

# The Collaborators of Tomorrow: The National Policy Consensus Center Internship Program

National Policy Consensus Center

Hatfield School of Government

Portland State University

The National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State is a national leader in the field of collaborative governance, and we work on everything from multi-party dispute resolution and hard land use and natural resources disputes to really involving the general public in issues that affect them but that they might not otherwise have a venue to participate in. Interns have gotten to participate in these types of projects at every point along the spectrum from training inside of federal agencies to participating in projects that really affect communities and affect the future of the state.

The internship program accommodates students from a wide range of majors—everything from public administration to conflict resolution to communications. And students have the opportunity to work on projects in every sector imaginable from health and human services to environment and natural resources. They can work in projects that operate at the state level, at the regional level, or even at the national level depending on their interests. Some of the roles that they can play are from process support to actually helping with the facilitation itself, depending on their interest and skills.

When I'm approached by a graduate student who's looking to do an internship here at the National Policy Consensus Center, what I first look at is setting up a profile assessment interview. It's a one-hour interview, and it's really a great opportunity for us to get to know each other and for me to let them know more about the programs that we offer here, and more about the projects that they could be interning on, but also for me to really get a sense of what they're looking for. I want to get an idea of what their personal goals are and learn a little bit more about their academic background, the knowledge base that they bring to an internship, what skills they bring, and where they want to grow as a result of an internship.

That interview is very useful, I find, for both of us—one for them to take away from it what we really do have to offer here (and they get pretty excited about that), but I come away having a really strong sense of what projects they might be able to fit on that I'm aware are ongoing, what might be coming down the pike that I could see them being placed on and being useful, one to fit their interests but also to very much help our project managers get the expert help they need on a project.

I was in my conflict resolution graduate program at Portland State University when I heard about this public policy facilitation class, and I thought that it sounded interesting and I had some free time and signed up for a very intense weekend of learning. I first noticed the difference in my normal educational setting in that the teachers started off by just having us make our decisions together using consensus, and this was fairly new to me, and it just seemed like a really empowering way to have a learning experience go.

I used to think that the reason we had interns was to benefit the student and I'm sure it does benefit the student, but now I've learned that the interns benefit the project. They bring a different perspective. For example, we had an intern work on the regional environmental forum. As a matter of fact, her work on this project was so exceptional that I offered her a full-time job, and after working for us full-time for one month, she was hired away by one of the top facilitation firms in the Pacific Northwest because they were familiar with her work on this project.

We bestow an internship award to honor students for their service, not to NPCC, but really to Oregon. It's not only lots of work and it's hard and it takes a lot of energy, but it's also so rewarding and fun when you see all these people getting together to collaborate and actually make a change.