

Sillerman Summer Fellowship Reflection
New York Women's Foundation
Summer 2016
By Ariela Lovett

I applied to the Sillerman Center's Summer Fellowship program having participated in two grantmaking processes, one as a high schooler through a local youth program and one through the Sillerman-sponsored Practicing Philanthropy course at Heller. I was eager to move beyond the classroom setting to learn more about philanthropy and the grantmaking process from inside an actual foundation, and to consider whether I might pursue a career in the philanthropy sector after completing my dual MPP/MBA degrees. With Sillerman's support, I was lucky to secure an internship at the New York Women's Foundation (NYWF), and spent my summer working with their Programs department, guided by my wonderful supervisor, Camille Emeagwali. I was eager to return to New York City where I had worked prior to beginning at Heller and to experience the day to day at a mid-size foundation with an explicit gender lens.

NYWF was founded in 1987 by a small group of New York City-based women and has grown into one of the nation's pre-eminent community-based foundations that gives away roughly \$6 million per year to over 100 organizations across the five boroughs. Part of the foundation's mission is to be a "cross-cultural alliance of women catalyzing partnerships and leveraging human and financial capital to achieve sustained economic security and justice for women and girls." I was able to see this mission in action from my vantage point in the Programs department, which is responsible for carrying out all grantmaking activities in collaboration with a rotating Grants Advisory Committee made up of a diversity of New York women.

During my time at NYWF, I was able to focus most of my attention on a long-term research project regarding the foundation's capacity building work. Capacity building relates to activities that strengthen the infrastructure or internal workings of an organization so that they can best carry out their mission. In addition to its general operating and program specific grants, NYWF provides \$5,000 grants to organizations that apply with a specific capacity building need, such as upgrading an outdated website, developing a fundraising plan to expand individual giving, or customizing a Salesforce database for improved client and donor management. This summer, I was tasked with reviewing and evaluating the capacity building grant applications that the foundation received from 2011 to the present to identify trends in requests and opportunities for the foundation to expand their work in this area. This research culminated in a working paper and presentation to office staff where I was able to share my conclusions and we engaged in conversation regarding the future of capacity building at NYWF.

Beyond my capacity building project, I participated in other foundation activities that contributed to my well-rounded summer experience. I accompanied staff on Programs department site visits to two of the foundation's grantee partners, Footsteps and Make the Road New York. I was also asked to prepare one-pagers for donor site visits that provided an overview of the grantee partners to be visited. I attended a launch event for a new partnership between another grantee partner, United Women Firefighters, and the New York Sports Club. I

got a taste of an incredible initiative that NYWF has played a role in launching and is currently spearheading- The New York City Fund for Girls and Young Women of Color- the first pooled fund of its kind that invests in organizations and initiatives that advance the leadership and well-being of girls, young women, and gender non-conforming individuals of color. I was also grateful for the opportunity to sit down for one-on-one informational meetings with foundation staff in communications, development, and strategy roles to learn more about their professional backgrounds and how their job functions fit into the NYWF whole. Through these conversations, regular meetings with my supervisor, and my own curiosity, I learned a ton about the inner workings of NYWF, their grantee partners, and where the foundation is situated in the philanthropic landscape.

Throughout the summer, I was able to use and strengthen many skills that I honed in my first year at the Heller School, including research, critical analysis, writing for a variety of formats/audiences, as well as public speaking. Prior to starting the accounting course sequence during my second year at Heller, it was valuable to read over financial documents that grantee partners provide to the foundation to get a taste of how I might apply financial skills in my future career. One of my biggest takeaways from my time with NYWF is the impact a mid-size foundation can have in advancing social justice through its grantmaking and related activities. NYWF is doing truly incredible work to provide financial resources and build relationships and power among grassroots nonprofit organizations in New York City that serve women and girls.

Spending the summer at the New York Women's Foundation allowed me to engage with social justice philanthropy at the intersection of my policy and nonprofit management/business interests. I am grateful to the Sillerman Center for sponsoring the summer fellowship program and for supporting me during the selection process and throughout the summer. And I am grateful to the staff of NYWF, and my supervisor, Camille Emeagwali, in particular, for welcoming me into the NYWF family and for providing me with a robust philanthropic education!