



**Yale College**  
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**Class of 1960 John Heinz Government Service Fellowship**  
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**Empowering Underprivileged Minorities by Connecting Government to Local Communities**

This summer, I had the incredible privilege to intern for the White House. I worked for the Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), which is based under the White House Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs (OPE). Though originally accepted for an internship in Washington D.C., I was offered a position with the newly established regional office in Seattle, where I would be working to promote and implement a "Regional Network" system to engage underprivileged AAPIs and other minorities across the country to address issues that impact their lives, such as healthcare, immigration, and foreign policy. Upon hearing that I would have the chance to work on a system that would impact people around the country, I asked to instead be assigned to the regional office for the internship.

My initial goals I outlined for the Heinz Fellowship and for my internship was to implement a community dialogues method that I helped design in 2012 across the country. The community dialogues method was a way to excite ordinary community members about policymaking and to motivate them to participate through a series of roundtable and community discussions held in succession over a period of time, such as three months or a year. In doing so, I proposed that I could get greater, self-sustaining grassroots participation in the policymaking process through community dialogues. The White House Office of Public Engagement, I believed, could offer me an avenue to bring communities across the country in better contact with federal government. In addition, I wanted the opportunity to study the implications of nationwide community engagement systems. What did community members think about the policymaking process? Did they think such a community engagement system would be sustainable? Would an engagement system help with policymaking? These were some of the questions I had before I began my internship.

Working on the Regional Network engagement system with White House staff members was everything I expected and more. The Regional Network was launched back in 2014. The White House Initiative was keen on not only engaging community members, but also in bringing more parts of the federal government in contact with local communities. The Regional Network was spearheaded by the White House, but was constructed in partnership with over 40 federal agencies. When the Regional Network was launched, there were but 40 agency staff members who were part of the system. Today, there are over 250 staff members who are located in every part of the country. The federal government divides the nation up into 10 regions. The point of the Regional Network is to hold community roundtable discussions in each of the 10 regions to bring federal agency representatives and community members together to talk about pressing policy issues like healthcare and immigration. The idea is not only to let community members to know about what resources federal government agencies like the Social Security Administration have available to help AAPIs and other minority groups address pressing issues, but also provide a forum for community members to offer feedback and opinions. After each initial region's community roundtable, follow-up roundtables are planned and executed based on community feedback, allowing the process to continue and to generate momentum. After each community roundtable, evaluations from community members are collected to gauge how community members felt about the roundtable and which topics they believe should be addressed next, which are compiled into a Microsoft Access database.

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In my 10 week internship, I was able to coordinate and execute five different community roundtable events across the country. I helped to line up federal agency representatives to participate at the different roundtables and organized the roundtables to address different pertinent domestic and foreign policy issues, based on suggestions given by regional federal agency staff members. In all five events, more than 150 community members showed up to participate—three of the events were overcapacity—a testament to the community's interest in the Regional Network. Over the two and a half short months I worked for the White House on the Regional Network, the system engaged more than 1500 people nationwide. The most inspiring part of the entire engagement effort, however, was the community interest in continuing the process. From the five events I helped organize alone, at least five follow-up events have been planned, hosted jointly by community members and federal staff members who participated in the first roundtable discussion. The discussions, much to my delight, became self-sustaining, which conform exactly with the goals I initially set when I decided to try to apply the community dialogues method nationwide through the Regional Network.

I was also able to gain insight into the implications of the Regional Network and national engagement systems by analyzing the evaluation data gained from roundtable discussions across the country. Since 2014, the Regional Network had amassed over 100000 evaluations from AAPIs and other disadvantaged minorities, complete with quantitative data, from community members. The data revealed that community members overwhelmingly favored the engagement system. In aggregate, over 91% of community members believed that the Regional Network engagement system was effective and over 92% of community members believed that the system is going to be sustainable into the future. Those numbers speak volumes about the effectiveness and enormous community interest in the Regional Network and national community engagement. Towards the end of my internship, I put together and started to execute a set of White House memoranda to institutionalize the Regional Network so that it will continue to engage the public even after the end of the current administration.

My internship with the White House Initiative on AAPIs this summer was incredibly fulfilling and allowed me to see the power of community engagement. Though I was based in Seattle, I had the opportunity to travel across the country to attend regional roundtables and to report to the office in D.C. During my short visits to D.C., staff members caught wind of my Chinese and my experience working at the United Nations and asked me to provide some opinion and advice about US-China climate change policies and about my thoughts on Asia foreign policy in general. I had the opportunity to work with staff about activating AAPI and minority voices to support the Iran nuclear deal and other presidential foreign policy initiatives. Hence, through my internship, I was not only able to influence the domestic policymaking process but also foreign policy as well.

I was able to build on my previous experiences in community engagement and international affairs to achieve something greater this summer. My internship has cemented my dedication to a career in public service, whether that is engaging community members on the local level to advocate for policy change or functioning as an American diplomat in international affairs. In addition, I have come to understand that national community engagement systems are effective in giving community members a voice in the policymaking process and have enormous potential to change the way policymaking works in the US. I will stay on with the White House as a White House Engage, Educate and Empower Ambassador to institutionalize the Regional Network over the next year. I will continue to study international relations and political science to prepare myself for a lifelong career in public service.

I wish to say that I am incredibly honored to be the recipient of a Class of 1960 John Heinz Government Service Fellowship. Without the support of the fellowship, I would not have been able to pursue an internship with the White House, nor will I have been able to have such a transformative summer of public engagement. I sincerely thank the Heinz Fellowship sponsor and selection committee for making possible my internship and summer.