

RARE ALUMNI ANSWER:

“IN YOUR FIRST THREE MONTHS, WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU LEARNED?”

In these past few months I have learned that the desires that I have may not be what is best, at this point, for the community. I have learned that understanding the position that the community is in and where they are most likely to head, and working within the parameters of that, is more important than my personal ideals for the community.

I'm learning the value in knowing what I want. Work experiences can be opportunities for self-inquisition, exploration, and personal development; the challenge is in finding or creating these opportunities within everyday tasks. The more I understand myself and my goals, the better I am able to creatively design my day.

America can be as foreign as another county. All people think very differently and I cannot assume anything. I must be clear with what I am saying and how I am saying it.

The past three months have taught me a lot about my professional strengths and weaknesses. I have a much better sense of the types of skills and activities that I do well as well as those that I could improve on. I have also learned a great deal about what types of work-related activities that I enjoy and what types that I do not enjoy. I believe that all of this will ultimately help me to clarify my career goals and seek professional work that I find fulfilling.

I have learned more than I had expected about technical language and its importance. Many of my projects...have dealt with developing ordinances, regulations and licenses.

The last three months have been a good lesson in how to motivate and stimulate the participation of key people in projects. Selling the idea is as important as implementing the idea, if there is no buy in, there is really no project.

One of the most important goals I had coming into the RARE program was to branch out and make connections. Specifically I really felt a need to make connections in both the community I would be living and in Oregon's planning community... I have found that living in a small town really puts you in an environment where getting to know the locals is bound to happen. The great thing ... is that these people have treated me with respect and dignity, and in the end isn't that what really matters?

The biggest thing I have learned is the speed and manner in which things get achieved in an organization. Completing projects takes much longer than I imagined, and I am still trying to learn how to time manage within the organization to keep a good pace on the projects I'm working on.

At times, personal agendas may try to stand in the way of group progress. However, it is important to redirect the energy towards something constructive and realize everyone has a way of contributing to the greater good. As always, being patient and having a consistent policy will accomplish many goals.

That momentum on a project(s) can be achieved by contact with the right people and finding the solution that best fits the situation. Thinking outside of the box and getting people involved in the idea can have a snowball effect and what was once just an idea can be turned into reality.

There's a lot that I've learned...this fall. Most importantly I've come to appreciate the significance of social networks and gatekeepers in communities. My work in establishing a local Steering Committee was made much easier by utilizing my human resources to find contacts and make connections with local stakeholders. They were able to advise me on whom to contact at various organizations and helped make introductions - this eased the process tremendously. Secondly, I'm learning how to communicate technical information to various stakeholders with differing levels of knowledge. This skill will only get more valuable as the year goes on!

One important lesson I have learned relates to being the only employee. It is important for me to make sure I call members of the Steering Committee to talk through my frustrations or big questions so they don't build up or create road blocks for progress. The other relates to correspondence. I have to realize follow-up phone calls or emails do not result from the other party's disinterest in speaking with me. I have to remember not to internalize or take personally any interactions that aren't entirely positive from the onset.

The process of progress is slow. It is of the utmost importance to not get dragged down in the day-to-day steps to create change. The big picture is your savior. Embracing the process and "enjoying the ride" are extremely important. A good attitude and sense of mind will save you. Laugh and put your projects into perspective.

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“WHAT WOULD YOU TELL TO INCOMING RARE PARTICIPANTS?”



- Listen as much as possible when the work begins, but be prepared to speak your thoughts and beliefs with your supervisor and other close workers.
- Be friendly and set an open, informal tone with people – it helps a lot in a rural community and has made a big difference in my meetings with local stakeholders.
- Dive into projects and activities that are totally unfamiliar to you – it is okay not to know what you are doing at first; you will learn.
- Be organized! Saves time, saves effort.
- The first half is the hardest.
- Take time to know your Supervisor and your community.
- Be diligent and also patient.
- Enjoy your time.
- Don't give up if your project appears to flop, something unexpected will most likely turn things around.
- Don't procrastinate because time flies.
- Be humble, and eager to learn.
- You can never know enough about your community. Read the paper or any local publication regularly. Get to know the gossip of a small town. Get a library card and go there. Volunteer with community organizations. Offer to help, some more. Bring cookies into work one day.
- Live in the community where you work. I cannot stress this enough.
- If you are in a rural community, you'll definitely have some quality alone time. Be prepared for this and react accordingly. Make a reading list, take up a craft, write letters to your friends, make Christmas gifts, start a garden, make a timeline of your life's ambitions, join Netflix, etcetera. Also, look for friends in unlikely places.
- If you are in a rural community by yourself, try to take advantage and pick up a new hobby or two.
- Explore Oregon and find excuses to visit other RARE participants.
- Talk to the Chamber of Commerce about clubs, organizations, or activities to get involved in.
- If there are past RARE supervisors in the area, talk to them about their previous participants, what they got involved in, etc.
- Travel! Oregon's beautiful.
- Learn when to say "no" to additional work.
- Try to stay active in the community outside of the working environment.
- Don't take anything personally!
- Schedule regular meetings with your supervisor.
- Be flexible.
- Seek balance in life and engage in community.
- Ask as many questions as you need without embarrassment.
- You get what you give.
- Take advantage of the fact that you're new to an area by asking lots of questions.
- Recognize the potential rural communities have to flourish if everyone within the community (i.e. cities, counties, or regions) works together, and do your best to foster cross-jurisdictional relationships.
- When writing a plan for a community without a lot of extra staff or financial resources, consider including an action plan. I am learning that a plan is only as good as what is implemented from that plan...so, the easier to bring to fruition the better.
- Remember to breathe.
- Get involved in your community. Live there. Join groups there. Meet the people. Find ways to submerge yourself so that you are a part of the community and that the local residents develop a relationship working with you.
- Find one thing that you could do, in your position, that you have stake in (such as a specific project that would not only fit into the community/organizational goals but also fits into your professional goals.
- Carpool.
- Take the time to appreciate sunshine whenever you see it.
- Don't expect hand-holding: be assertive and ask questions and seek help when you need it.
- Have fun with your co-workers.
- Perfection is impossible. You will make mistakes.
- Actively involve yourself in the community – the relationships you garner with your neighbors will be what you remember, not your project specs.
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY:** be proactive! Take it upon yourself to do what needs to be done and follow up. No one is watching over your shoulder every day to ensure that you're on task and moving forward and *taking initiative*. This is your responsibility and it will make all the difference in your work.