Everything’s Bigger in Texas
RJ Howard, Landon Wilcox, Diamond Green, Amethyst Kelly, Nadine Compton, 2017-18 NBA XPLOR Residents in Dallas, TX

The Texas host site has the largest NBA XPLOR house to-date! In this blog post, this cohort’s five Residents share their thoughts and experiences in Dallas so far.

Little known fact: my XPLOR host site is in Dallas. Dallas was actually one of my first picks when initially looking at the various locations for a few small reasons that are totally random in nature. Looking back over my thought process, I wonder how I managed to convince myself at all. There were three components to deciding that Dallas was going to be my primary preference.

First off, Arizona is stupidly hot, and while I dislike it, I have come to accept the life of constant suffering. Texas, from what I imagined, was also hot. The similarity of climate would then make it super easy to exist. Then there was the native plant life. After living in a desert so long, it seemed easier to just retain knowledge of all the poisonous things that would kill me instead of learning an entire set of new ones by moving away from the desert. That actually wasn’t very far-fetched, as I went to Alabama just before XPLOR started and despite the best efforts of my friend there, I never could figure out how to identify poison ivy. I was not pleased to remember that poison oak also exists. (I knew them before, but it’s been a while!) Then there was my second reason. I heard that there was decent public transportation in case I needed to take the bus or light rail.

The last reason feels like the most reasonable to me as I look back... especially considering that I could have tried to go somewhere cooler to avoid the heat. I won’t tear down my concern over poisonous whatevers, because that might come back to bite me later (not a pun - don’t even start). Now that I’m actively existing in Dallas, I feel better in my choice. The city does have its own ups and downs, like any other place. The drivers aren’t particularly careful here, but it does rain. I enjoy it here.

P.S. My housemates are cool too. - RJ

nbacares.org/xplor
NBA XPLOR has given me the chance to help the underprivileged community of North Dallas by connecting me to a community engagement site. My community engagement site, Network of Community Ministries, has been a phenomenal place for my personal and professional growth. By wearing a variety of “hats” at Network, I get to experience a mix of hands-on and office-related tasks. I often work in the food pantry, coordinate meetings, assist in bringing new services and resources to Network, and engage our stakeholders for our new Chapel Program. Every week I have the opportunity to serve in our food pantry in a variety of ways. Often times, we have hundreds of pounds of food donated to Network in short periods of time, so I have to assist in receiving the donations as if I were a warehouse manager.

On another occasion, I reached out to Brookhaven College (a local community college) in order to provide GED and ESL classes to our clients in need of credentials and assistance with learning English. This is especially important for our clients because many of them have not graduated high school, and others are not originally from the United States. We have many clients that speak a variety of languages, such as: Arabic, Spanish, Mandarin, and (to my surprise) some Slavic languages.

Sometimes, my work just consists of me doing data entry and assisting volunteers with simple IT problems. No, my work is not always glamorous. I don’t get to be the warehouse manager all day, and I don’t get to bring new resources to Network every week. But, collecting data and assisting volunteers is necessary, and it is vitally important. These and the many other things I do in my day-to-day have been essential pieces to my personal and professional development, and I am grateful that what I do makes a difference in the lives of North Dallas residents. – Landon

Dallas has been great! I have made so many strong connections, particularly through working at Juliette Fowler Communities for my internship and serving with Highlands Christian Church as my host congregation. It has been great. I’m glad I’ve had the time to spend with these people.

But I am ready to go. I’m ready to go back to the people I already know. I’m ready to be done meeting new people (I forgot, this is real life; it never ends.) I’m not saying that these people don’t matter. After two years participating in NBA XPLOR, I’m just saying I’m tired. Mostly, I just miss my people. Dallas has been a good experience. - Diamond
I feel so lucky that XPLOR placed me in Dallas, TX for my service year. In the beginning, I found it difficult to have a preference on a location placement. The job I would be working and the people I would be living with mattered more to me than the state in which I would reside. I put my trust in XPLOR to place me somewhere that would be a good fit. And, guess what? I feel like I fit here. The work I am doing and the people I have met along the way have helped me see where my skills are and what I want to do next.

Texas itself has taught me a few things about myself. I hate traffic. I really hate traffic. Not in the road rage kind of way, but in the soul-sucking kind of way. I do, however, enjoy the southern hospitality and welcome atmosphere of this community. I feel like I have become part of the Texas family. There are a few people in particular who have given so much time, thought, and energy to make me feel right at home. I hope they know how much their efforts mean to me; and how they have helped comfort me while I am away from friends and family. Dallas has been a great learning experience. I am thankful for my Texas placement! – Amethyst

I’ve always wanted to live in a big city. For someone that never has, the bright lights and diversity of things to do and see that it offers have always appealed to me. Dallas never did though.

When I applied to XPLOR, my first host site preference was Oakland. One of the community engagement sites there, the Oakland Peace Center, was so similar to an organization I volunteered at back home, that I believed it’d be a great fit. Plus, it was so close to San Francisco, a city that I love, and to relatives that live in California.

But the NBA thought otherwise. They placed me in Dallas. I was not happy. The only thing I knew about the city was that JFK was assassinated here.

I do have a confession to make though. I did select Dallas as a host site preference, but it was a distant second. We were encouraged to make our decisions based on the size of the city and its public transportation, its potential community engagement sites, and its weather. I chose Dallas because a childhood friend of mine lives here. While spending time with friends is a worthwhile experience in and of itself, that has nothing to do with XPLOR and I was worried that I’d get placed at a work site I’d hate. Yes, I could see my friend in the evenings and on the weekends, but I’d be spending most of my time at work and I did not look forward to interning at an organization for 10 months in which I did not feel valued or where I’d waste my skills and experience.
You see where this is going, right? My community engagement site ended up being one of the best parts of my Residency so far. My supervisor has been a great mentor, and I’ve been provided with many professional development opportunities. I’ve strengthened my marketing skills, learned about non-profit development, and have even traveled across the U.S. And that friend I mentioned earlier? We’ve experienced what she’s called a “friend-naissance.” She and I grew up together overseas and share a Filipino heritage. Our experiences and identities have created a bond between us that is strong enough to withstand living apart for most of our lives. But in Dallas, we’ve gotten to know each other as adults. We have the same politics and share a love of makeup. As a city resident, she’s been able to act as a guide for Dallas. This place will always be a formative part of our friendship.

I don’t like admitting when I’m wrong, but I’ll give you this one XPLOR: you knew what you were doing when you placed me in Dallas. And for that, I’m grateful. – Nadine

_NBA XPLOR_ is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. [Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.](https://nbacares.org/xplor)