

United States Department of Agriculture -Rural Development

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Executive Summary

During my Sophomore year as a student at San Diego State University Imperial Valley, I had the great privilege to intern for the United States Department of Agriculture- Rural Development in Imperial California. Being an intern for USDA Rural Development's Water and Environmental Program in the Imperial Valley, taught me many skills that will help me in my future as a professional. As an intern, I quickly learned the dynamics of the federal government's role in rural America. I witnessed how the government makes endless efforts to help the economic growth and improvement of quality of life for rural America. The ultimate goal of all the projects I got to take part in was to benefit rural communities.

Although I am an Imperial Valley native, I was surprised to see how the Imperial Valley heavily depends on USDA's services. The services offered by USDA ranged from housing assistance to water and sewage needs. As an intern I got the opportunity to work in Southern California, towns many of which lacked vital resources such as clean water. One of the last projects I worked with was the Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant-TTHM Improvement Project. In this project, USDA was the primary source of funding. The purpose of the project was to restore the water storage tank and provide Seeley clean and safe water.

During my time as an USDA-RD intern, I got the opportunity to assist in various duties such as organizing and preparing loan documents for water and sewage systems, housing, and community facilities. I would mainly assist in ensuring that the files for water and sewage systems, housing and community facilities were well organized. Furthermore, I assisted with the preparation of loan and grant processing, servicing and closing documents, and reviewing loan applications for completeness and conformance with the agency regulations. I also further developed my communication skills by becoming the first point of contact for USDA-RD. In

other words, I provided customer service by helping walk-in customers and answering telephone calls. Working for USDA-RD was such a valuable experience. My supervisors at USDA-RD are very well experienced and from them I learned so much on the process of getting these community projects completed. Working closely with my supervisors, I got to witness the extreme dedication and hard work it takes to aid communities receive water treatment and sewage loans. Interning with USDA-RD has inspired me to one day be part of USDA and make a difference in low income and rural communities one step at a time.

Project Objectives

When I first applied to the USDA-RD internship, I imagined that as an intern I would be carrying out simple and common tasks such as filing, helping customers with applications, and answering phone calls. At first, I did start with those simple tasks, however, as time progressed I worked on more high leveled duties that included specific documents such as letter of conditions, letter of intent to meet conditions, request of obligation of funds, and many other documents. My goal as an intern was to learn the ins and outs of USDA-RD. I wanted to absorb as much knowledge as possible. I achieved this by assisting in several USDA-RD projects. My role in helping the Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant-TTHM Improvement Project was to revise the format of the documents received from the borrower, contractor, and engineers. I would work off a checklist and revise the crucial documents in the application such as the letter of conditions, and request of obligation of funds. In order to receive the documents in correct format it was necessary to meet with the borrower to explain the importance of each document and how to complete it. I had the opportunity to go with Community Facility Program and Water and Environmental Program Specialists to the project site located in the town of Seeley to talk about the application.

Before being part of this type of project, I used to think that the process was faster and easier; however, I learned that it takes patience and dedication to execute the project. I learned that applications cannot just be sent to the State Office, until everything is properly completed. The specialists were great at explaining the importance of each document. At first my goal for the project were to simply revise the borrower's documents and check them for error. Later, my goal became to be more involved and attend the project meetings in which the borrower, engineers and contractors all met to discuss the project. I learned that projects like these go far

beyond than just paper work, but they require consistent communication with the borrowers in order to provide them with the best service possible.

In Multi Family Housing I was able to review and analyze loans all supporting documents for completeness and conformance with Rural Development statutory regulations, policies, procedures and practices and inputted data into appropriate automated database systems. I performed comprehensive review and in-depth analysis of financial credit data documents pertaining to the tenant's application eligibility, credit worthiness and viability within assigned application portfolios. I also performed servicing actions including site visits to determine a project's conformance with loan requirements; monitor civil rights compliance; evaluate/ mitigate and/ or prepare environmental assessments; and review key data to ensure multi-year forecast that were realistic to the projects budget.

-Project Approach

My approach to the project was to keep myself organized and always ask questions. I created strong communication with my supervisors so that I could ask them questions if at any time I felt confused. I made sure to take notes on important points my supervisors would make and would create checklists to make sure I was not missing anything. When we met with the borrower for the Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant Improvement Project, I made sure to pay attention to the conversation and took notes to become more familiar with the business vocabulary used. I paid close attention to my supervisor's behavior when meeting with the borrowers and learned important business etiquette from him. I learned how to approach your borrower and the people involved in the project. I also learned you have to be very patient in explaining the steps of the application because the process can sometimes be difficult to understand for the borrower. When I received all the documentation from the borrower I double checked all the information was correct and that the documents submitted were in the correct format. My approach to reach my goal was to ask questions, stay organized and take notes. I learned that these three approaches will work in any other type of work environment and will definitely help me become a better professional in the future.

Project Outcomes

As an intern I was involved in many projects including the Imperial County Fire Department funding project, School District projects and the Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant Project. I had the privilege to job shadow area specialists and attend meetings with borrowers. I took part in preparing the application files for most of these projects. I also assisted in audit data input into USDA'S servicing system. Furthermore, I completed the servicing filing by ensuring that the documents such as security inspections, and compliance reviews were in the correct files for each borrower. I also helped housing specialists by assisting applicants fill out the Pre-Qualification form for Single Family Housing program. In the Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant Project, water storage tanks were fixed, which resulted in Seeley finally having clean water. During those lasts projects, I learned from my supervisors, the hard work it takes to complete projects and the community benefits that result from them. I aspire to one day make an impact in the community like they did.

Being an intern for USDA-RD was a rich learning experience. I had the opportunity to work with all four programs, Community Facility, Water and Environmental, Multi-Family Housing, and Single-Family Housing, which demonstrated how much my community needs these services.

Conclusion

In the end County Water District Water Treatment Plant TTHM Improvement Project, all water safety requirements were met and the citizens of Seeley finally had clean water. I was very fortunate to have taken part in this project. I felt proud to be part of USDA-RD and see the positive impact we had in the town of Seeley. Completing my internship with USDA-RD was a great learning experience. I gained further knowledge on how the federal government works. I learned the value of being patient by working with the borrower's applications and further developed my communication skills. My supervisors served as my role models and inspired me to one day pursue a career with USDA and help change the lives of people one step at a time.

I have always been passionate about helping my community and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. For this reason, in the near future I would like to work with USDA'S Food and Safety Inspection Services. I believe the role of the Food and Safety Inspection Services is very significant to America and that is something I want to be part of. After my bachelor's in Public Administration, I want to further my education and obtain my Master's degree in Public Health. My ultimate goal is to have a career that dedicates to serving others.

Appendices



Seeley County Water District Water Treatment Plant- TTHM Improvement Project. Community Facility Program/ Water and Environmental Program Specialists.