

Cecilia Morales
Internship Report
Summer 2016

Company:

Write A House (WAH)

List of Activities:

- **Event Planning/Fundraising:** Working on WAH's annual fundraiser gala, participating in brainstorming sessions, gathering contacts and resources, researching comparable events, researching fundraising opportunities.
- **Internal Communication:** Updating contact info and bios for WAH's board members, writers, and judges.
- **Grant Writing:** Gathering information and preparing documents for grant submission, researching grant opportunities, writing letters of introduction to establish communication with potential donors.
- **Writing Content for Website:** Gathering materials and preparing documents to aid WAH's transition to their new website, organizing and revising previous website content, gathering and organizing other resources such as photos, logos, etc.

As an intern for WAH, I was working closely with co-founder Sarah Cox, helping her in any way I could with the daily upkeep of the organization. Because WAH is still a relatively young organization (founded in 2011), it is still very much in the midst of developing and stabilizing, and it was exciting to be able to aid in this growth. While doing so, I was able to observe what it takes to run a small nonprofit while also learning a lot about the particular needs and challenges of the city of Detroit. The work I did for WAH was challenging, interesting at times and tedious at others, but my biggest take-aways from this experience came from simply being privy to the inside-circle of the world of nonprofits and coming to a deeper understanding of the ways in which my knowledge and skills can serve me in a professional or managerial space.

Over the course of this internship, I went from being fairly timid, unsure of how I could contribute to WAH to being confident about my ability to offer up my skills in a professional, non-academic context. For example, after spending weeks researching grant opportunities, reading about the various requirements of the grant, and constructing a spreadsheet of deadlines, available funds, contacts, etc., I asked Sarah if we had an official letter of introduction that I could send out to those grants that I had deemed most likely to give us money based on their targeted interests. (Most nonprofit grants will not take unsolicited applications, but they will accept a short letter of introduction.) Sarah sent me a letter of introduction that WAH was using in 2014 and asked me to take a look at it and update it. As it turned out, the original letter was very specific to the moment WAH wrote it in 2014; it outlined very specific phases and goals that WAH planned to go through in the next three years (up to 2017). Thus, when I first looked at the letter, my first reaction was to feel completely underqualified (or at least under-informed) to be able to write a comparable letter that could address WAH's concerns in 2016. However, after making the decision to give this new genre a fair shot, I made the realization that I had every necessary skill to write an effective grant letter. I had spent the past couple months reading

WAH press coverage, learning about WAH's mission, and developing a deep understanding of my audience of grant donors. I had access to WAH's vision for itself in 2014, and I had a fairly clear idea about WAH's current goals and priorities from attending board meetings. And I had experience collaborating professionally from writing collaborative seminar papers, so I was able to leverage my skills and abilities to write a letter that Sarah could then fill in with her expertise.

Working with WAH, I also developed a deeper understanding of the situation in Detroit and the ways in which certain grant foundations and nonprofits fit into and, in a lot of ways, contribute to Detroit's economic hardship. While many grants and nonprofits focus on the clearly necessary, worthy goal of helping Detroit's children and youth get access to better education, it became obvious to me that over-determining education as the answer to Detroit's needs puts Detroit's need for infrastructure and job development on the back burner. I read close to a hundred grant descriptions, and probably 80% of those descriptions claimed to either give money exclusively to educational programs or to grant priority to those nonprofits who do so. Meanwhile, the national narrative of Detroit continues to focus on the fact that there are no job opportunities in Detroit, and "successful" educational programs are those that are able to help Detroit's youth leave Detroit. While I am someone who is passionate about education, this experience expanded my vision of potential interventions in cities like Detroit. It also taught me a lot about gentrification and ghettoization in general. Because I am interested in nonprofit management as a future career, this opportunity to develop my understanding of these issues was an unexpected but invaluable take-away of working with WAH.

While much of my work with WAH was exactly what people would consider stereotypical on an entry-level internship, I was able to gain a lot from working closely with Sarah and other WAH board members. I would absolutely recommend continuing the department's partnership with WAH, and I think making similar opportunities available for graduate students is an important, useful investment.