American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of PA

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Description of Placement: The ACLU is a national, national organization that works in courts, legislatures and communities with the mission to defend the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country.

It is a part of ACLU office culture to attend protests and rallies in the Philly area. It builds community amongst coworkers!

My Role
- I worked in the Intake department of the Philadelphia office. I interviewed those who called the ACLU helpline and wrote summaries of their legal complaints, researched facts about the complaints, and made recommendations about solutions and referrals.
- I attended weekly case review meetings with the legal department and participated in conference calls between the PA ACLU offices.
- To assist my fieldwork, I studied the growth of non-profits in the US as well as the differences between private and non-profit organizations.

Academic Inquiry
- I got this internship after the current US president got elected, but before he made any policy or legislature
- My first day at the work was the weekend after the Muslim ban was issued!

Noteworthy Points:
- The importance of community was re-emphasized in my mind after the election. The donations, cards, and food platters that the ACLU received after the election was only a small portion of the support they received
- I underwent personal growth and development – law school became an option, I broadened my network of contacts involved with community organizing, and I got the chance to spend a day in the city every week

Learning Objectives
To grasp an insider’s view of how a big organization with small local chapters operationalizes its mission

To gain an in-depth perspective of what grassroots efforts look like in an organized non-profit company as opposed to a movement in the streets

To frame an understanding of the questions nonprofit leaders address as they operationalize their mission of (i) what services to deliver (ii) what the target community is (iii) how best to engage constituents

What I learned
Local chapters of national organizations work together and they are not separate entities. The mission is in every staff member, intern, and volunteer.

Having seen organizing efforts mostly in the streets through marches and rallies, I saw legislative efforts and lobbying as important organizing work

Each arm of an organization regardless of size/outreach has their own important role to play