

Elizabeth Smith

2018 Sillerman Summer Fellow

New England International Donors

Sillerman Fellow Reflection Paper

This summer I was a Sillerman Summer Fellow at New England International Donors (NEID), a giving collective of more than 150 individual, organizational, and corporate philanthropists who are dedicated to educating themselves about how to give more responsibly to the world's most pressing needs. NEID has two giving circles that meet regularly to host subject matter experts on issues like climate change mitigation and empowering women and girls. These groups collect donations from members and then at the end of their education process, facilitate a grant cycle to identify and invest in several grassroots organizations doing work in the respective areas. This summer, I attended several meetings for the climate change giving circle and worked with the members of the circle to facilitate the grants cycle. We identified more than 30 grassroots organizations doing climate change mitigation work in the Caribbean basin. We reached out to several of those organizations to request Letters of Inquiry to further narrow the pool of potential grantees.

I also worked with NEID's two staff members to organize and execute the first Innovations in International Philanthropy Symposium. NEID, along with the Boston Foundation and The Philanthropic Initiative, hosted several non-profit chief executive officers from the Kellogg Foundation and Water.org and philanthropic thought leaders like TED's Chris Anderson to discuss similar, but more nuanced issues including how to scale solutions to reach their maximum impact, the role of racial and gender minorities in development, how to use financial mechanisms to create access to clean water for all people, and the trends for the future of international philanthropy. We also oversaw and helped facilitate several workshops including how to align a person's individual philanthropy with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, how to take a participatory approach to grant making, and how to engage corporate philanthropy partners in international giving.

The summer was fast paced and a great academic and practical challenge. Sillerman afforded me an introductory boots-on-the-ground look at how to map funding priorities, listen

to the donors, and prioritize the needs of the beneficiaries above all else. I was so encouraged by the way the NEID members frequently discussed the existing power dynamics in traditional philanthropy and worked together to create new, more equitable funding streams. Being part of the grant-making cycle will no doubt make me a better development practitioner. As I settle into my practicum in fundraising, I will begin to see how grant-makers and grantees need to work together to make sure development dollars get to who need them most. I am grateful not only to NEID who willingly took on an eager-to-learn graduate student and found a role for me in several significant events, but also to the Sillerman Center which is working tirelessly to research philanthropy and educate us all on how to best improve it.