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**Sillerman Placement: Boston Women's Fund**

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This Summer, thanks to generous support from the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, I was able to work with the Boston Women's Fund (BWF) on research to advance philanthropic support for grassroots organizations led by and for women, girls, and gender expansive individuals, with a focus on organizations led by black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). As a dual MPP and MBA student, I am interested in how forces in both the public and private sector can advance equity in the country and work to rectify systemic gaps based on race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, proximity to wealth, disability, among other factors. As a public policy student, I focus on how government can advance equity through policy, and as a business student I see the value of embracing the faster pace of the private sector to progress this work. Working with BWF has been such an eye-opening experience on how an organization can center equity in the work that they do and how these practices can impact the philanthropic sector more broadly.

BWF's community-focused and trust-based approach to philanthropy was what initially drew me in to the organization. Since its founding, BWF has consistently prioritized populations that have been overlooked with traditional forms of philanthropy – namely, women, people of color, and low-income individuals. This goes beyond just the mission statement, they embed equity into their daily practices by working with communities to identify leaders who are meeting local needs, employing a diverse array of staff, and creating opportunities for community members to be involved in grantmaking decisions. Seeing these practices firsthand was an affirmation that philanthropy can be transformed into a more community focused sector and that they are already organizations taking the lead in this work. I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about their approaches firsthand, then take a broader look to understand trends in the sector.

This summer, I was able to conduct a literature review then conduct interviews with major philanthropic organizations in the Greater Boston area to understand how the field prioritizes grassroots organizations, in what ways they are supporting women, girls, and gender expansive folks, and how they are intentionally supporting racial equity and justice in their work. These interviews gave me a much broader view on how organizations can center community in their business practices including making grantmaking easier on small organizations and adjusting reporting requirements to minimize administrative burden. We have seen throughout history that in times of crisis, grassroots organizations consistently serve as a central pillar in communities. Amidst the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic local organizations stepped in to meet local needs when other services were paused or stopped.

Recognizing the strengths of grassroots organizations, community-centric philanthropy can further boost this work. During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, many grant makers shifted practices to meet the needs of small organizations and to better center gender equity and racial justice as part of their work. The COVID-19 pandemic and racial reckoning of 2020 shed light on deeply embedded inequities in this country, however many of these community-centric practices have waned in more recent years. The research with BWF this summer highlighted the ways that

many organizations continue to do this work – the more that we understand best practices, the more we can mobilize the greater philanthropic community to center equity not just amid a crisis, but as a standard way of doing business. Intentionally programming for organizations led by and for women, girls, and gender expansive folks, for grassroots organizations, and leaders of color can be a key strategy to undoing systemic inequities in wealth and access to resources in this country.

I am so grateful to BWF for allowing me to join them for the summer, for sharing their insights and expertise, and for their fierce dedication to centering the strengths of communities who have historically been marginalized. Thank you also to The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy for connecting me to BWF, for guidance throughout the process, and for the generous support in making this opportunity possible.