

Reflection: My Summer at Mama Maji

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Hello!

It has been a few weeks since I concluded my summer at Mama Maji. As I take inventory of the lessons I've learned, I realize they are as practical as they are personal. Not only have I become acquainted with the day to day processes of a small NGO, but also, in doing such, I have learned a great deal about my own strengths, weaknesses, needs, and desires. Ultimately, this summer has informed my future.

I accomplished a great deal of concrete work this summer. After learning how a small organization like Mama Maji researches grants, I completed several “grant profiles.” These profiles discuss the specific requirements and timelines that are associated with grants and help to determine their relevance and urgency. My major project was to apply for a seed grant through The Pollination Project on behalf of the Maji Mamas in Kajiado County. I learned a lot about this field through the roadblocks I confronted during this process. Unlike my experience applying for personal grants, applying for grants on behalf of an organization requires a great deal of back and forth communication. Additionally, and especially within the IDEV field, these organizations don’t always have consistent access to internet. For this reason, applying for the seed grant took more time than I thought it would. I had to learn to think ahead, note questions as they came, and make full use of the moments where I could communicate directly with a local leader in Kenya.

Perhaps my favorite part of the internship was the media projects. I made 7 promotion videos as well as many “memes” for Facebook and Instagram. My last assignment was to set up a Facebook page for the woman’s group that would feature these media projects. I felt in my element when completing these tasks, and I learned not to ignore that feeling.

Although I acquired a great deal of concrete knowledge through this internship, I believe the most important lessons were less tangible. Despite my passionate support for Mama Maji’s mission, I found myself ultimately uninspired by my administrative responsibilities (fundraising). Instead, I prefer creating and interacting. It is difficult for me to feel influential unless I have something tangible to show for it. This could range anywhere from a visual project to a familiar face.

I was able to discuss these observations with my internship director, Brian, during my exit interview. We discussed the importance of catering to one’s skill-sets when taking job positions, especially while in college. I left feeling certain that it is not only possible, but necessary to be creative with my career path if I want to be satisfied.

I have already put these lessons into practice as I sit here abroad, in Dakar. My development studies practicum includes an internship placement. I was placed at a local women’s rights organization in Dakar, and although I feel passionately about its mission, when I saw my placement I became worried that I wouldn’t have a hands-on experience. For this reason, I met with the program director to talk about my strengths, weaknesses, and concerns. I was extremely relieved to hear her

response. She assured me that my skill-sets are applicable nearly anywhere I go, that, as an intern, it is my job to be vocal and assertive about what talents I can bring to the table. She said that if I show them my past work and present myself as I am, I will be given tasks that I find inspiring.

Overall, my summer at Mama Maji taught me just as much about NGOs as it did about myself, and I am eager to apply these lessons moving forward!