

# Co-op #1 Reflection

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Celia Conway

# Hello!

## I'm Celia

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I am majoring in environmental studies and sociology with a political science minor. I spent the past 6 months (Jan. 6th - June 19th) as the NCSE Applied Solutions Science Corps Fellow at the National Council for Science and the Environment.

1.

**Before  
Beginning my  
Co-op**

# Choosing NCSE

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- I was searching for an opportunity to work for an environmental organization - NCSE was one of only a few options on NUCAREERS
- Changed from being paid to unpaid in the middle of the application process
  - Fortunate to be financially able to still pursue this opportunity
    - Received a scholarship to participate and saved money on expenses because my family is located in the DC area where NCSE is

# Learning Outcome Goals

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- I hoped to develop:
  - a basic understanding of nonprofits and their role in advancing environmental policy and addressing climate change
  - my writing skills and office communication
  - other new skills and experience to become a competitive candidate for future jobs
  - refined personal and professional goals
  - connections to further the work I'm interested in

# Working at NCSE - Expectations

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- NUCareers described this position as one where I would get the chance to help develop a new program that would connect local government officials and university faculty and implement a fellowship for graduates in order to create informed local climate resilience and sustainability policy
- Key roles described to do this included liaising with people in the field, developing training materials and communication pieces

2.

**My Time at  
NCSE**

# Pre-COVID-19

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- A lack of financial resources, time that my boss dedicated to developing the program, and a work structure that made it hard to progress on developing the program without her feedback meant we were not progressing as quickly as I would have liked
- My boss had a lot of things going on so it was frustrating at times that it felt like I had nothing to do because she did not have time to allow things to progress



# Pre-COVID-19 cont.

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- I had to adjust my expectations for how fast things could get done and shift my time to things I could do without my boss so I spent a lot of time doing background research and writing one-pagers
- Although I wanted to do more liaising, I really enjoyed the few meetings with people working on similar initiatives where we had the chance to think about how we could work together towards a common goal

# Pre-COVID-19 cont.

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- We are a small team and, in the beginning, I only really worked with my boss
- I enjoyed the small team environment because everyone knew each other and we were able to update each other on all that was going on at our weekly staff meetings
- At times after hearing what everyone else was doing I felt a little discouraged that I was not involved in these efforts because these were things I was interested in and had time to help with

# During COVID-19

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- Because of COVID-19 and the difficulties it brought to potential partners for the program, the project that I was hired to work on was put on hold
- The transition was slightly discouraging at the beginning because I could no longer work on the project I was excited about and would not be able to go to events in DC
- On the bright side, transitioning to other tasks gave me the chance to collaborate with other staff members more

# During COVID-19 cont.

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- After a couple months of being in lockdown, we came around to getting to think about the project again and I got to do a little bit of thinking about how to transform our original idea to meet the current need
- Towards the end of my co-op, the program was rethought to to have a new name and a slightly different goal
- I was unfortunately left out of doing some of that thinking but had the chance to create a spreadsheet filled with foundations, thought partners and university initiatives that would be good matches for the goals of the new program
- My co-op ended before getting to do more

# Summary of my Responsibilities

## Sponsorship Campaign



I laid the groundwork for beginning our outreach campaign to get companies to sponsor NCSE's annual conference. This included designing template emails, crafting custom sentences for each company, creating a timeline for when each outreach piece should go out from now until the conference and creating a spreadsheet to keep the work organized and on track.

## Video Production



Using iMovie, I produced 4 short videos. Three of those videos were from the past conference to summarize it and the fourth one was to advertise the upcoming conference. I did this with little experience and little footage to use.

## Writing Piece



I wrote a piece, that was published in their newsletter and on their website, about how I was feeling about COVID-19 and how that related to climate anxiety.



## Background Research



I did a lot of work researching the landscape of the field that we were hoping to get into. This involved researching similar initiatives that were already in existence and preparing for meetings we were going to have with people working on similar initiatives.

## Following Through on Big Thoughts



I was able to take the big ideas that my boss and I talked about in our meetings and flesh them out in writing to create actionable steps. Some of the steps that I took included creating one-pagers, outline a potential slack workspace, updating the website to reflect our goals and thinking and researching development opportunities.

## International Membership



I showed flexibility when I got pulled into helping with an international membership campaign. This included doing research on international universities in certain regions to determine schools to contact, creating custom sentences for the template email and finding emails of university faculty.

# New Task

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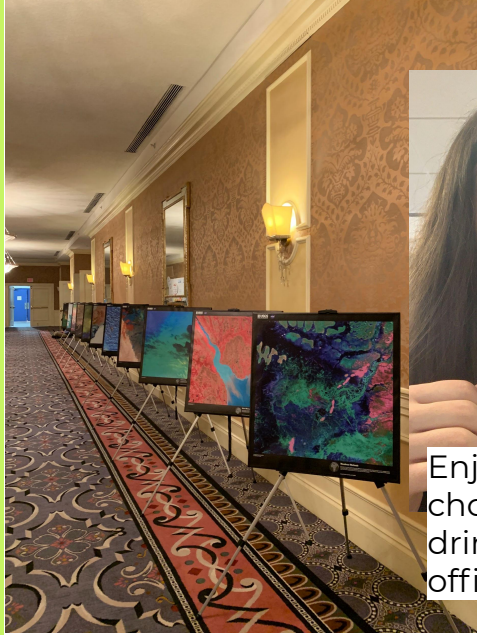
- I learned how to draft communication that was targeted at specific audiences
  - I had to develop one pagers for universities and local governments which involved thinking about what they might want to get out of things and the benefits for them and making sure to mention that
  - I also researched corporate sustainability initiatives in order to appeal to corporations to encourage them to sponsor the annual conference
- I really enjoyed doing it because I love thinking about things from other people/groups perspectives so this gave me a chance to do it in a professional way

# New Task cont.

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- I got feedback and support from my supervisor, I would write the pieces and then she would edit them or explain why I should go in a different direction
- I learned primarily by doing but also by reading some of the work that the previous co-op student did and from getting direction from my boss and from my prior knowledge
- I was successful with this task in the sense that I was proud of what I had done and so was my boss but I did not always get to see these pieces in action so I was not always able to fully judge my success

# Photo Gallery: A Few Co-op Pictures



Gallery at the NCSE annual conference. My first day was attending their conference!



Enjoying hot chocolate from the drink maker in the office!

An image from one of my explorations of DC. Even though I am from the area, working in DC gave me more time to get to know DC.



Working from home photo contest!



**3.**

# Personal Reflection

# Hindsight

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- I wish I had better understood how important it is to advocate for your goals (and how to do that appropriately)
- My boss was always encouraging me to give her a nudge if there was something I wanted her to look at and I got better at it but I wish I had felt comfortable doing it sooner and pushing her more in order to continue to make progress on the program I was working on
- Hearing from my boss that she was encouraging me to nudge her and my realization that bosses often want to help you but they are busy and are not ignoring you on purpose was helpful to understand
- I think I still have difficulty feeling like I am pushing too much but I think I learned a valuable lesson about self-advocacy

# Surprises (besides COVID-19)

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- I was happily surprised at how friendly everyone was and that there was a great workplace culture where everyone got along personally and professionally
- I was surprised that the team was primarily white women and the men were remote workers
- They had just moved into a new office space and I was surprised by how empty it was on our floor
- I originally assumed that I would be allowed a 1 hr lunch break but I only got a 30 min lunch break

# Learning Moments About Self

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- I learned:
  - I work best when I have multiple projects to work on so that when I need a break from one thing there is another productive task I can do
  - I like having a mix of meetings and individual work as another way to vary what I do day to day
  - How to ask for more direction (a skill I am still working on)
  - To collaborate with other colleagues in addition to my supervisor
  - I prefer a manager that communicates often (Including communicating expectations, advice, etc while also giving me some autonomy and some time to work together)

# Future Career

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- ▣ This co-op exposed me to the idea of creating local climate resilience plans which got me interested in sustainable urban planning
- ▣ One of the main things that I was frustrated with at NCSE was with how slow things moved and how I felt like I was not making a direct impact so this makes me want to do something with more immediate and tangible results
- ▣ I think that COVID-19 has also really opened my eyes even further to all of the injustices in the world and it has made me even more interested in working with grassroots organizations working for climate justice and fair voting
- ▣ I plan to use this summer to further build my resume and connect with family-friends in related fields in the hopes of self-developing a co-op that meets my interests

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# Academic Reflection Question

# Inequality

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- We were a nonprofit of limited resources so in order to ever take our thinking and apply it to a locality, it would have to be one with some resources, this was an unfortunate reality because it would have been more meaningful to help under resourced communities who really need it so it shows how better funded communities have the means to continue to improve
- Also I confirmed how dominated the science field is dominated by white people and how the culture of academia and institutions in some way is not conducive to serving the communities they are apart of
  - The environmental movement has particularly been dominated by white people

# Inequality cont.

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- These insights confirmed that I wanted to work for a place that had the means to address injustices and tackle the systemic problems
- I also know that the to get into the field that I was apart of if you don't have a co-op it is easier to get into it by having the chance to make those connections and have those networks so there will be groups left out (as shown by the fact that my team was primarily white women)
- I plan to continue thinking about inequalities that can arise within the areas that I plan to go into



# Thanks!