

Sillerman Reflection Paper – CF Leads

Thanks to the flexibility and support of the Sillerman Center I had the incredible pleasure of interning with CF Leads this past summer. As the first Social Impact MBA/MA in Sustainable International Development fellow, I am grateful for the opportunity to adapt my schedule for both my summer courses and internship responsibilities. I believe it is safe to say that my experience with Sillerman and CF Leads has changed the trajectory of my professional life, in the best way.

CF Leads, a philanthropy-serving organization, supports a network of community foundations nationwide to strengthen their impact on the communities they serve. They accomplish this goal through a myriad of outlets, most notably through their Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), which facilitates constructive solution building for community foundations' management challenges brought in by cohorts of CEOs, CFOs, and VPs. My time with this organization centered around this 12-month program.

I was tasked with identifying content materials that would serve as guiding resources during, and in-between, group sessions. My supervisor, the Senior Director of Strategy and Learning, and I were able to decide the content format to be a self-directed facilitation guide that included activities and other content applicable to supporting a wide array of management challenges. Based on the CF Leads' ELI facilitation model, the content spanned across topics such as: problem identification techniques, solution and risk management assessments, personal development, organizational change theory, 'Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion' assessments, and more. Given that each yearly cohort of executives may highlight different trends of challenges, the facilitation guide had to account for that as well as touch on the constant, or likely, challenges community foundations face.

I am appreciative of the CF Leads team's openness to ensure that my experiential needs were met by actively including me in as many spaces within the organization and its programs as possible. My access to the cohorts' meetings was exciting, and furthermore, the encouragement to participate in dialogues around the presented challenges was empowering. I attended meetings for the CFO and VP cohorts, originally serving as an observer, and then evolving into a participant in discussion, offering my Social Impact MBA perspective and personal anecdotes.

With a better sense of the types of challenges that community foundations face, and perhaps the larger philanthropy industry as well, I am more confident in what I can contribute in pushing the industry closer to social justice giving or transformative philanthropy. I started this journey after reading "Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance" by Edgar Villanueva, which reminded me that redistributing resources is not enough; we must include social and cultural considerations of healing into our giving or restoration practices. Community foundations, more so than others, should be beholden to such a standard because what will be left, without the community?

My background in community development seamlessly informed the perspectives I offered towards different community foundation challenges presented. Coupling that insight with my more recently acquired skills in organizational behavior, social justice management, and social impact strategy helped me to create a 26-page guide, containing 15 strategically curated and scaffolded activities, that I am certain will support the co-learning space that ELI creates; and that I am immensely proud of.

Overall, I am certain that philanthropic advising/coaching/consulting, will be the next move in my career, post-graduation. My experience in having creative freedom to develop this self-directed facilitation guide has shown me this I should not fear that my seemingly “unrelated” skills and experience are in fact what may be needed in the charge towards social justice philanthropy. My experience as a youth educator, an international community developer, a Social Impact MBA and MA Sustainable International Development candidate gives me the unique skillsets to strategically advise philanthropic giving in an interdisciplinary and intersectional way.

Through my time spent at CF Leads, thanks to the support of the Sillerman Center, I was able to remove any inkling of Imposter Syndrome and deepen my passion for Philanthropic Advising. I have already transitioned into another role supporting a family foundation, also looking to make some changes toward social justice philanthropic practices, and I couldn't be happier. Thank you for this opportunity, I truly believe that I have found my voice and my niche.