My Public Policy and Administration Program Internship took place at California Common Cause. I began as a volunteer in February of 2006, which quickly turned into an internship, followed by a fellowship. I have now been working at California Common Cause as its Northern California Organizer since January 2007.

California Common Cause is a non-profit, non-partisan citizens’ lobby organization working to hold public officials and public institutions accountable to the people. California Common Cause’s current focuses include redistricting reform, public financing of elections, and media reform. Its budget is composed of membership donations and grant funding. It has offices in Sacramento and Los Angeles with six paid employees, including myself. California Common Cause is the state organization for the national Common Cause. While California Common Cause provides state support for national issues, it mainly focuses on the state and local level within California.

I was very excited to have the opportunity to volunteer for California Common Cause and am thrilled that it has turned into a full time position. I have been a member for many years, during which I was always impressed by the organization’s work. I particularly like its emphasis on remaining non-partisan, working solely for the common good of all Californians. Due to the small number of employees and the diversity of the work, I was able to participate on a huge variety of projects, including redistricting reform efforts, researching state campaign contributions, summarizing state bills and drafting letters of support or opposition of bills, writing sample letters to the editor and political officials for CCC members, organizing public financing efforts in the San Jose region, writing CauseNets, our “Action Alerts”, and updating the website.
Redistricting Reform

One of California Common Cause’s main focuses is promoting redistricting reform. Currently, the State Legislature draws political districts for state and Congressional representatives. California Common Cause sees this as a clear conflict of interest. Politicians are basically picking and choosing whom to include in their own districts, allowing them to draw districts that will be most beneficial to their reelection.

As such, California Common Cause has been working with a coalition of various interest groups, ranging from the League of Women Voters of California to AARP to the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund to help promote a fair and unbiased process for drawing district lines. My first project with California Common Cause was to help build this coalition and find additional partners to work with on redistricting reform. Additionally, I participated in discussions with the coalition members on drafting a redistricting proposal and on how to lobby the Legislature. I also attended a number of Committee hearings on redistricting reform and provided basic support to our Executive Director, who is in the LA office and is not always able to be present for meetings in Sacramento. Finally, I organized a public forum in San Jose on redistricting reform efforts. I worked with a coalition of local community organizations and took the lead for providing all of the necessary support including arranging the speakers, location logistics, and promotion to our members, the community and the media.

Campaign Contribution Research

Following the 2005 Special Election, California Common Cause prepared a report for its website tracking campaign contributions for the various propositions. I was in charge of preparing much of the research for this report. My main duty was to use the state’s campaign contribution disclosure website, cal-access.ss.ca.gov, to track the contributions to campaigns
supporting and opposing the propositions on the Special Election ballot. This involved pulling away the various levels of “secrecy” regarding where campaign contributions came from. For example, a person can make a donation to a political action committee, then that committee can make a donation to another committee and so on. My job was to try to follow the path to the individuals and corporations supporting and opposing the proposition. Additionally, I used that data to evaluate campaign contributions’ effect on the outcome of the ballot votes.

**Tracking Legislation**

Another one of my duties at California Common Cause includes providing support to our Policy Advocate. This includes tracking various bills of interest, summarizing state bills and drafting letters of support or opposition of bills. I also use Capitol Track to follow bills of interest for California Common Cause, as well as for organizations in our voting rights coalition, the California Voter Empowerment Circle.

**Member Support**

Many of my other duties include providing materials and information for our members. This includes writing sample letters to the editor and political officials for our members to use, writing CauseNet Action Alerts and keeping our website up to date.

While California Common Cause focuses the majority of its support on redistricting, public financing and media reform, it does follow all other government reform actions at the state and local level. This mainly includes issues regarding elections and voting and changes to the Political Reform Act. As such, I work to ensure that our members are aware of the proposed legislation discussed by the Legislature. I do this mainly through our email CauseNets, I both write and track the CauseNets, as well as keeping the website updated. Finally, I provide sample letters for our members for issues of particular importance.
San Jose Public Financing

My main work since becoming the Northern California Organizer has been the promotion of public financing for local elections, primary in the San Jose/South Bay region. The City Councils of both San Jose and Sunnyvale have expressed an interest in exploring public financing for their local elections. As such, I have attended Election Committee meetings and City Council meetings to both provide information on public financing as well as promote it as a positive solution to their election problems. I have additionally organized our members to contact their council members to show support for public financing and attend city council meetings when public financing is on the agenda.

Finally, one of my most labor intensive projects was my work on the Clean Money-Clean Cities conference. This all day conference took place in both San Jose and Pasadena and focused on providing information to local officials and activists about how to implement public financing in their cities. Over 200 people attended the conferences and the California Clean Money Campaign co-sponsored the event with California Common Cause. I was in charge of all logistics for the San Jose conference, including location logistics, catering, and speakers’ arrangements. I also helped craft the content of the event, prepare materials, promote the event to our members, city officials, the community and the media and keep the event website current.

In conclusion, my experiences at California Common Cause have been invaluable to my future career in public service. I was lucky enough to be able to participate on a number of different projects covering a variety issues, providing me with a very diverse experience. Additionally, I am fortunate to have been able to turn this internship into a full time position with California Common Cause, where I continue to work today.