Badger Reach Internship: Final Impact Report

Megan Bjorgo

This past summer I had the great opportunity to work as a Resource Development Intern at the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County. United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County is a non-profit organization that works to better individuals’ lives and the community as a whole through investing funds they’ve raised into effective, local programs and initiatives within the areas of education, health and financial stability. United Way has five main departments: Community Impact, Resource Development, Marketing & Communications, Information Technology & Processing and Volunteer Engagement. Over the summer, I worked mainly with the Resource Development Department and four other interns. The Resource Development Department is in charge of developing and distributing donation information to individuals and companies as well as creating volunteer events for those who give to United Way.

As a Resource Development Intern, I had a few larger tasks, or projects, throughout the summer in addition to day-to-day tasks. My daily tasks consisted of donor stewardship which involved producing mass mailings, preparing for meetings and leading volunteer activities. Another task I often performed was data entry and clean up for United Way’s database, Andar360, to make sure individual and company information was up to date. As for projects, I researched CEOs of over 200 large companies in the southeastern Wisconsin area to make sure that the information was accurate in United Way’s database. In addition, I helped organize a collection drive where companies in Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County donated new and slightly worn professional clothing to those in need. I also helped organize, set up and lead Intern Day of Action where over 600 college-aged interns across Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha
County came together to volunteer for an International Day of Literacy Fair at one of over 10 locations in Milwaukee County.

One of the program themes of Badger Reach, ‘Relationships Matter,’ was prominent throughout my time at United Way. I realize how important relationships are when it comes to reaching a grand goal. At United Way, their goal to improve individuals’ lives and the community in the areas of health, education and financial stability would not be possible without community collaboration. While I was interning at United Way, there were numerous volunteer activities that I was a part of, such as Emerging Leaders Day of Action, where people of all different ages from Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County came together to pack over 1,000 Parent Engagement Kits as well as create a garden and paint a classroom at Lincoln Avenue Elementary School in Milwaukee. In addition, United Way partners with over 110 local agencies, investing in over 220 programs, which all seek to improve lives. For example, United Way is currently partnered with Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee for Boys and Girls Clubs Teen Pregnancy Prevention Collaborative. Over the next five years, this program aims to significantly reduce the teen pregnancy rate in the five zip codes of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County that have the highest teen pregnancy rate.

Specifically working as a Resource Development Intern, I learned the importance of another Badger Reach theme, ‘Considering Clients/Customers.’ When asking for donations, one must consider the characteristics of the entity you are asking. The way in which you appeal is different depending on whether you are asking an individual or a company to give their time or donate money to United Way. Furthermore, when organizing volunteer activities for donors you must consider their individual capabilities/interests. For example, young adult volunteers may be
more able to participate in activities that require more physical activity than those that are retired volunteers.

One takeaway from my internship experience that I believe is crucial in terms of professional development is the importance of assessing your growth through setting and completing reasonable goals and benchmarks. With the internship program at United Way, my fellow interns and I attended weekly meetings where we had the opportunity to meet a United Way employee and learn about their role at the organization. In addition, we would all share our professional successes, opportunities and discoveries of the past week. When working on repetitive tasks, as I often did with data analysis and research, it may be difficult to establish goals and examine your growth. Despite having repetitive tasks, our weekly intern meetings allowed me to reflect on my past week, assess my growth and set new goals and benchmarks for myself. One week, the goal I set for myself was to learn more about initiatives that United Way specifically leads. To achieve this goal, I contacted and met with the Director of the Community Impact Department, Julie Divjak.

For future Badger Reach students beginning to apply for internships, I would suggest that they be careful not to discount internship descriptions that appear to not directly fit their interests or major. When I first read the description for the Resource Development Intern position on United Way’s website I did not believe the position included many of the skills I wanted to develop over the summer for it seemed to focus mainly on marketing. Little did I know, I would be given the amazing opportunity to greater understand a nonprofit organization and the difference that they make across Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County. In addition, I would advise interns to take advantage of any and all opportunities they are given to learn more about the workplace and the people in it; strive to understand the different parts of the organization and
how everyone works together to reach a finished product or common goal. This could be through speaking with employees, attending events or even attending staff meetings. Also, get to know the people at your organization, whether that be your fellows interns, your supervisor or the employees you come in contact with. Ask them what they did before this position and how they became a part of this organization. Learning and understanding more about the organization, the work they do and the people within it will only benefit you and allow you to have a more fulfilling experience as an intern. Furthermore, it will grant you with knowledge and lessons that you may use for your own professional development.