
What They Won't Tell You About Working in Government: Advice to New Fellows From an Alum ?

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The final stage before one fully steps into the AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowship (STPF) is an intense two-week orientation where incoming fellows receive a crash course in science policy. Traditionally, it is one of the only times when STPF fellows in the same class are all gathered in a single room. But these are not traditional times, and the 2020-21 class are attending orientation virtually.

For many of the incoming fellows, the STPF fellowship is their first experience working in government

or congressional offices, so orientation is also a time when they're able to get first-hand advice from second-year and alumni fellows in attendance. These critical interactions cover things that first-year fellows may have been afraid to ask their placement offices or mentors, or they may touch on completely unexpected issues. Unfortunately, these casual conversations have been hindered with the virtual format of orientation this year.

Fortunately, second-year and alumni fellows have been able to share their experience over social media, illustrating the strength of the professional network that comes with the fellowship. In one great example, STPF alumnus Loren LaPointe (2017-19 fellow at the U.S. Department of Agriculture) took to [Twitter \(https://twitter.com/LorenLaPointe/status/1301144958385127424\)](https://twitter.com/LorenLaPointe/status/1301144958385127424) to impart a few nuggets of advice for incoming fellows.

“Just thought about how normally I'd be crashing @AAAS_STPF luncheon with current fellows at orientation (though I guess I can't do that anymore! #alum) where I'd be enjoying a yummy meal and giving them all my very real takes on working in government, so I'll give some here:

1. You will struggle and fail through learning email etiquette. Don't feel like you have to respond immediately. Think it through, pretend the Under Secretary might read it. More people prefer to be “looped in” than “bothered by another email.”
2. YOU ARE LIKELY NOT THE EXPERT IN YOUR OFFICE, Program Area, or even Agency. Be humble and learn from people who know more about the process than you do. You know a lot, but your best skills are being able to learn new things and problem solve. Lean in to that.
3. Find ways to appreciate the bureaucracy. It can be soul crushing, but you're prepared for this! Pushing a new idea through bureaucracy can take a little bit of sustained effort over a loooong period of time. It's exactly like doing a Ph.D.!
4. Don't be afraid to cold email people for a virtual chat about what they do in their office, whether it's super related to what you're doing or not. DC people love to talk about themselves and their jobs and the difference they are making.
5. Lastly (for now) enjoy the ride and the wave of new stuff you're going to learn! You might feel like you're starting all over and it does take at LEAST a year in most placements to feel like you have a handle on your job...

... but you're going to pick up on things so easily once you get off the first big learning curve. Good luck and enjoy!!”

View the original post and replies here:

<https://twitter.com/LorenLaPointe/status/1301144958385127424>
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