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Fund for the Public Interest Intern

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: Fund For The Public Interest Internship

Student Name: Isabela Alvarez

Internship Dates: June 22 - September 18, 2023

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STUDENT SIGNATURE *Isabela Alvarez*

DATE: 09/19/2023

Fund For The Public Interest Summer Internship

When I accepted an internship with Fund For The Public Interest, my learning goals were simple: learn how a national nonprofit organization of such great size is managed, gain insight into how the organization's funds are utilized, and learn more about each state's environmental research and advocacy process. While I do feel I accomplished all of my learning goals in my position, I also learned various other priceless lessons through my experience with the Denver office, skills that I am confident would benefit *any* college student regardless of their desired field or career path after graduation.

The first learning goal I set was to learn about how a nonprofit organization the size of Fund For The Public Interest is run. I learned quickly that their key to success comes partially from the efficiency of each separate department. Instead of assigning every staff member a task, The Fund organizes their staffers into departments. I personally got to work with the Member Services Department, where we handle all questions, concerns, and communication with current, past, or future sustainers. While there, I saw firsthand how important it was for my team to work efficiently. Members were happiest when we got back to them quickly and directly addressed their questions or concerns. Maintaining positive relationships with those who donate is vital to ensuring that the organization continues to receive funding.

Another strategy that the Fund For The Public Interest utilized to run efficiently was to practice collaboration among different state groups. Essentially, the Public Interest Network is how the Fund For The Public Interest is interconnected with each state's individual environmental nonprofit. For instance, Washington's environmental nonprofit is "Environment Washington", Colorado's is "Environment Colorado", and so on. Additionally, each state has a Public Interest Research Group, known as a "PIRG" state group. Again, Washington's is

“WashPIRG”, Colorado’s is “CoPIRG”, etc. Each of these state’s nonprofit organizations is part of the Public Interest Network, as is The Fund, which is how my department was able to oversee member operations for each one. However, if a member contacted us inquiring about a specific behind a certain state group’s campaign, employees, or practices, I’d practice collaboration by forwarding that email or voicemail directly to the member services staffer of that group, allowing them to either handle it directly or send it to another person who could. This seamless communication amongst each nonprofit ensured that we kept as many of our members as happy as possible, thus causing them to continue donating. Now that I’m approaching my final days with the organization, I can confidently say that I’ve learned that massive nonprofit organizations require teamwork and efficiency in order to run smoothly and continue growing.

My next learning goal was to learn about how Fund For The Public Interests utilizes their funds in order to promote environmental activism, change, and legislation, which again, I certainly did. As far as activism goes, that’s arguably most of the organization’s job in the first place. When members donate and provide funds for their state’s nonprofit organization, part of those funds go to paying canvassers. Canvassers are tasked with the daunting and exhausting task of going door to door and asking for support for a given campaign. I was lucky enough to be able to learn about a variety of campaigns that were run in each state this summer, from the prevention of logging old-growth forests to single-use plastic bans. Each campaign that canvassers canvassed for this year was deeply important and in need of bipartisan support. The organization’s canvassers are truly how the funding for the organizations aids in promoting environmental activism. As far as environmental change and legislation go, those are essentially the next steps for each organization after canvassing. After gathering support from citizens, members of our staff then take this widespread support to their government officials. They

provide evidence of how widely these campaigns are supported and demand legislation that honors their requests. At the end of the day, the organizations in The Public Interest Network fight for social change by paying campaign staff to create and promote campaigns, canvassers to gather grassroots support for the campaigns, staff to research public interest issues and publish reports, and critically, advocates to fight for these campaigns to become law or for corporate actors to change their companies' practices.

Finally, my last learning goal was to establish a deeper understanding of the research and advocacy done by the Fund's researchers and canvassers. I had plenty of opportunities to do this, particularly by sitting in on campaign briefings with my team, and by my last week of interning, even leading my own! These campaign briefs were short presentations on the various campaigns being held by our nonprofits around the country. In order for these campaigns to exist in the first place, Public Interest Network staffers must research them and gather information about why we should do something about them. One of the campaigns I had the opportunity to learn about this summer were the Right to Repair Act, which prevents rampant consumerism by providing repair shops and individual consumers with the parts and instructions to repair outdated technologies to prevent us from throwing them out and buying new ones. I sat in on another campaign where we discussed the harms of single use vapes, which are plentiful and vary from polluting our planet after being disposed to being an inefficient use of lithium. Another campaign towards the end of the summer informed my coworker and I about the benefits of establishing land as national monuments! Finally, I was able to lead a campaign brief during my last week at the office, where I gave a presentation on the Beyond Plastic campaign. In my presentation, I was able to share some of the information found by our researchers to the rest of my team so they could gain a further understanding as to why this is such a pressing issue. I was able to provide factual data

about the harms of microplastics, as well as our nonprofits' proposed solutions to this crisis. By sitting in on these campaign briefs as well as leading one of my own, I gained immense insight into what work each state group works towards and why.

I was also fortunate enough to learn many other important lessons through my work with Fund For The Public Interest that went far beyond my learning goals. I was able to give my first ever presentation for a job instead of school, work in an office for the first time, see firsthand the importance of working efficiently, and learn how to communicate professionally with our members over the phone as well as over email. These are lessons that I would consider valuable to anyone, regardless of their interest in environmental activism or legislation. I can now add skills to my resume such as presenting, experience in administrative work, office experience, and professional communication. While I once feared speaking over the phone, I am now comfortable doing so. While I experienced a small amount of imposter syndrome on my first day, I now feel confident walking into an office knowing I will get all of my work done. These kinds of experiences have allowed me to feel more self-assured as I wrap up my collegiate experience and begin to enter the workforce. Additionally, while I once feared asking for help when I misunderstood a task out of fear of being seen as unintelligent, I can now understand that asking questions in a new position is how you learn to be the best at your job as you can be.

I am incredibly grateful for everything I learned from my summer internship with Fund For The Public Interest and would highly recommend interning with them to any college student wanting a stepping stone into the workplace. Based on my experience, they can expect a patient and encouraging team, valuable resume skills, and an in-depth understanding of how national nonprofit organizations are run.