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Grant Report, Class of 1978 Princeton Foundation

This summer, thanks to a generous grant from the Class of 1978 Princeton Foundation, I participated in an internship at Centro Humanitario para los Trabajadores (Humanitarian Center for Workers, fondly known by members and staff as “El Centro”). As I explained in my initial proposal, El Centro is a non-profit organization based in Denver, Colorado that works on behalf of day laborers in the Denver Metro area through education, job skills and leadership development, united action and advocacy. The day laborer community is one of the poorest and most invisible in Denver, and among their biggest needs are quality employment opportunities, along with education and advocacy. El Centro works to fill these needs in several ways: through direct services offered by employment and wage theft programs and a woman’s catering coop, as well as through organizing and advocacy campaigns to advance wage theft protection policies and the passage of a Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights in Colorado.

Upon my arrival at El Centro, Marco Nuñez, the executive director, made clear to me that El Centro desperately needed to create more employment opportunities for members. As a population already at the very margins of society in Denver, day laborers have been very negatively impacted by the recent recession and rise in unemployment. There were many days that El Centro had twenty or thirty members arrive for the morning employment lottery, but only received calls or visits from one or two employers. El Centro needed to engage in an aggressive marketing and advertising campaign to increase job opportunities in order to continue meeting the needs of the day labor population, but the organization was understaffed and recovering from a recent leadership transition and so did not have the time or resources to devote to such a project. That was where my internship came in. Marco and I agreed that I could be most effective by assuming the “marketing campaign,” as we called it, as my primary responsibility for the duration of my internship.

The first days of my time at El Centro were spent getting to know the staff and the member workers whom the organization exists to serve. The staff of El Centro are a small but inspiring bunch: their sympathy for and dedication to the day laborer cause were a daily source of motivation for me. As for the workers, they were welcoming from the start when Marco introduced me to them and told them about my project, and were especially enthusiastic once they discovered that I spoke Spanish and was eager to communicate with them about what they wanted to see from any marketing efforts. Marco had been insistent, and I agreed with him wholeheartedly, that any sort of marketing campaign had to include the members’ opinions and feedback; El Centro is very focused on equality and a grassroots approach, and it didn’t make sense to design the materials without the input of those they were supposed to benefit.

In the early stages of my time at El Centro, I used materials from the National Day Laborer Organizing Network to outline a multifaceted approach for the marketing campaign, and then sat down with Marco to outline goals in each area of outreach for each week of my internship. I also then created a day-to-day outline for myself based on those weekly goals in order to give myself a daily schedule of sorts. We identified five main areas of outreach: email, telemarketing, residential flyering, business flyering, and neighborhood association presentations. It was also understood that I would design any other outreach materials El Centro needed, such as for the Women’s Project or the new parking lot that was to function as another center in Aurora, and participate in tasks that all staff shared, such as fundraising calls. Most of my work, however, centered around the five main areas of outreach mentioned above, so the best

way to explain my activities and accomplishments seems to be breaking them down into those areas. (Please see the attachments for examples of my work in each area. An explanatory list of attachments is included at the end of this report.)

My goal for email outreach, beyond preparing actual advertising emails to send out, was two-fold: to reach out to the 221 past employers whose email addresses we had in our database (we had over 1300 past employers and almost as many phone numbers, but comparatively few emails) and to target new potential contractors. I first designed the emails to send out, a process which I began by getting feedback from a couple of the members. One member, an older veteran who had been in the construction business for decades before a disability stopped him from working, was particularly helpful. He explained to me that contractors are looking for certain qualities in workers, such as safety training, that we should be careful to emphasize. He suggested sending the contractors separate emails from those sent to homeowners or other businesses, and based on his feedback, I created a separate email tailored for those addresses I identified as belonging to contractors. I then created an email for homeowners and all non-construction businesses that advertised both the day laborers and the domestic workers from the Women's Project, which offers services such as childcare, catering, and house cleaning. While we successfully sent out these emails to all 221 past employers' addresses, we suffered a setback in targeting new contractors and potential employers, as we did not have access to any unified database (we had hoped that the online Yellow Pages would provide email addresses as well as phone numbers, but that wasn't the case). When I discovered that identifying new employers would require going to the website of every company individually and then searching within that website for contact information, I talked to Marco and we agreed that it didn't make sense to pursue that task any longer in the interest of making my limited internship as time-effective as possible. However, the front desk was in the process of revising the employer information sheet when I was there, so El Centro has been collecting the email address of every employer since the summer and will use those addresses in the future to remind past employers of their members' services.

In the telemarketing area, though the project seemed to have good prospects of success at the outset, we again were faced with a bit of a setback towards the end of my internship. The goal for telemarketing was to contact all 1300 of El Centro's past employers, which we knew was an ambitious project, but which we hoped would prove fruitful in several ways. It would remind past employers of our existence and hopefully persuade them to contract our members again; it would provide more sympathetic employers with an opportunity to donate to the organization; and it would give us the much-needed opportunity to clear out the database, which had existed since El Centro opened in 2002 and was rife with disconnected numbers and outdated information. I began by analyzing the database and sorting the information, and then I prepared a call protocol in both English and Spanish designed an email and sign-up form for El Centro's email list. Our goal was to recruit board members and other volunteers from El Centro's community of supporters through this method. We also planned to recruit English-speaking members of El Centro, as we wanted the members to have ownership of the project. To our disappointment, our outreach to El Centro's supporters was unsuccessful: no one signed up to come in for a call shift or even to make calls from home. We considered robocalls instead, and received input about them from a supporter of El Centro's who was an expert in telemarketing and outreach, but the personal connection of a real phone call was important to us, as we thought it would make the calls much more effective and would better represent what El Centro stands for. In light of these considerations and our failure to recruit other volunteers, we

decided to involve the staff. We had originally planned to involve them to a very limited degree, as they have more than enough to accomplish daily already. We decided, however, that it was better to have every staff member make a few calls a day than not to move forward on the project at all, so we agreed on that plan for the future.

The residential and business flyering plans met with more, though still limited, success. In the residential flyering campaign, Marco and I agreed on eight neighborhoods as an outreach goal, and I selected the specific neighborhoods based on geographic proximity, socioeconomic standing, and political leanings. I spent a considerable amount of time mapping the zones I had identified and creating a large wall map in one of the community meeting rooms at El Centro, a map which I hoped all staff and members would mark with their completed routes so that everyone could both see our progress and avoid flyering twice in the same area. I also created smaller versions of all of the maps by neighborhood and instructions for the staff for flyering runs. In designing the various flyers themselves, I again sought and incorporated feedback from the members, who seemed very excited about flyering—so much so that they asked to take the example flyers with them to pass out on their way home from El Centro that day. I was thus surprised to discover shortly thereafter that the biggest obstacle that the staff and I faced in carrying out the flyering campaign was resistance from some of the members. The goal was to take several members out once a week to flyer for an hour, but we met with a lot of pushback and complaints. Some of the members were reluctant to flyer because they saw it as a pointless waste of time, rather than as something that might help create more employment opportunities in the future. They had become disillusioned with El Centro and with the process of seeking out jobs at all due to extended periods of unemployment broken by only a few days of work per month. Some of the members did agree to flyer readily, and Marco spoke with the rest multiple times and succeeded in getting some of them to comply. El Centro had carried out a few small flyering campaigns in the past, and flyering was intended to be a mandatory duty associated with membership, but Marco wanted to wait to enforce that seriously until El Centro enacted a host of new membership rules in September, so we moved forward with the members we had. We flyered several areas during my internship, and I left detailed instructions about how to move forward with weekly flyering trips after I was gone.

As for flyering in businesses, the goal was to identify stores in the Denver Metro area whose clientele might be interested in our members' services—hardware stores, home improvement stores, paint stores, plant nurseries—and obtain their permission to leave flyers with them. I began by designing a countertop flyer and a community board flyer in both Spanish and English. I then identified and called 100 stores and obtained permission from 23. Most of the people with whom I spoke were amenable to the idea of advertising on behalf of day laborers, which surprised me somewhat, and many of the refusals were either from large chains that had policies against flyering of any kind, or from stores that themselves already provided the sorts of services our members offered. After that, I assigned each staff member about four stores that were close to their homes or other places they frequented and handed out flyers, instructions, and details about which kind of flyer the store preferred.

The neighborhood association presentations were a late-breaking success. The goal was to identify neighborhoods that might be receptive to a presentation by El Centro and then present with one or two members on the work El Centro does and the services their members offer. The thinking behind the presentations was that they would help El Centro members overcome two of the biggest obstacles they face: lack of knowledge about the existence of El Centro and the possibility of hiring day laborers, and prejudice that comes from blanket stereotypes and

assumptions which often dissipate in the presence of face-to-face interaction with another human being. With this in mind, I set about identifying neighborhood associations with which to begin. My father works in the non-profit world of community organizing in Denver, and has interacted with many of the various neighborhood association leaders, so he was able to assist me with identifying the communities that might be most receptive to El Centro. I sent out emails to eight neighborhood leaders based on his recommendations. This area of the marketing plan was pushed to the end of my internship by my other work, so between the late date of the emails I sent and the (in some cases long) amount of time it took the leaders to respond, we only were able to set up one presentation before I left. It went very smoothly; two members went with me, in addition to Sarah, El Centro's Chief Operating Officer, who had agreed to attend in case there were sensitive questions asked that I did not have enough knowledge or experience to answer. I gave a brief outline of El Centro's mission and work, and then each of the members introduced themselves and talked about their experiences as day laborers, after which we invited questions from the neighborhood members. We were happy to find that no one asked anything intentionally inflammatory, and that people for the most part seemed genuinely receptive to the prospect of hiring from El Centro. Following this initial success, we had several more responses from the original email group inviting us to present, and we agreed that I should reach out to more neighborhood associations while we waited for replies from the others. I compiled a spreadsheet of every neighborhood association in the Denver Metro area (253 total) and contacted about ten more, with the understanding that if those did not reply, we would move to ten additional ones (we didn't want to overload our members and staff with more than a couple presentations per month). To our pleasant surprise, many neighborhood leaders from both this group and the original group replied giving their consent, and we soon had a full schedule for the fall months. I made sure that the staff member who was going to take over for me at the meetings had the necessary information to continue the presentations, and in this way was able to end my internship satisfied that I had begun a process which would continue well after I had left.

I engaged in several other miscellaneous projects as well. One involved investigating the possibility of putting street signs on the fences near El Centro advertising the center and the members' services. However, it proved difficult to discover who owned the empty lot and to get in touch with them. Once I finally found out that the lot was owned by the city and began a conversation with them about allowing El Centro to post banner signs there, it was late enough in the summer that I had to abandon the project for the time being. Marco hopes to take it up again soon.

I also designed quite a few flyers for various Women's Project events, compiled Frequently Asked Questions and other useful information for our website from websites of similar organizations, and made outreach visits with the staff to two new locations to which El Centro was looking to expand. One location, in Aurora, was on the verge of becoming an established location of El Centro (for the time being, they planned to use a parking lot near where the Aurora day laborers gathered, and were only waiting on the issue of rent to be resolved). I visited Aurora several times and helped the staff distribute food and information about El Centro to workers. For the Aurora lot, I also created membership cards with expectations and responsibilities for new members, made an employer-worker contract, and designed a one-time newsletter, which Marco planned to distribute to nearby businesses surrounding the parking lot once the rent was finalized, which did not happen during my internship.

The setting up of the Aurora location actually resembled much of my experience at El

Centro: it was characterized by limited success and long-term planning, which proved to be two of the most constant themes and valuable lessons during the course of my internship. One of my primary motivations for interning at El Centro, which I mentioned in my grant application to the Class of 1978 Foundation, was a desire to learn more about non-profit work in the United States. I had had extensive experience at a non-governmental organization in India the year before, but I had never experienced domestic non-profit work first-hand, and I felt that that was incredibly important as I began to consider careers in the non-profit world both internationally and in the United States. During the course of my internship at El Centro, I learned volumes about the simultaneously inspirational and frustrating work of a non-profit organization committed to social justice. As I have explained above, I faced setbacks in almost every project I undertook, which was disheartening at times. However, learning to be flexible and readjust my plans and expectations was one of the most valuable aspects of my internship, and is an essential skill for engaging in non-profit work in the future. As important, I discovered, is learning to be patient and think long-term. Many of the projects I began could not be completed in the short span of a summer internship, and I had to make peace with the fact that, should the projects bear fruit, I likely would not see the effects during my time at El Centro. I had to trust that the groundwork I was laying would prove valuable in the future, and find fulfillment in the work itself without looking for immediate gains, which is a skill that will serve me well in any work I undertake.

As it turns out, long-term gains did actually occur: Sarah, the COO, recently emailed me to tell me she had crunched some numbers for their jobs tracking records and discovered that El Centro saw a 30% increase in jobs overall for the last six months (June to November). I cannot adequately express my gratitude to the Class of 1978 Foundation for providing me with the grant that allowed me to engage in this internship, but I hope that this growth in employment and my own personal growth this summer serve as their own thanks.

List of attachments:

Exit memo: The document that I wrote on Marco's request during the last week of my internship. It includes detailed instructions for continuing each area of my marketing campaign.

Email—Contractors: For contractor emails

Email—Homeowners: For homeowner and other non-contractor emails

Day laborer and women's project back-to-back (half-sheets, for printing back-to-back): Flyer for residential flyering, store counters, and passing out at presentations

Full page tear-off: For community bulletin boards in stores

Women's project flyer (bilingual): For advertising the Women's Project services in Spanish and English

Entrenamiento profesional para niñas: An example of the flyers I created for Women's Project events