

Brian Ramsey, MPP '14

Sillerman Center Summer Internship Experience-Summer 2013

For nine weeks this summer I worked at the Boston Foundation in Development and Donor Services. My work, learning experience and the connection to tBF was made possible by the generous funding of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy.

When I originally applied for the Sillerman internship I wanted to learn more about philanthropies in the Greater Boston area and use that knowledge to inform my study and future work. Because my past experience in philanthropy had only been at the service delivery level, I wanted to learn how and why people give philanthropic gifts and what was needed to encourage that giving. I felt that without understanding how and why people give I was missing a piece of the puzzle. I believed an internship working in philanthropy would dovetail my career goals because it would help me better understand the (paraphrase), "hearts and minds of people with financial power to serve others."

Obviously, understanding the heart or mind of anyone is a bit lofty. But seriously, I do still want to understand why people give of themselves, why people serve others. I think understanding why we serve empowers us to do it better, do it more often and encourage others. And that's a good thing.

For the Boston Foundation, in the Development and Donor Services department, I spent much of my time performing research on donor prospects. I was trained to find the right information and provide analysis to support effective fundraising for the Foundation. I used a variety of sources to develop and synthesize information on prospects to produce a clear profile of prospect background, career, financial capacity, philanthropic interests and nature of relationship to the Foundation. I performed financial analysis of prospect and donor known wealth indicators to accurately assess philanthropic capacity. I also performed data management tasks, helped organize donor attended events and was invited to participate in frequent interdepartmental meetings regarding the direction of the Boston Foundation's donor centered philanthropic goals. I finished the summer working on a project to create an online donor education tool which would empower donors to give strategically and better achieve their philanthropic goals. All in all, it was a useful learning experience. I learned a lot about community foundations, the Boston region, some local players and the nature of philanthropy.

At tBF I felt that I was always learning something new about Boston, a nonprofit, or some public initiative. The Boston Foundation has their hands in everything. They're a fairly large and relatively old community foundation. TBF, like other successful community foundations, expands and connects with the whole region. If they're doing the job right they're connected to the community.

The Boston Foundation is a donor impact partner, major nonprofit funder and a civic leader. TBF both assists donors in their own philanthropic goals and steers its own course. TBF is working on impact, and this summer even released a new PR campaign encouraging donors, "don't just give, solve." Through tBF led civic initiatives, tBF research and tBF information sharing like the Giving Common or The Boston Indicators Project, the Boston Foundation has an impact on the health, education and safety of the region. During my time at tBF, I came to really admire the efforts of one of their initiatives, StreetSafe

Boston, and I'm hoping to analyze the program for a field research project in one of my courses this semester.

Through my Sillerman internship experience I learned a lot about Boston and philanthropy, two of my previously stated goals. And I discovered an unexpected skill: I'm fairly good at finding information on donor prospects. I gained a great deal through the connections and knowledge of Boston. TBF is in the practice of influencing public policy. And I think community foundations can have a strong impact on the public policy decisions in their region. In the future, if I pursue work in the philanthropic field I hope to use skills and knowledge gained at the Heller School to help drive policy decisions and more directly influence the policy agenda.

Originally stated in my Sillerman application, I had hoped to gain an understanding of philanthropy and an understanding of why people give. Part of me really wanted to understand how people with wealth make decisions. I learned that we're all pretty similar. We give to what we care about, what we believe in, what we trust. We give to people and organizations where we have a connection. We give where we anticipate impact. And we sometimes give for recognition. But I also learned that philanthropy can be strategic. Our gifts can have a specific concentrated impact.

I'm glad I got a chance to work at the Boston Foundation, and I'm really glad I was exposed to so much of the nonprofit community that until then, I didn't know that much about. I plan to use what I learned at tBF to better study StreetSafe, a youth violence reduction program, in an upcoming class. I expect to use tBF's Boston Indicators Project and their partner the MetroBoston Data Common as a future information resource and I expect to maintain a healthy respect for philanthropy and continue to try to better understand why people give of themselves and their resources to others.