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Sillerman Summer Fellowship 2020 Reflection

For my fellowship, I was lucky enough to work with two organizations doing quite different work. I worked with Angela Brown and Len Bartel at CFLeads, an organization that provides training and support to community foundations. At The Clowes Fund, a family foundation working in New England and Indiana, I worked with Megan Reilly. While my work for both organizations required that I hone my research and writing skills, the content and application of the work I did varied. While my experience was certainly shaped by the current Covid-19 crisis, I gained valuable knowledge, experience and connections.

A large portion of the work that CFLeads does is leadership training for community foundations. Obviously, the current crisis impacted their work tremendously. Like many other organizations, they had to find out how to make their workshops effective in a remote setting. I was tasked with compiling a literature review on best practices for adult learning, specifically for remote learning. This project helped me hone my literature review skills, and certainly helped me in my own online learning.

I helped CFLeads with two other projects: one was to help them frame an evaluation they are beginning of one of their economic inclusion programs, the other to help find statistics to frame a report they will publish soon. My work on the economic inclusion program evaluation revolved around finding literature that spoke to the impact of the presence community foundations and other place based organizations on specific communities. I reached out to several potential thought partners to request interviews about their work in this area. I think likely due to the Covid crisis, we did not have much luck with responses to this request, but the task gave me more confidence in reaching out to experts.

The Clowes Fund is a family foundation that funds work in immigrant justice, workforce development, arts and education. I worked with Megan Reilly primarily in immigrant justice and workforce development. I completed an update of their giving landscape for workforce development funding. The giving landscape is a document that outlines the problems in a certain area to inform funding decisions. I compiled data and provided analysis on Indiana and several New England states showing the problems and need in terms of workforce development. This included data on unemployment, graduation rates, and low wage work.

I also helped Megan with several other projects. We organized two meetings of immigration legal service providers, which allowed providers to share their challenges, particularly those related to the current crisis. It also helped Megan learn how The Clowes Fund can further support these organizations. Megan also gave me some practical experience with grants. She taught me to evaluate grant reports from fundees, and tasked me with writing responses to these reports. This gave me practical insight into how grants work.

The Covid-19 crisis did pose some challenges, but overall did not detract from my experience. All of the work I did was remote, meaning that I did not get that informal enriching experience that comes with working with people in person. However, I met weekly with my supervisors over Zoom and even met in a park with Angela Brown a few times. My supervisors also invited me to attend staff meetings, which gave me more insight into the inner workings of CFLeads and The Clowes Fund.

In addition to work experience, all of my supervisors supported me by inviting me to meetings in the field and suggesting resources I should look into. They all took a clear interest in my professional development as well as my wellbeing and I hope to stay in touch with them over the coming years.