

John Ruzic
New York City

Through the financial support of the Tonya Public Affairs Internship Fund, I was able to live and work in New York City during the summer of 2009. I worked as a Public Relations and Development intern at City Futures, Inc. City Futures, Inc. is a nonprofit organization which works to improve the debate around cities. The organization serves as the administrative parent organization to two others, which include The Center for an Urban Future, an urban policy think tank, and City Limits, an urban affairs magazine focusing on policy in New York City. City Futures works in a supporting role to fundraise, develop, and increase the scope of the two other organizations. The ultimate goal is to influence policymakers in such a way that inspires them to create a more equitable city in which to live.

Working as an intern in the administrative arena of the three organizations, my primary responsibilities were in development and grant writing. To begin my two month internship, I was asked to attend a number of workshops facilitated by the philanthropic community of New York. I was first instructed to find grants and grant makers that had similar interests and compatible goals. Not only would poor judgment in this area waste the time of the grant makers, but also waste the time, effort, and limited resources of a non-profit organization.

Continuing with the grant identification process, one also had to ensure that an organization's goal for grant making was compatible with your own goals in using the grant money. It was encouraged to do extensive research on the criteria of the organization or project which the grant making organization wished to support, but also to do a review of past grants made by the organization, and subsequently, the missions of the organizations that received this grant. Extensive research, I learned, was the only way to ensure that an organization was a proper fit for a grant.

Many philanthropic organizations choose to make themselves accessible to only a small community of grant seekers, so as to streamline the process for all people involved rather than seem unreasonable requests for funding. I learned about resources available to locate these organizations, research past grantees, and understand exactly what types of projects are viable for funding. One such resource was called the Foundation Center. The organization provides a library for public use, featuring records of every philanthropic organization in the New York area. One can obtain contact information as well as deadlines and guidelines for submitting grant requests. After searching out potential grant makers which shared similar goals with the projects my organization wished to accomplish, it then became my responsibility to write the grants.

As part of my work with development, I was also given some tasks involved with developing a marketing plan for the policy magazine City Limits. I was asked to identify the various political, social, and economic demographics which existed in New York and identify which of these were and were not being targeted as readers and potential activists.

I can separate my learning experience into two categories. I recognize the direct experience I was exposed to and thus the practical skills. I learned about the many research tools that are available in most areas of employment, and more importantly that there exists a community of professionals. I began to understand how to use this community to advance my own goals and profession.

Continuing with the establishment of yourself within the community, it became very evident that at this level, most grant seekers were past cursory research on the

John Ruzic
New York City

internet, through search engines, or through word of mouth. While networking was very valuable in this field of work, I also began to understand how important it was to do hands- on research and exploration.

I was also able to find learning points through the mistakes I made or what I saw as lacking within the organization I interned for. I began to understand very early on in my internship that there was a lack of understanding regarding the organizations specific goals. I recognized the need very quickly for a member of management that could skip over vague language to provide a clear, concise, explanation void of “buzz words.”

When reflecting on my own shortcomings and mistakes, I have begun to understand the need for structure, schedule, and planning. I often spent so many of my days doing what I thought was wasting time. I should have taken this as a chance to test myself in my abilities to make my own directions. I began to recognize the need for planning before jumping right in, as I am so apt to do. I have recognized the need to set aside a clear goal for the project, regardless of how significant or insignificant it might seem.

Because my career goals were rather vague at the start of my internship, I would consider the summer to be a success in further narrowing down what I do not want to do in the future. I saw a lack of accomplishment, a lack of effort, and a lack of general need for effort. The non-profit sector seemed to be a place where money was spent trying to get more money, instead of rallying around a cause or working towards drastic social change. I will continue searching for a career where my sense of accomplishment is higher, my work load is more satisfying, and there is a deeper desire and understanding of how to work towards a goal.

However, the people with whom I worked with helped me to realize some goals I have in furthering my education. I plan to look into some of their programs of study as an option for myself upon graduation. These fields include dual degree programs in Law and Urban Planning as well as graduate programs in Public Policy and Public Administration. In addition, the information I was exposed to sparked my interest in a number of subjects which I will continue to follow. Those subject included are real estate, affordable housing, and urban planning.

While my internship was not one I particularly enjoyed, I do not consider any experience to be a waste of time. The more experiences I have and the more people I meet, the more I understand my options in the world outside Sewanee, and how I can tailor those options as tools for reaching my goals.