

Reflection Paper: Summer Fellowship at the Social Innovation Forum

This past summer I had the privilege of working as an intern at the Social Innovation Forum (SIF) in central Boston. SIF was founded in 2003 as part of Root Cause, and has been an independent non-profit since 2015. The organization's mission is to create positive social change in greater Boston by engaging leaders, strengthening organizations, and building networks. It does this through a network building approach that involves creating opportunities for exchanges, dialogues and sustained engagement between members of its community, referring to itself increasingly as a marketplace for social change.

My internship title was "strategic planning and evaluation intern", and the internship aligned closely with my MBA concentration in philanthropy. I had worked extensively as a grant seeker for several organizations in both Israel and the Canada, and I also had experience as a grant maker working with the New Israel Fund, a background which was enhanced through the experimental learning course in Practicing Philanthropy I took at the Heller School. I was particularly excited about beginning work at SIF because I believed the experience would enrich my understanding of the intersection of the non-profit and philanthropic worlds. This reflection paper will outline my main projects and deliverables at SIF.

I worked on two main projects during my internship. The first was a strategic planning project related to SIF's recent acquisition of the Next Mile Project (NMP) (a co-working space at 1 Congress Street in central Boston). The project involved assisting in the development of strategy and planning surrounding the recent acquisition of NMP. It entailed supporting SIF staff in defining how the space would be used, pricing out membership levels and capacity, and thinking about other activities related to SIF/NMP community building. This project connected to several MBA courses, including the focus on mergers that we studied in conjunction with Strategic Planning, and the financial analysis of roll out pricing and break even points that we reviewed in Financial Management. I conducted research for this project, mapping the potential stakeholders of a co-working space and considering how best to appeal them (a marketing strategy).

My second project was to develop a plan to evaluate SIF's core programming, namely its social innovator accelerator, and its growing network of members. This project involved helping to design and build tools for measuring SIF's impact and outcomes. For this project, I used my prior knowledge in network theory and my previous academic work tracking social networks of ethnic and social groups. These skills helped me to build SIF's theory of change into an evaluation plan, while considering how best to track and understand the impact of its network.

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Several deliverables emerged from this project. The first was a survey designed for all past SIF innovators, aimed at evaluating their learning and growth as an organization. The second was a spreadsheet designed to track engagement levels (breadth and depth) of those in the SIF network.

In addition to these projects, I also worked in conjunction with SIF executive staff on some preliminary organizational strategy work. This project involved drafting a series of slide decks on potential future program directions, working with SIF staff on redrafting the organization's purpose, and in the design of a survey where all staff were asked to individually evaluate a number of future projects based on their perception of their fit with mission and organizational capacity.

I immensely enjoyed my time at SIF, and the experience gave me a new vantage point through which to understand social justice philanthropy, and particularly to engage with the wider social change community here in Boston. I am truly grateful to the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy for the opportunity this fellowship afforded me, and I believe I will carry the connections and learnings from the summer forward into my future career.