

A Summer at the New Commonwealth Fund

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With gratitude to the Sillerman Center for their support, I joined the New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund (NCF) as a Summer Research Fellow this summer. As an organization working as a thought and philanthropic industry leader in Massachusetts on issues of racial equity and social justice, I was grateful for the opportunity to use research and public policy tools to help inform NCF's transformative work. Moreover, I believe my experience with Sillerman and NCF has shaped my professional goals and academic work deeply.

The New Commonwealth Fund is a funding and support resource for Black, Latino and Indigenous entrepreneurs, innovators, and nonprofits. NCF addresses systemic racism and racial inequality while fostering inclusion, representation, opportunity, and prosperity for Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities in Massachusetts. To achieve this goal, NCF uses a three-pronged philanthropic approach of respect-based grantmaking, culturally relevant capacity building, and fostering an ecosystem to support robust racial equity and social justice outcomes.

As a Research Fellow, I examined policies and current practices across the state of Massachusetts associated with NCF's four pillar areas—criminal justice and policing reform, economic empowerment, health equity, and youth development—and used those findings to create a public policy agenda that would provide a blueprint for NCF to both guide and continue to support transformative change in Massachusetts. Working closely with my supervisor, the Director of Portfolio Impact and Community Building, Nadia Harden, I worked mostly on policy content, conducting research on the four pillar areas, and networking with relevant stakeholders among NCF's nonprofit partners.

My background in research and program evaluation thoroughly informed the perspectives I offered towards crafting the public policy agenda. With insights from skills I developed at The Heller School, such as policy analysis, research methods, and program evaluation, the public policy agenda took the shape of a resource I am positive will support, enhance, and guide the relationships and partnerships NCF builds as it continues to grow.

I am especially appreciative of the NCF team's flexibility, openness, and graciousness to ensure that my fellowship needs were met. As a recently founded organization, the NCF team actively included me in almost all aspects of the organization's work and programs. I visited with the team on their non-profit partner site visits, helped prepare and attend a donor cultivation event on Martha's Vineyard, and participated in the convening of NCF's non-profit partners as they formed their impact measurement tool. Through each activity and opportunity, the NCF team entrusted me to participate as a partner in their work, and share my thoughts and experiences, both personal and professional.

As a relative newcomer to the philanthropic sector, I was interested to learn about how philanthropy operates as a vehicle towards social justice. Guided by former president of the Ford Foundation Franklin Thomas's framing of the philanthropic sector as "society's research and development function," I looked toward NCF's work and commitments as an opportunity to explore this understanding and work towards advancing this philanthropic function in Massachusetts. Now that I have completed my summer with NCF and look forward to continuing our work together this fall, I am confident in this framing and familiar with what I can offer in its pursuit as the philanthropic sector evolves to greater incorporate approaches like NCF's, a grantmaking model built on respect, rigor, courage, determination, and love.