

Katherine Ponce
Sillerman Fellow Reflection Paper
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I applied to the Sillerman Fellowship because of the center's commitment to diversity and hoped to be placed at a foundation that would share this value while working to improve health inequalities in this country. The Sillerman Center helped match me at a foundation that does just that.

The MetroWest Health Foundation is located in Framingham, MA. They are a private foundation that works to advance health equity in the 25 communities that make up MetroWest. This summer at the MetroWest Health Foundation I was fortunate enough to learn a variety of skills and experiences in such a short period. This included the functions of different types of foundations, grant applications, grant cycles, and breakdown of foundation financials. The most valuable skills I will take away from my time as a fellow, are improving my data collection and my research skills.

I started collecting and synthesizing data early on at the Foundation. Before I arrived, the foundation awarded over 50 agencies with COVID-19 emergency grants. I got to work on developing a plan of how to measure the effectiveness of these grants. I began by drafting evaluation questions and then developed a survey. Using these questions, I completed a phone interview with 20 grantees. I used the data I collected to report the impact these funds had on our communities, to the staff at the foundation, and the foundation board of trustees. I appreciated the opportunity and autonomy I was given on this project to own its deliverables from start to finish.

In addition to my work to assess the effectiveness of the foundation's COVID-19 emergency grants, I also contributed research on topics around mental health, healthy aging, and conversations around racism. This research was distributed through multiple channels including a July blog on the foundation's website; *Mental Health: Switching the Focus from Breaking Down Access Issues to Re-thinking Our Delivery System*. Throughout the summer I was able to work on topics that interested me and assist larger efforts at the foundation. For example, my research on healthy aging was used to write the Fall 2020 Request for Proposal. This was my first experience where my research was used outside of the classroom. This experience helped me meet deadlines and work across the organization to gather the necessary information to be successful.

I am so thankful for the Sillerman Center and my time at the MetroWest Health Foundation. It not only expanded my skills, but it also helped me gain a better understanding of a possible career path for myself after Heller. This fellowship has given me a better understanding of philanthropy and shown me the different types of foundations.