

Yang (Wilson) Wen
Rich Collins Community Leadership Impact Fellowship Reflection
BGC Worcester Music Program

By participating in the Rich/Collins Community Leadership and Impact Fellowship (R/C CLIF for short), I have gained valuable networking opportunities, developed leadership skills, and found my position and purpose in the local community. For that, I would like to first thank the fellowship committee for giving me the opportunity to partake in this endeavor, and I would also like to thank the generous donors for making this project possible in the first place. I am also grateful for the mentoring crew who has always been there to support me, especially Jason Li and Yuki Xu, who have played essential roles in the parturition of the project. Last, but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester (BGC Worcester for short), who have been extremely supportive of bringing this project to fruition.

I firmly believe that everyone should be entitled to explore the world of music as it has had a positive impact on me, however, the costs associated with a proper music education may deter many who are less fortunate. My R/C CLIF project, BGC Worcester Music Program, aims to introduce instrumental tutoring sessions to the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester. I want to offer quality, equitable access to musical education for the youth in our local community. At the same time, I believe that it is a great opportunity for Brandeis music students to develop their tutoring and leadership skills. Plus, as someone who has tutored music for four years now, it brings me great joy to be a catalyst for my students' interest in music.

The project saw its very incipient development last October when I became aware of the existence of R/C CLIF. As I read through the description of the fellowship, I soon realized that it was a great opportunity for me to rekindle my passion for bringing accessible music education to the community that is now local to me. Since then, I have been hatching a plan to bring this vision to life. I collaborated with my best friend from high school, Karam Alshaikh, who attends San Diego State University, to complete my application. At the time, I was driven by passion and idealism, but Karam, being an engineering major, was the voice of reason that dragged me back to reality. With my experience in starting a tutoring program and his logical perspective, we gained remarkable progress towards completing the application, often losing track of time and conversing late into the night for many days in a row. Eventually, I submitted my finalized application.

Needless to say, I was ecstatic to learn that my project was approved by the committee in December. I called Karam and my parents in tears, but I knew that it was only the beginning. Over the winter, I made modifications to the plans that I proposed in my application in accordance with the suggestions that I received from the committee. In addition, I got in contact with the Brandeis music department and updated BGC Worcester on my progress. When school resumed, I sprung right into the action. I first got in contact with Neal Hampton, the director of Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra, Julian Glenn, and Andrea Segar, the professors for chamber music. I explained my project to them, and they were all enthusiastic to pass on the electronic recruitment flier that I had prepared in January to their students. I then checked in with Taisha

White, who has been extremely helpful during my application process, and discussed with her the next steps to take. In the following week, recruitment was officially underway, and I started to talk with a local violin store about rental opportunities. On February 2nd, 2023, I held the first interest meeting for the program. This was not only a monumental step for the realization of my program but also a crucial meeting for my personal development. Although I have held leadership positions in the past, it was my very first time speaking in front of a crowd just by myself for recruitment purposes. Luckily, it went extremely well.

With the initial meeting kicking off my February, I reached out to BGC Worcester again to report on the recruitment process. One of the main frustrations that I have encountered is the response time from my community partner at BGC Worcester. Although I understand that she has a busy schedule, I also have set deadlines for myself to stay on track. After having noticed the long response time, I advocated for Zoom and in-person meetings in one of my emails, to which my community partner agreed, and we scheduled a meeting on March 7th. On top of that, I followed up the initial interest meeting with an email, sending prospective mentors the instructions on signing up for Calendly, which is the tool that I planned to use later on for coordinating schedules with future mentees. I also sent out a Google Form inquiring about their availability for future meetings and on-site visits. Toward the end of the month, I sent a flier and a Google Form to my community partner to be sent to the parents of the prospective mentees so that I get a rough idea of how many people are interested in the program.

March came around, and so did the Zoom meeting that I scheduled with my community partner. We discussed details of the program, including the form of delivery, and the forms that needed to be completed prior to going on-site. We concluded that the on-site group visits are to be conducted bi-weekly as Brandeis is quite far from BGC Worcester, and we will offer one-on-one, weekly Zoom tutoring sessions that last 30 minutes with the mentees. This way, the students will get quality, personalized violin lessons weekly, and we can take advantage of the on-site visits to correct their postures and establish deeper connections with our students through interacting with them face-to-face. After having estimated the number of mentees, we also concluded that our program will have a mentor-to-student ratio of around 1:3, which ensures efficiency while also making sure that our mentors are not overwhelmed during the week. When we discussed the forms, I realized that the process was much more complicated than I thought it would be. On top of the CORIs, there is an additional background check to work with children below the age of 5, and there is also a volunteer registration form for all the mentors. However, I was able to spin the unexpected obstacle into an opportunity to visit BGC Worcester on-site for the first time to get more progress on communication. On March 17th, I made my first visit to obtain the necessary forms for me and the rest of my crew. In addition, we talked about the mandatory training sessions that we are required to complete prior to volunteering.

Organizing activities in March was especially difficult for me as I had a midterm every week of the month. It was a real challenge for me to keep everything organized and keep up with the pace that I initially envisioned. However, it was also during this time that I abandoned my habit of procrastinating. I used to procrastinate on seemingly insignificant things, such as

replying to emails and completing my homework, and they always end up causing unforeseen, negative consequences. Driven by the urgency and my passion, I began to keep schedules, which was also something that I have not practiced that often. It was difficult to strike a balance between academics and service, but I find that spending 5-10 minutes each week to plan the week to be very helpful in outlining reasonable expectations for the goals that I need to complete. Essentially, the program gave me the right amount of pressure to get my act together and notice unproductive habits that are holding me back.

Although I will withdraw from Brandeis this August, my friends, Jason and Yuki, will continue to keep the program in operation next fall. They have demonstrated promising leadership skills, and they were also of great help in the spring. Jason has been helping me with communication and assistant duties, while Yuki helped me with recruitment and arranging transportation. I will keep in contact with them to ensure that everything is running smoothly and as intended. Currently, my project is in a very desirable position and on its way to fulfilling its initial purpose.

We have come a long way to get to where we are now. I still remember opening the application to RCCLIF for the first time in Usdan Student Center, and the first question that caught my eye was the last prompt, "In 300 words or less, please explain three ways in which you hope to learn and grow (professionally and personally) through this fellowship. Share how this opportunity will prepare you for your future career interests". In the essay, I mentioned that I would like to develop my professional communication skills and my problem-solving skills, which unintentionally coincides with my main takeaways from this project. Looking back, I have had many cherished moments that were crucial in my personal growth, but none is made without the support of others and my own perseverance. Just like the musical legacy that I wished to pass down to my mentees, the influence of this project on me will forever stay with me.