

When I first heard that the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy offered a fellowship during the summer, I was immediately intrigued and thought about applying. I came to Heller with five years of experience working in nonprofits, including a couple years working as an evaluator where I assessed the success of various foundations' and nonprofits' programs and initiatives. Up to that point, I had a basic understanding of what foundations do and the role they play in social movements; beyond providing funds to a variety of different organizations and issues, I knew that foundations could also be conveners and policy advocates. The power and privilege that comes with being a funder, and most often as a convener and advocate as well, naturally makes foundations a powerful ally to have when advancing any type of social movement or issue. However, I was unsatisfied with my limited understanding and wanted to delve deeper into how foundations operate, how they actually work towards addressing issues I care about, and how and to what extent they include racial and economic justice lenses into their day-to-day work.

This past summer I had the honor of interning at the [Boston Foundation](#) and the [Haymarket People's Fund](#). The Boston Foundation is the largest community foundation in the Greater Boston area. Their catchment area spans as far north as Rockport, MA and travels all the way down to the southern reaches of Duxbury, MA. Among the foundation's many focus areas – arts and culture, education, economic development, and housing – I worked with the Boston Foundation's Neighborhoods and Housing team. I spent the bulk of my time helping the team think through their initial funding strategy for the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program. FSS is a national program that the Department of Housing and Urban Development oversees. The program helps Section 8 and public housing tenants save and accrue wealth and helps tenants reach their financial and educational goals.

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My responsibilities included conducting a literature review of existing evaluations and findings about FSS and interviewing FSS practitioners and talking to them about their experiences operating FSS, the challenges they see in their work, and how foundations can better support the work that practitioners are doing. My work culminated in a five page memo that included recommendations which I presented to the team on my last day.

Haymarket People's Fund is an anti-racist and multi-cultural foundation in Boston that supports the social justice movement in New England by giving operating and capacity building grants to grassroots organizations operating in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. I had the opportunity to interview several grantees to learn about the amazing organizing work they did. The information I learned from my interviewees will be highlighted in Haymarket's upcoming Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 newsletter. I also conducted research into Haymarket's grantmaking since they were first created more than 45 years ago. This helped the organization have a better sense of the types of organizations and regions they have historically supported the most, and the regions and types of organizations that could need Haymarket's support more.

Through my summer internships I felt like I had deepened my understanding of how foundations operate. I got a taste of how some foundations carry out their role as a convener and funder, the importance of creating space for community organizations to come together to connect and support each other, and the questions Haymarket and the Boston Foundation had to grapple with as they try to support as many organizations as possible while being aware of their privilege and power in the community. All of this provided me with a more holistic perspective of foundation's role in social movements, and I'm excited to continue my learnings around foundations in the coming years!