

Title

Mission Control: Service and the Stewardship of Science

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Abstract

Like many RSEs, my path to my current work was hardly linear and certainly not where I expected to be. I began my professional career in AmeriCorps, serving for two years at federally-qualified health centers, directly helping patients. I moved to research and trained as an epidemiologist. Now, I work as an embedded RSE at the Health Policy Data Science Lab at Stanford University. It's the best job I've ever had, but the further I've gotten from direct service, the more I've questioned my relationship with service.

Recently, after attending a training I offered, my department chair described my work as being like NASA Mission Control—the critical support that brings astronauts home safely. I appreciated this not just because I felt valued (I did) but because of the connection to service.

In this talk, I'll reflect on my journey into a particular subtype of RSE whose work is meant to support science. I've come to understand that this work is not merely the production of science but the stewardship of it. While I am further from the clinic than ever, a new path of service has arisen in front of me.