

Adiba Nasser
Sillerman Fellow Summer 2016
Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts Foundation

The Sillerman Fellowship program gave me the opportunity to acquire the best summer experience with important and necessary learning opportunities. It is not only a prestigious addition to the value of my resume, but also a networking and learning opportunity of a lifetime.

As a student of Sustainable International Development, I always knew I wanted to work for the development of the world's poor with the help of philanthropy. Philanthropy can be defined in many different terms, however, and it was always a complicated matter to me. I understood funders, foundations and philanthropy to provide the conditions and money necessary to affect a system. Because I am from an underdeveloped (currently developing) country, I always had a fear of funders, since the success or even continuation of many projects solely depends on their financial resources. I realized with time that the fear should not be real and there is a gap between donors and the organizations they fund that carry out the work. I must understand the culture and process of philanthropic organizations to have a better impact. The Sillerman Fellowship Award offered me a wonderful opportunity to find the perfect placement at the Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts Foundation (BCBSMAF) and experience first-hand the necessary aspects of philanthropic activities.

BCBSMA Foundation is not a very large foundation but has been serving the community with their innovative and ideal grantmaking design in the health care arena for fifteen years. They collaborate with public and private organizations to broaden health coverage and reduce barriers to care, through grants, research, and policy initiatives. One very important fact about the organization is it is currently an all-female organization! So, this was influential for me to observe closely how these women are adding significant value to the community while managing their families as well.

Though I spent a short time in the foundation I had the opportunity to work with a number of different grant areas. I jumped into the Catalyst Fund Campaign right after joining. This grant is generated by the employees working in the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) insurance company and the campaign runs once a year to raise more funds with which to distribute grants. Different grantees come and participate in the campaign to convey their gratitude to the employees and also show what changes they have made with the grant. I visited three different locations of the BCBSMA company and helped the foundation in pre- and post-organizing and setting up the campaign.

The opportunity of writing grantee success stories for the internal publication gave me an opportunity to use my creativity and designing skills. Communicating with local grantee

organizations, collecting stories, quotes, photos from their archives was very interesting. Making the stories short but appealing with the perfect photo attached was challenging as well!

Reviewing Grantee proposals for both Strengthening the Voices for Access and Connecting Consumers with Care grant area was a meaningful experience for me. I learned to write summaries from the proposals which were eventually presented to the board for final decision making process.

Fostering Effective Integration of Behavioral Health and Primary Care (FEI) is a very interesting and important grant area which helped me find out about the current state of care for behavioral health issues in the country. During the site visits, I came across many specialists and learned the current concern of integrating behavioral health with primary care.

I mainly worked with the grant making team so hadn't much chance to work with the policy and research team apart from joining them in some webinars. However, I had chances to do general organizational research for all different grant programs and, was able to extend my knowledge on various sectors of the health care system, management strategy, updated technologies, etc.

If I look back and think what outcomes I have from the summer placement then I'll just find a bag full of good memories, along with a nice and modern working environment, beautiful working space and supportive colleagues and mentors who were always ready to extend any help with a smiling face. Their approach to work-life balance is notable and something I have learned for the rest of life. I will try to make a good balance for me and my team from now on wherever I go to work.

The foundation not only helped me with developing my writing and analytical ability but also enriched my knowledge by the site visits. Every field visit was very exciting and precious to me as I was learning, observing, contributing and gathering lot more queries for further research. I am grateful to the foundation for counting me in for the visits. Learning new software like Salesforce was another positive aspect of the foundation experience.

Overall, the health care system in the US and Massachusetts was a new window of education for me, having no background in the field. The experience gained from the placement is going to help me in my further endeavors, undoubtedly. Though, I strongly feel I would be able to contribute more to the foundation's work if I had some health care background.

Last but not the least, I cannot thank enough the Sillerman Center and the BCBSMA Foundation for giving me this wonderful summer in a foreign land. I wish both the establishments very best of luck and I will look forward for more opportunities to work with both of them.