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Internship with The Lenny Zakim Fund Reflection Paper

This past summer I was an intern at the Lenny Zakim Fund, thanks to the generous support of the Sillerman Center. As an international SID/COEX student, my previous experiences focused on work with international organizations and cultural institutions. I had little experience in the philanthropic field. Amidst my questions about what the experience would be like, I was sure of two things: I wanted to work with a foundation that provides support to immigrant and refugees, and I wanted to increase my set of hard skills.

The Lenny Zakim Fund had a clear task for their prospective intern: an evaluation project for one of their most-recently implemented programs. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an area I have been interested in from undergrad, area I delved further into during my first semester at Heller. Upon further investigating into LZF's funding areas I found that they prioritize historically marginalized, under-served and under-resourced communities throughout Massachusetts. Thus, two were my certainties, and two were the factors that contributed to me choosing LZF as my placement for the summer.

If I wasn't sure that my decision to work with LZF during the summer was correct, their executive leadership of the foundation solidified my satisfaction with my choice. From the moment I started my internship, the executive director, Allison Picott, and my immediate supervisor, Dominique Ramos, made sure that I felt welcome in the foundation by providing me with an office space, security clearance to enter LZF's offices, and chances to engage and connect with the rest of the staff.

Apart from that, my direct supervisor made sure I felt empowered in my position from the get-go. Having the power of making decisions on a project of this caliber was an opportunity someone of my background does not get often, and I am

incredibly grateful that I was able to take charge and implement the knowledge I gained during my undergrad and my first semesters in the Heller School.

My evaluation project took place from early May to August 31st, when I sent the final evaluation report to LZF's executive leadership and two members of their investments committee. I divided my work on the project into three stages: documentation, data collection, and analysis and reporting. At each stage I found challenges and opportunities for learning.

My challenges were mainly people management and technical skills. As for people management, the subjects my project evaluated were all leaders in their organizations, with the responsibilities and tasks of a leader...and their schedules were proof of that. It was immensely difficult to make contact and find a time that was optimal for meetings. At the end of the project, 70% of the members of the universe studied were reached. This was enough to have trustworthy findings and conclusions.

When it came to technical skills, I had to become familiar with the software I used to implement one of my data collection tools. Although I had some field experience, I had never had full power to conduct data collection and analysis of a project...which creates a loop with my initial challenge regarding people management. Despite several attempts to have the subjects of study to answer a particular data collection tool, too few of them did so, and I could not obtain any data from that tool.

Despite my challenges, I still put in practice many of the skills I had only used in a classroom setting, which I am so thankful for. On the one hand, I think that the evaluation project would have benefited from a larger team; although this is not LZF's fault—every time my supervisor asked me if there was support that could be provided to me, I didn't request expanding the evaluation team. However, the independence and power of decision this project provided me was unparalleled.

My internship has continued into the fall, with a final Q&A to LZF's Investments Committee in September, and a presentation for the board in a future date.