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New York State Health Foundation Intern  
Wellman Hill Recipient 2019

This summer, thanks to a Wellman Hill Grant, I had the opportunity to intern at the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHF). The grant allowed me to relocate to New York City and work for an organization engaging in place-based grantmaking with the goal of building healthy communities.

At the NYSHF, I was assigned to the Building Healthy Communities initiative, a 5-year initiative launched in 6 neighborhoods in New York City. The focus areas were “Healthy Eating” and “Active Living,” so the NYSHF funded several grantees who had project ideas to improve access to healthy food or to promote a more active lifestyle. Healthy Eating grants included increasing the number of farmers markets, supporting food cooperatives, and offering local job training in the culinary arts. Active Living grants included improvement of parks, provision of fitness classes, and enhancement of public safety through programs such as street cleanup. The initiative was in its final year, so the goals of my internship were to understand how grantees could sustain their work after the NYSHF funding ended. During my 10-week internship, I had to complete several deliverables, including a comprehensive report summarizing the advocacy initiatives launched by grantees of other foundations engaged in place-based grantmaking. I also created a list of organizations that provide services to groups interested in legislative, policy, and advocacy activities. This list turned into a pool of potential grantees for NYSHF as they sought to fund a consultant for advocacy work.

The most valuable part of my internship experience was how much I learned about grassroots nonprofit work. I was able to see how different forms of public service on the ground complement each other and must be coordinated to achieve broad philanthropic goals. I was able to attend many valuable meetings where these broad, overarching visions for statewide health were discussed. I attended check-in calls with grantees so I was able to see what was happening on the ground and what challenges grantees faced in their work. I attended the review meeting for the OpenNotes Request for Proposals. This was a meeting where outside reviewers went over all the proposals received by the NYSHF for funding to implement OpenNotes in their hospitals and provided feedback on grant proposals. The feedback would be taken to the applicants to improve their proposals. The reviewers also determined which proposals were good enough to receive funding or not. This meeting was particularly informative because I saw the process by which foundations determine which grantees to fund; I got to see what qualities funders look for in potential grantees and what nonprofits have to do to receive funding. After the meeting, I understood much better what kinds of projects make good investments. I also attended program review meetings, which happen before each board meeting (4 times per year). In these meetings, the entire staff came together and offered feedback on each program staff members’ project proposals for the upcoming grant cycle. This was also a great way to see how projects that are good investments are chosen. I saw the inside perspective on how to sell proposals to the board

as well as to other funders. I went to several in-person meetings with potential grantees and was able to go on a site visit to East Harlem and meet with the Concrete Safaris staff.

All of these experiences with the NYSHF strengthened my conviction to pursue a career in health policy. Before this internship, I knew very little about philanthropy as a career. The experience was extremely rewarding because the organization was large enough to make an impact and was driven by its philanthropic mission, rather than by the profit motive. I enjoyed putting grantees together like puzzle pieces to see how we could best make the largest impact in the state. The size of the organization also contributed to the experience. The NYSHF is a tight-knit community and I developed relationships with nearly everyone in the office. I loved that everyone was familial and welcoming, and I hope to work in such a warm organization one day. I am extremely grateful to Liz Hill's generosity and to the selection committee for awarding me a Wellman Hill Grant, which made such a rewarding and educational summer possible.