to collect and understand the CBOs' perspective. In preparation for the event, the Foundation made sure to pick a venue that was neutral. They did not hold the event in a clinical space nor at the Foundation in order to make the CBOs feel more comfortable. During the event, the moderators wanted to create a shared language, as the medical space and the social services space do not share the same lingo. This event gathered any fears and conflicts, and what could not be assuaged there, and the Foundation plans to communicate their suggestions and solutions to key stakeholders, in order to better support and empower these CBOs. From here I learned how to gather seemingly disparate

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organizations together, encourage them to share, and to get their perspective on potential problems and solutions.

Another big part of my internship was that I got to participate in the process of evaluating and selecting grantees for a grant cycle, in addition to experiencing the creation of new grant cycles. Here, evaluation skills were emphasized, and I learned what makes a good proposal and how to integrate what was seen during a site visit into what I learned from a proposal. I learned how, in making grant guidelines, to think and visualize new contexts and how to holistically tackle the roots of health inequity.

Through these projects, reports, gatherings, and research, I experienced the myriad of ways a foundation can make a positive, sustainable impact on the world. The Foundation took a holistic look at what determines health outcomes and sought to make sure all aspects of health could be supportive. They made sure to put out policy briefs and primers so everyone can understand how new legislative changes can impact themselves, their family, or their patients. From mental health, to health access, to the social determinants and social services, the Foundation made relationships with innovative people and teams in order to create long-term change for the better and help people live their healthiest lives.

Overall, my time at the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation allowed me to pick up new evaluative skills, teaching me how to integrate both information from a proposal and insights from a site visit, as well as the larger context surrounding a grantee. I honed my writing and communication skills, observing how the team negotiated and contracted with grantees, institutions, and evaluation consultants, and following suit. My experience attending events led to me become more literate in state policy, community organizations, and communication with seemingly different groups with different specialties. My internship is defined by all my new experiences and skills, and I'm very grateful to have been able to work there. I feel privileged to have worked alongside a talented and hardworking team, and I look forward to continuing my internship in the Fall.