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American Action Form/Network

I spent this past summer interning with the American Action Form, a subsidiary of the larger parent organization, the American Action Network. The Network is a 501 (c) (4) “action tank” that uses the Forum branch as its policy center to promote neo-liberal, supply side economic policy by publishing papers, maintaining a strong media presence – both new and old media platforms – and engaging influential thinkers and policy makers by hosting events (such as panel discussions, round tables, and open forums) around the country addressing topics relevant to national policy. The think tank, or “action”, tank styles itself as being more proactive than other policy institutes, and employs a number of experts in economic (fiscal, monetary, and tax), education, energy, environmental, and foreign policy.

The Forum is the policy center and nucleus of the entire organization. It advocates right wing policies, but its employees possess a variety of views and come from different parts of the country, offering a more engaging political discourse in the office. The organization itself is a 501 (c)(3), and is therefore meant to maintain a neutral line by providing non-partisan information and analysis of policy, based on facts and statistics. Also within the umbrella of the organization are the Hispanic Leadership Network, which aims to engage Hispanic voters on center-right issues, bringing them into the Republican dialogue by holding events, publishing a quarterly newsletter, *Accion*, and advocating pro community and business issues. Finally, another organization that shares offices with and whose staff overlap with the Network’s, is the Congressional Leadership Fund, a political action committee that supports Republican candidates for the House of Representatives, by funding advertising spots, sending out mass mailers, and reaching out to voters in elections. Its primary purpose is to maintain the Republican majority in the House of Representatives.

The Forum has a well developed internship program. Upon entering, interns receive binders with useful information – from office contacts to a blogging aid – are given a tour, interact with their issue area peers, and meet their actuary leaders. They have the possibility of writing two blog posts every week on the policy blog, which is shared by all the interns, and to which they are automatically enrolled. It offers an excellent opportunity to develop a body of written work in various policy fields. Interns work together in a large open area, in an attempt to promote inter-issue communication. This becomes immensely helpful if questions arise that you

are not capable of answering or for sharing of sources, facilitating project completion, but can also prove distracting when media interns over-share their discoveries on facebook or twitter. There is an intern speaker series, with weekly lectures from different area leaders, helping the interns to gain an idea about the many different possibilities in Washington, as well as the many roads traveled to arrive in either policy or fundraising. Interns are encourage to attend speaking events and panel discussions throughout the city – which are numerous - and put on by other policy centers and schools. Most can be found on DC LinkTank, and make for excellent, nonpartisan blog entries.

My primary function was to assist the development team – for the Network, Forum, and Leadership Fund. I performed data entry, maintaining the donor list and updating records across the different organizations from culled online data, business cards, and other materials. I had to write call sheets, which focused on prospecting leaders across industries as well as guests who would attend our events, noting background, education, charitable affiliations, and political giving – all of which was available online. I also had to write similar call sheets about different lobbying organizations, both NGO and corporate, measuring and quantifying their efforts. This facilitated the process of donor acquisition and management, while facilitating discussion for my superiors. As an intern, I regularly attended events sponsored by the Forum/Network, helping in event planning and execution. There was a minimal amount of phone banking on my part, but a great deal of data entry associated with mailing campaigns.

Like all organizations in Washington, the AAF/AAN is not monolithic. Within the larger umbrella of one organization, and within the same office, there was a variety of operations with smaller entities performing targeted functions. To say that the AAF/AAN, Center for American Progress, Brookings, and other such think tanks serve one function would be incorrect. They all have multiple operations that include issue advocacy, political advocacy, and other such work. Working for just one branch, of organizations such as these will not necessarily mean that your energy will focus on that particular facet, but rather that you will work as one part within the whole of the institution, advancing all aspects of its operations. I suggest that anyone wishing to come to Washington clearly research issues they feel are personally important, and try to seek out organizations that advocate a similar position; otherwise they could end up being a Democrat working to advance Republican issues, or vice-a-versa. This will certainly lead to a great deal of cognitive dissonance, and prove even more difficult as time goes on.