

2019-20 PiAf Fellow Report: 3-Months

Fellowship Organization:	International Rescue Committee
Fellowship City:	Freetown
Fellowship Country:	Sierra Leone
Fellowship start date:	2019-07-13
Anticipated fellowship end date:	2020-07-31
1. What is your fellowship title/role?	Research and Grants Fellow

**2. What are your primary responsibilities?
Please list your duties as you would on a
résumé.**

- Designing and implementing a qualitative action research project on adolescent girls' empowerment
- Managing and training a team of 10 people to conduct data collection activities
- Developed qualitative data collection tools and trainings
- Leading a team in analyzing focus group and interview data with NVivo
- Contributing heavily to the development and implementation of new adaptive programming and a corresponding monitoring and evaluation system based on the findings of the research
- Actively contribute to grant proposals and donor compliance activities with international donors (DIFD, Irish Aid)
- Leading Budget versus Actual (BvA) meetings with senior staff
- Created a tracking spreadsheet and dashboard to monitor task completion across multiple departments for BvA meetings using advanced Microsoft Excel skills

3. Did you receive any sort of orientation, handover or “onboarding” when you started your fellowship?

Yes

Please describe your orientation / onboarding and note who handled it.

I received an initial orientation from IRC Sierra Leone Human Resources that is standard for all new employees. I was also briefed on the programs in my department (Women and Girls Protection and Empowerment). I also received a short briefing on grants processes from my Grants supervisor. All of that being said, I feel I did not get the kind of onboarding that many PiAf fellows get, because I had no previous fellow who worked a similar role before me. If I were to do things all over again, I would have appreciated a more in-depth onboarding process, specifically with regard my assigned projects and my roles within them. I also would have definitely asked more questions about these things from the very beginning. I later came to the realization that I was unclear about some basic things that could have been easily addressed if I had known to ask for clarification sooner.

4. Describe a representative day at work.

Describing a typical day at work is difficult as my work changes fairly regularly depending on what projects I'm working on and what stage I am in within those projects. Right now, for example, I'm doing a lot of qualitative data analysis, but a few weeks ago, I was designing question guides and training manuals. I also go out to the district office where my major project is based on a monthly basis. However, I don't really get out into the field very often; I mostly stay in the office. All of that being said, a typical day for me starts at 8:30am, when I arrive at the office. I usually get through emails pretty quickly. I often have a big ongoing task that I am working on for the research component of my job (i.e. writing question guides/questionnaires or training manuals, doing qualitative data analysis) that I work on most of the day. Most days I have at least one grants task to do (i.e. creating/maintaining the Budget vs. Actual (BvA) tracker, compiling a monthly report using feedback from various IRC departments). I usually have 1-3 meetings per week that are mostly grants-related, but also some regular research-related meetings with the Senior Program Manager in the district or my boss in Freetown. I also usually call someone on my team from the district office at least once a day to check in about how data collection/transcription, etc. is going. We have a one-hour break for lunch that I normally take in full and we leave the office at 5:30pm. I rarely have work to take home to do. During busy times, I occasionally take my computer home over the weekend, but even then, I don't usually do much work.

5. On average, how many hours per week do you work?

39

6. Have you found ways to be effective and create value within your team?

Yes

7. Please briefly describe 1-2 specific projects you have undertaken or accomplishments you have made so far.

For the research component of my job, I am currently managing a qualitative research project aimed at understanding how adolescent girls are involved in making important decisions that affect their lives. The research is then supposed to inform programming that we will design in the coming months. Managing the project has entailed: 1) creating a research plan, including the study methodology, data collection tools (i.e. question guides/questionnaires), and data collection plan; 2) creating the training materials and delivering the trainings to train moderators, note takers, and transcribers, as well as regular program staff on how to do qualitative data collection; 3) leading the analysis of the qualitative data, including coming up with the data analysis plan and coding the data; 4) presenting the results to the research team.

For the grants component of my job, one of my major achievements has been creating an action tracker spreadsheet and dashboard for tasks related to our monthly Budget vs. Actual meetings. Prior to this, I had little experience doing more advanced functions in Excel, so creating this tracker required me to really improve my Excel skills. Having done it, I am really proud of how it is working and the progress I've made on developing these skills. I've since been asked to create other dashboards and trackers.

8. What is your office environment like? Please comment on the size and structure of the office(s) where you do most of your work.

The IRC office is a large house, with different departments in different rooms. I work in the room that houses most of the Grants department. There are 7 other people in that room. I suspect the entire Freetown office has about 60 people with desks (more including the drivers and support staff). It's a much larger office than the other NGO offices I've worked in developing countries.

9. To whom do you report? (Please specify name, title & email of all applicable contacts-- your primary supervisor and any other staff you report to. Please also tell us in what capacity you work with them.)

My primary supervisor and my supervisor for my research-related work is the Women and Girl's Protection and Empowerment Coordinator. For my grants-related work, I report to the Senior Grants Manager.

10. Please look back at your online VITALS form to review the goals you set for yourself before orientation. Are you working towards these goals? Have you met any of them? Changed any of them? Please explain.

To have a clearer understanding of what I want to do career-wise in the next 1-5 years I'm definitely working on this goal. I now realize that I want to get more work experience before going to graduate school, so that I can be more confident about what type of program would be best suit me and my career aspirations. I'm looking forward to thinking about this more in the coming months, as I now feel like I am really getting settled and understanding my place in my work environment and my life here in Freetown.

1) To learn more about M&E, research, and grants work, particularly from inside a large INGO

I'm making progress toward this goal as well. I have talked informally with and befriended a few M&E and research folks that I've met here. I now want to do more professional informational interviews with these people.

2) To integrate myself to the best of my abilities in my new environment, specifically to develop new relationships and to learn more about the history and culture of Sierra Leone
The first half of this goal I finally am feeling I have a grasp on. I've established some good friends from different areas of my life and have identified several activities that I am doing on a fairly regular basis for fun. However, I need to work more on the part about learning about Sierra Leone. In addition to other things, some concrete steps I can take toward achieving this goal are resuming Krio lessons and resuming the book I started reading about the history of Sierra Leone.

11. Please briefly indicate 3-5 goals you have for the rest of your fellowship year (these can be personal or professional). Your professional goals should align with your Work Plan.

- 1) Continue to work toward creating a collaborative working environment within my team by making a more concerted effort to involve field staff where possible in my work.
- 2) Engage in professional development activities at least twice a month. These could include informational interviews (formal or informal), learning more about the M&E and grants systems at IRC and other organizations, etc.
- 3) Be more assertive and confident in my capabilities particularly in the workplace
- 4) Engage in more activities and interactions with Sierra Leoneans. This could be through Krio lessons, the community engagement project, etc.

12. Do you receive adequate direction/support to perform your fellowship responsibilities?

Yes

Please provide more information on your response above.

My supervisor is always available to meet with me and is there to provide support and guidance when needed. At the same time, I've been given a lot more autonomy in this position than I've had in previous ones. This has at times been difficult for me, as I'm used to having more hands-on supervision.

Furthermore, due to some organizational issues that were beyond my supervisor's control, I did not always have the technical support I felt I needed to best do my work (this issue is now being addressed). However, I've chosen to take these challenges as learning opportunities. I've learned to trust my instincts and believe in myself more, as a result of working more on my own. It's a work in progress for me, but I'm coming to enjoy the extra autonomy more and more and I know that it will be useful in future jobs. In sum, while I feel I could have received more support initially, I now feel I am receiving adequate support.

I think for future Fellows it's important to communicate your preferred style of supervision to your supervisor early on or at the very least the things you need from a supervisor to effectively do your job, like weekly meetings or daily check-ins, clear terms of reference, technical support, etc.

13. How often do you check in with your supervisor?

Weekly

14. Have you had an opportunity to travel for work so far?

Yes

Describe these opportunities. [Please include locations and a brief description of the purpose of the trip(s).]

I travel on a monthly basis to the district office in Bo, where the research project I am working on is taking place. Thus far at these visits, I've done trainings, review and reflect sessions, staff meetings and check-ins, data collection piloting, among other things. I almost always stay in the office rather than go out to the villages we work in. This is primarily because my work is centered around capacity building and working with the team in Bo, not working directly with program beneficiaries. I will continue to do this for the entirety of my fellowship.

15. Do you anticipate any work-related opportunities to travel in the future?

Yes

If so, please describe them briefly.

I will continue to travel to Bo on a monthly basis for the entirety of my fellowship. What I will do after the research project ends at the end of this year is not yet clear, but the visits will continue.

16. I feel adequately prepared for my position's professional responsibilities.

Agree

Please briefly explain your response.

I had previous experience designing, implementing, and analyzing qualitative research projects before, but I've never done something on this scale or for this type of organization. While I feel that I had a lot of the experience necessary to do my job, it's at the same time required a lot of learning on the job.

17. How did you travel to your host country? Please be specific in terms of what airline(s) you flew, what cities you flew to/from, how much your plane tickets cost, and how you found/purchased your tickets. For example: "I purchased my ticket from the Cape to Cairo travel agency based in Washington, D.C. I flew on British Airways from JFK to London, London to Johannesburg, and Johannesburg to Maputo. I have also booked a return flight for next June to return through the same cities. The round trip ticket cost \$2,277."

I took 2 flights: 1 from Los Angeles (LAX) to Paris, France (CDG) and 1 from Paris, France (CDG) to Freetown (FNA). I flew Air France the entire way. I paid for a one-way ticket (as I wasn't sure when or where I would be coming back) and it cost \$824.81. I found the flight on Kayak or another travel website.

An important thing to note about traveling to Freetown is that you have to take a boat from the airport to Freetown. It costs around \$40. IRC reimburses you for this cost, but you have to have the receipt, not just the ticket stub.

a) What kind of visa / permit do you have?

Residence permit, although I came in on a business visa

b) How did you obtain your visa or permit?	Prior to arriving in Sierra Leone, I applied for and received a business visa in-person at the Sierra Leone embassy in Washington D.C. IRC took care of obtaining the residence permit once I arrived in country.
c) Did you apply for and receive your visa / permit before heading to your host country or after arriving?	I applied for and received my visa before arriving in Sierra Leone. I obtained my residence permit within a month of living in Sierra Leone.
d) What costs were associated with obtaining your visa or permit?	\$160 for the visa, plus a \$50 express charge. IRC paid for the residence permit.
e) Did you pay the visa / permit costs or were they covered by your organization?	I paid for the visa, but I think IRC covers the visa cost, but they require a receipt and I forgot to keep my receipt. IRC paid for the residence permit.
f) Are you still having challenges obtaining your visa / permit?	No
g) Any suggestions to help future Fellows navigate the visa / permit application process?	Keep your receipts. Make photocopies at the very least. You never know if you might be able to get reimbursed.
20. What vaccinations were you required to obtain prior to your departure? How much did your vaccinations cost? Did you get a yellow fever vaccination?	<p>Typhoid: about \$200 (I think). I got it at a travel clinic. I already had many of the vaccinations, including yellow fever, as I've been to the continent a few times before. A few words of advice. For typhoid, I'd suggest doing it early so you can take the tablets (rather than the shot), as it is cheaper and effective for a longer period of time. But you have to take the medication over a couple of weeks before it kicks in. Also, check the CDC website to know what vaccines to get, so you don't get swindled into buying vaccines that you don't really need at the travel clinic. I've also heard that it is possible to get some vaccines via a prescription from your primary care physician and then the pharmacy orders the vaccine. I've heard that it might cost less this way than going through a travel clinic. Lastly, check with student health services if you are still a student. They often have good rates on these things.</p>

21. How was your arrival and first week in your host country? Any improvements that could streamline the assimilation process for future Fellows?

My arrival was a bit hectic. My planes were delayed and my luggage didn't arrive until 3 days after I did. I also, full disclosure, got mugged during the week in country. I consider the mugging to be a fluke incident, wrong place at the wrong time, and have since not felt unsafe. I talk about this more in a later section. All that being said, IRC helped me a lot and made my difficult first week a lot better. They provided detailed instructions on how to board the boat to Freetown and were there to pick me up at the boat terminal. They provide you with a work phone that has a SIM and credit. They also put you up in the IRC guesthouse and there are drivers to take you wherever you need to go. They will help you exchange money and buy credit, which is really useful if you arrive over the weekend like I did.

There are a few pieces of advice I'd give to an incoming Fellow. First, request a security briefing over the phone if you get on a Friday or Saturday night. IRC provides you a written briefing before you leave, but you don't get a verbal briefing until you get to the office. It would have been nice to talk to someone knowledgeable about the security situation in Freetown immediately after arriving. Second, bring 2-3 days' worth of clothes in your carry-on, because if your bags don't make it (which happens all too frequently), it can be 3-4 days between when you arrive and when the next plane arrives and your luggage is delivered. Third, bring luggage locks. Lastly, investing in waterproof bags (like North Face duffels) might be worthwhile as they often get wet during the boat ride during rainy season.

22. PiAf's Pre-departure Orientation was sufficient in preparing me to transition into my fellowship.

Agree

Please briefly explain your response.

No comment.

23. Is there anything in particular that PiAf could cover at orientation that would have better prepared you for your fellowship post? Please specify.

No

24. Is housing provided by and/or paid for by your organization? Please explain.

IRC provides you with a stipend to cover your housing costs (including security, utilities, and other related costs). The stipend is sufficient to cover housing in Freetown. However, you are in charge of selecting your house. IRC does not provide a lot of formal guidance on this front. Also, note that the stipend amount may be different if you stay with another IRC employee (i.e. a co-fellow).

25. Do you live in a rural or urban area?

Urban

Please describe your experience in your living environment.

I live in Freetown, specifically near Aberdeen. It's a great location as I am close to the office (usually a 5-10 minute drive by car or a 20-25 minute walk) and within walking distance of a grocery store (which is pretty unique for Freetown as it is quite hilly and things are fairly spread apart). I am also a short drive from many bars, restaurants, and activities. The immediate surroundings of our house are quite safe. We have a guard and are close to a main road, but not on it directly.

26. Please describe your living arrangements. Include the following details:

a) Are you living in a house, apartment, guest room, etc.? b) Are you living alone or with roommates? c) How did you find your housing?

I live with my co-fellow at IRC in an apartment. We are living in the same compound that the previous two IRC fellows have stayed in, but we looked at other places before deciding on our current place. IRC does not provide you with much formal assistance in choosing a place to live. Several coworkers recommended locations and the best way I found to find places to live is the Freetowners Facebook group. You can go through a broker, but many have not so great reputations and charge fees that IRC does not always cover. I stayed at the IRC guesthouse for about 1 month before moving into my apartment, which was nice, because it allowed me to get a lay of the land (get to know neighborhoods, where other staff live, where grocery stores and restaurants are, etc). I'd highly recommend finding a place after you arrive, so that you can look at it in person (a bunch of the houses looked quite a bit different in person than in the pictures sent to us) and so you get an idea of where you would like to live based on your unique wants and needs.

27. How do you typically travel between your home and your work? How much does your daily transportation cost and how long is your commute?

I get picked up in the morning and dropped off in the evening by an IRC vehicle along with other nearby expatriate staff. The commute takes 5-20 minutes depending on traffic. There is no cost for this transportation.

28. Is your transportation adequate? Please briefly describe your options and their related costs.

As an IRC expatriate staff member, you are required to use IRC vehicles at all times. The vehicles are free to use and IRC employs drivers to operate them (i.e. you don't self-drive). There are 4 vehicles and they operate from after work until midnight on weekdays and 9am-midnight on weekends. You can get them outside those hours, if needed. You just have to arrange it with a driver ahead of time. Generally, this has met my needs fine. Sometimes immediately after work, there aren't any cars available, but one usually frees up pretty quickly. You can use them to go anywhere. They are free to use during the specified hours. If you go outside of those hours, it costs a small amount of money.

**29. How is the weather in your host country?
What season are you presently in?**

The year is divided into two seasons: rainy and dry season. The rainy season is very rainy. I think Sierra Leone gets the second most rainfall in Sub-Saharan Africa and the 12th most globally. The rain can flood the streets somewhat frequently. An umbrella and rainboots are necessary, especially if you walk at least partway to work or go anywhere on foot. IRC staff have access to vehicles most of the time, which lessens the impact of rainy season a lot (i.e. I don't walk much at all, much to my chagrin at times). The rainy season starts in May and lasts through October with July and August being the worst months (which is when many PiAf fellows come to Sierra Leone). It sprinkles throughout the day and pours somewhat regularly. I have yet to experience the dry season in Sierra Leone, but I experienced it in Liberia. It gets really hot and somewhat humid. The sun is intense. You get quite sweaty walking outside. That being said, your body adapts and the IRC office and most houses, offices, and restaurants have AC. Your experience of the weather really depends on your access to transport and how much time you spend walking outside. If you are more reliant on public transport or your house is somewhat far from the main road (which can often be the case), you will notice the seasons a lot more than most people at IRC do, because we always have access to vehicles that can pick us up.

30. What are the local languages, your proficiency in them (if any), and your subsequent ability to get by?

Krio is the local language, which is an English-based creole language, is most widely spoken amongst Sierra Leoneans. However, most people speak English and it is more than possible to get by with English. I am currently trying to learn Krio by taking lessons with an instructor who comes to my house on a regular basis.

31. What is the appropriate clothing for work and outside of work at your fellowship post and in your host community in general?

Clothing around town is similar to what you would wear in the US. In my opinion, there are no real restrictions on what you can and cannot wear (speaking as a woman). Our office is very casual. Some people dress in business attire, but most wear casual or business casual clothing. For example, it is fine to wear jeans and a t-shirt to work.

32. How have you been spending your free time? What kinds of opportunities are available for socializing in your city/town?

There are a lot of sports activities, like volleyball, tennis, basketball, water polo, field hockey, running, ultimate Frisbee, yoga, rock climbing, surfing etc. They are all relatively inexpensive: \$0-10/per session, with most being on the cheaper end. I often go to board games night and monthly pub quiz. On the weekends, I often go out at night (food and dancing) and go to the beach. Speaking of beaches, there are a number of beaches that are fairly close to Freetown, some of which are great to go to for the day, others are great for weekend overnight trips. The accommodation and food are pretty affordable. I never have a shortage of things to do in Freetown.

33. I've been able to successfully navigate my personal/social life both back at home and at my fellowship post.

Agree

Please briefly explain your response.

I regularly call my friends and family at home (usually twice a week). Connecting with my pre-fellowship friends helps me feel connected and helps me process what's happening on a regular basis. Doing this has been a priority for me regardless for some time, as I really value staying in touch with people.

One piece of advice I'd give to all Fellows regardless of their post is to not be afraid to ask for people's phone numbers when you first meet them. It's not awkward to do that like it is in the US, in my opinion, and it really helps when you're feeling lonely over the weekend or want to get more integrated in your new home. Similarly, when you get those numbers, use them. People's friend groups are generally open and welcoming to new people. In my experience, it's not odd to meet someone one night and hang out with them the next day. I found I had the most fun experiences, when I got over my fear of being too forward or pushy (i.e. texting the same people every weekend with the exact same message) and just started doing the above-mentioned example.

34. Would you say you live and work in safe areas? Please describe the levels of crime in your area of work and residence?

I live and work in safe areas. I feel comfortable walking around both areas, although I don't do it much since I have access to the IRC vehicles. Having the vehicles provides a lot of security. I want to stress that I really do feel safe here, but petty crime does occasionally happen.

What precautions do you take to ensure your safety?

To minimize risk, I try not to carry many valuables on me. I have a cheap Android phone that I use most days, which makes me less worried about my phone getting stolen. I also use the IRC vehicles to get around and don't walk around at night. Also, when I go out at night, I usually carry extra cash and my house key in a separate pocket outside of my wallet, just as an extra precaution in case of a mugging.

<p>35. What has been your experience with crime so far? (Please note that any security or safety concerns or incidents should be reported directly to PiAf staff per PiAf safety and security protocol.)</p>	<p>As I mentioned in my response to an earlier question, I did get mugged within my first week in Freetown. However, I consider it a fluke event. Not that it was my fault, but I was in the wrong place at the wrong time with too much stuff on me. I haven't had any issues since then and I genuinely don't worry too much about crime.</p>
<p>36. Describe the incidence of crime and the general security situation within your city/town. Could you recommend specific areas future Fellows might consider for safe housing? What about areas that should be avoided?</p>	<p>Most crime is petty theft. Women face some harassment on the street, but it generally more of an annoyance than a safety or security issue. I don't know of places to avoid for housing, as I focused my search on the areas where most IRC staff live. One area I would avoid that wasn't mentioned in the security briefing is the National Stadium, especially during big games and events.</p>
<p>37. Do you have any frustrations with your living arrangements, your work or your life outside of work?</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p>38. Has there been anything that you have needed but have not been able to locate or acquire?</p>	<p>This is really niche, but I couldn't get an oven thermometer to use for baking. It's a really cheap thing to get in the US, but I could not find it here. That being said, I'm lucky that I have colleagues that regularly go to the US and Europe that I can ship stuff to, which is what I did in this case. Other than that, I haven't had any issues finding things.</p>
<p>39. How did you deal/are you dealing with "culture shock"?</p>	<p>I honestly have not experienced much culture shock. I think I knew what to expect to some degree based on previous trips to the continent and the region, in particular. I think I had some issues with getting caught up in comparing Freetown to other places I've lived in. To cope, I've tried to stay present as much as possible, and use a journal and talk with my friends to reflect and process the difficulties (and successes) I've had with regard to adjusting and other matters.</p>

40. What about your experience thus far has been the most... Surprising?:

Three things. First, I can play water polo here. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd get the opportunity to continue playing water polo somewhere in Africa. Second, the cost of living. It was cheaper than I expected it to be based on my recent experience in neighboring Liberia. My stipend covers my basic living costs and a decent amount of fun activities every month (i.e. day and overnight trips to the beach, going out on Friday nights, eating out occasionally, etc.). Third, the type of work I'm doing. I very much expected to be doing grants work most of the time and have been pleasantly surprised in that I'm doing mostly research. I feel like I'm doing really meaningful work that draws upon my background, while simultaneously learning new things.

Pleasant?

My work colleagues. It's not that I didn't expect to get along well with them, but the closeness I've been able to achieve with many of them over such a short period of time has amazed me. It's crazy how even though I've known these people for a few months, I feel like I've known them for years. I've also really appreciated how close I've gotten with some of my staff in the field office. The fact that I get to go out so frequently means that I get to develop really good relationships with them in a way that many staff in the Freetown office aren't able to do due to the siloed nature of their work.

Challenging?

Work. I honestly didn't expect to be given nearly as much responsibility as I currently have. It's super exciting and I wouldn't have it any other way but managing a research project and all of its ups and downs is not easy. However, I am learning a lot and gaining a lot of confidence in my abilities. Looking back, the things I've been able to achieve and the challenges I've overcome in these first three months are pretty incredible to me.

41. What are the Top 3 things you miss the most from your home country or the U.S.? (Can be food, amenities, movies, etc. Cannot be people—although we know you miss us in the PiAf office terribly, and we thank you! We miss you, too.)

Target. I miss the convenience being able to walk into Target and buy everything I need in one stop. I also miss the cheap prices for all of my baking ingredients.

Trader Joe's. I miss all of the yummy snacks, frozen food, and CHEESE.

Having my own car. While I don't miss driving, I do miss the freedom I had in being able to go anywhere at any time and not be reliant upon other people.

42. What are the Top 3 things about life in your host country that beat out life in your home country or the U.S.?

The people I meet here. My work colleagues and friends are from all over the world. We spend lots of time together, because people have time and a desire to spend time with friends outside of their house more so that I've experienced in the US. I love the fact that you can develop really deep and meaningful relationships here with people in a way that has been really difficult for me to do back in the US.

The beaches. I grew up in a beach town and after spending the past few years in places without beaches, it's great to be back in close proximity to some great ones.

My social life. I feel like I do more things here than I do back at home. Perhaps it's because some things are cheaper here. I also think it might be because I feel like I have more time and energy than I did in my previous jobs and internships in the US. I also just think that there is a culture of doing things here that wasn't always present in my life back home.

43. Are you receiving sufficient support, materials, and information from the Princeton in Africa office? What could we improve?

Yes. Nothing at the moment.

44. As we plan the 2020 PiAf Retreat, we hope to incorporate some Fellow suggestions into our programming. What are some topics/sessions you would like to see at the Retreat? We appreciate your feedback however, we may not be able to accommodate all suggestions or requests this year.

None at this time.

45. If you are receiving stipend monies directly from your fellowship organization, how are you being paid?

a) Biweekly, monthly, etc.?b) In U.S. dollars or in another currency?c) In cash or deposited directly into a bank account? Local account or U.S. account?

I get my stipend in monthly installments. For the first few months of my fellowship, I received my stipend in \$100 bills, but now due to changes in Sierra Leonean law, I have two options to consider for receiving my stipend: open a USD bank account at a Sierra Leonean bank or receive my stipend in the local currency (Leones) at the official market rate, which is lower than the rate you can get exchanging \$100 bills on the street. I'm leaning toward opening a Sierra Leonean bank account, but I haven't decided yet.

46. Did you raise funds (via a site like GoFundMe, a local community organization, family members, etc.) to cover part of your fellowship expenses? Have you taken on any additional work during your fellowship year (with PiAf's permission)?

No

Rent	0
Utilities	20
Furnishings	0
Phone	0
Internet	60
Transportation	0
Fitness	30
Entertainment	50
Groceries	80
Eating Out	180
Travel	0
Medications	0
Laundry	0
House Cleaning	30
Home Security	0
Other (specify)	0

Other one-time or infrequent expenses not included in your monthly budget above (e.g. visa expenses, vehicle)?	Bought some baking/cooking supplies and appliances: \$100
Budget Total (minus Entertainment, Travel and Medications):	400.00

47. Any additional comments on your fellowship experience so far?

Note about the budget: Internet is expensive, but you don't have to spend as much as I do. I just like watching college football, which you have to livestream, which takes up a lot of data.

I've utilized the remote mental health service provider (Konterra) that PiAf has a contract with twice. I had really positive experiences with them both times. I'd highly recommend using these services and it's nice to know that they are available for fellows to use at any time.

Overall thoughts: I love my experience working at IRC. It has been both exciting and challenging and I feel I have grown tremendously over the past few months. When I accepted the offer to participate in PiAf, I was not sure if it was the right choice for me, as I was looking at other potential job opportunities. But three months in, I can unequivocally say (even on my bad days) that I am happy with the decision I made. The experience has truly been life changing and I can't wait to see what the next nine months has to offer.

Community Engagement Project

1. What opportunities for community engagement have you found living and working in your host community?

I honestly am still trying to find something to do. I've struggled with some difficulties at work that have prevented me from focusing on this project or even determining what this project might look like. I've started to give it a bit of thought and will go into more detail about my thoughts in the responses below.

2. List three (3) of your top CEP Ideas and how you will go about implementing them in your community.

1) Finding an organization that works with students that want to study in the US and volunteer my time to help students with college applications and essays. I was inspired by my friend's experience in Liberia volunteering at an organization like that. I feel like it is a good way for me to contribute something meaningful to people, as I have a unique perspective having gone through the college application process twice. I have been stuck on figuring out where to start in finding such an organization, but have recently come up with two ideas to start: 1) contacting my friend who works at the above mentioned organization in Liberia to see if he knows of any organizations and 2) contacting a friend who is a school teacher to see he knows of any as well.

2) Doing something related to women's empowerment. I've identified a potential organization, but I'm having some difficulty getting in contact with them.

3) Doing Krio lessons with a Sierra Leonean teacher. I've done a few lessons, but have had some scheduling conflicts and been ill, and have therefore, fallen off the wagon. I'm hoping to resume soon.

3. How do you see your community engagement project taking shape over the course of your fellowship?

If I were to do the first option, I'd like to help edit essays on a regular basis. I don't want to commit to something that is too time consuming, as that is not feasible for my schedule at the moment. Developing a mentorship relationship with a student could be a possibility as well.

4. What support would you need from PiAf staff in the next three months of execution?

I'm not sure what I need at the moment, other than a gentle reminder every once in a while, to remind me to do this project, as I often forget about it because I'm tired from work.