

**CONSTITUENT ADVOCACY CO-OP:
BOSTON 311 AND THE MAYOR'S CABINET
OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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MY ROLE



This Spring, I worked at Boston City Hall under the Mayor's Cabinet of Community Engagement and specifically in the Boston 311 office as a constituent advocacy co-op. I worked on projects for 311 as I had initially expected, but I also got to work for the rest of the departments in the cabinet and support general City Hall initiatives.

I worked for 4 different departments in particular:

- Office of Neighborhood Services
- Boston 311
- Office of Civic Organizing
- Cabinet Communications



311



WHAT I WORKED ON

1

Policy Research

- Researched neighborhood demographics
- Analyzed data collected by Boston 311
- Looked at the history of neighborhoods to create neighborhood-centered initiatives

2

Neighborhood & Community Meetings

- Created plans for meetings based on community needs
- Took notes and created action plans for community concerns
- Represented Boston 311 at neighborhood events

3

Communications

- Created & maintained the Community Meetings page on boston.gov
- Conducted neighborhood outreach for the Cabinet and the APIA employee resource group
- Used the City of Boston brand guide to create posts for the Cabinet's social media

4

Data Plotting

- Plotted data from Boston 311 cases for City initiatives, including:
 - Needle pickups
 - Animal complaints
 - Encampments (for the Mayor's Unhoused Census)



MY EXPECTATIONS

When I started my co-op, I expected to be working with data, doing policy research, and learning about City Hall and what the City does. I hoped to learn more about how municipal government functioned and make connections in the City that could assist me in the future, as resources but more importantly as mentors. I hoped to improve my public speaking skills and become better at advocating for myself, especially with superiors. I also hoped to get field experience, as I wanted to interact with constituents directly and hear their stories, as I had heard that was the most rewarding part of the role.

I also sought to develop hard skills. In the description of the role, I was told that the co-ops would be working closely with City data, especially with 311. I wanted to learn data analytics skills and get exposure to different systems that the city used to collect and process data.



HOW I SPENT MY TIME

Almost every project I worked on was a collaborative effort between me and the other co-ops. We would either split up the task or each run passes through writing to make sure we had everything we needed.

COLLABORATING

Outside of Field Fridays, where I would accompany Neighborhood Liaisons to coffee hours and meetings, I also attended City and department events (especially if they were hosted on City Hall Plaza) to support staff and create content for Cabinet Communications.

ATTENDING EVENTS

Although it wasn't the primary portion of my role, one of the most valuable things I did during my co-op was take calls as a 311 calltaker. I would serve as constituents' connection to all City services, putting in cases or connecting them to departments best suited to assist them.

TAKING CALLS



THINGS I DIDN'T EXPECT

How young the office would be! I was surrounded by young, ambitious, and diverse coworkers that truly made the experience.

How much collaboration the position would entail- almost every project was a joint effort, and while this allowed us to always have multiple perspectives, it often slowed us down and sometimes even led to conflict.

How restricting some of the City's guidelines were- the City's brand guide (which I am using for this presentation) and the website interface limited my creative freedom much more than I expected.

How much autonomy we were given- I'm extremely grateful to my direct supervisors, Irgi and Meaghan, who allowed us to pursue projects and meetings in fields we were interested in. I was able to work outside the department and find mentors that I will stay in touch with far beyond this co-op.

Surprise puppy friends in the office!



SOME OF MY FAVORITE PARTS OF CITY HALL

My favorite room in City Hall: a miniature version of the city created by the Boston Planning and Development Agency.



Two of my fellow co-ops setting up our positivity wall! I loved working with the other co-ops, who became good friends of mine in the process.



Cabinet celebrations- we would celebrate everyone's successes and important events, like celebrating Enrique's baby boy in the picture below.



MEANINGFUL PROJECT

During my second month, I was asked to create a resource placard for constituents displaced by fires in their homes. I didn't think much of the project, as it was simple to design a placard with basic information. However, once I completed it, I realized how impactful this small project was. I created something palatable for constituents who would likely be experiencing an unbearable amount of distress, and it was going to be used citywide.

This was the first of many "small tasks" that I realized had much larger value than I initially attached to them. I came to value every task I did, regardless of the amount of time I spent or the difficulty.



TRYING SOMETHING NEW:

- Towards the end of my co-op, one of my indirect supervisors asked me to create a training outline for interns that her department had just hired. I was worried about being asked to create it entirely from scratch, unsure if I would forget something important or go about it in the wrong way.
- My supervisor gave me a basic outline but told me that she wanted me to use my own experience and training to help her understand what her interns needed. With her positive reinforcement and specific feedback, I was able to come up with a training guide that we were both satisfied with.
- After creating the outline and working with the new hires to introduce them to City Hall, I realized how much I had learned about the City and the cabinet. This project was definitely the most full-circle moment I for me during my co-op.



LEARNING ABOUT MY WORK STYLE

Supervision: I like to have check-ins and progress updates to get feedback as my work progresses, and also to get new work as I grow into the position. I liked the independence I got during my co-op, but I do wish I could have had a little more guidance or opportunities to showcase my work and receive comments. I did enjoy having multiple supervisors, as I learned something new from each of them.

Teamwork: I do enjoy working in teams, but I definitely prefer independent work with intermediate discussions to fully collaborative work. I often found that many of our disagreements could have been avoided if we had worked independently and gotten together to discuss afterwards.

Hands-on work: I'm a huge fan of fieldwork and interactive tasks. I found myself significantly more productive when I was out in the field, as it also served as a way to see the tangible results of my work.



PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

As an anthropology major, I am always critical of those in power, especially with regard to government. I see people in these positions as self-serving and performative, not actually working to serve marginalized communities or uplift any communities outside of their own. However, my experience at City Hall left me with an although still critical, much less hopeless outlook for community development. I worked with an incredibly diverse group of people that were just as enthusiastic as I was about community-level organizing, and got to see difficult topics being brought to the table.

I saw how powerful neighborhoods were because of their shared history and culture. They felt joy together, experienced pain together, and most importantly, stood together. I realized that while it's important to always critique those who sit at the table, change starts from the bottom up, and I saw that change every single day.



LOOKING FORWARD: NEXT STEPS

As I look forward to my next co-op, I am hoping to achieve the following:

- (hopefully) Finding another workplace as inviting and supportive as this one!
- Working on a variety of projects as I did here
- Potentially working in the legal sector (which I got exposure to during my time at City Hall)
- Working under more structured supervision
- Working more independently
- Most importantly: learning hard skills- I'm ready for a new type of challenge!



THANK YOU!

