

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FELLOWSHIP

COHORT 4 - MUMBAI 2022-23

REPORT



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Fellows

Elected Representatives fellowship, Cohort 4 - Mumbai 2022-23



Adithya



Afreenbano



Ashwini



Durgesh



Harshada



Krishna



Lekhani



Nishant



Palak



Prathamesh



Riddhi



Sakshi



Shubham



Swaraj



Vedank

About ER Fellowship

Praja Foundation conceptualised the ER Fellowship Programme as a collaborative effort to provide research support to Elected Representatives (ER) that will help them to keep track of civic issues from the city as well as give city-based youth to get an immersive understanding of city governance.

Mumbai ER Fellowship 2022-23 marks the fourth cohort of the fellowship programme in the city. This 12-months-long programme commenced in March 2022 and is going to be successfully concluded in April 2023. After a two-year break due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the promotions for fellowship began in February 2022. We reached out to 51 colleges and various departments of Mumbai-based universities. In total, 198 candidates applied for the fellowship. After a rigorous screening of applications and interviews, 20 fellows were selected. Special attention was paid to making a cohort with fellows from diverse backgrounds as well as maintaining the gender balance.

Building on the legacy of its previous cohorts, this year ER Fellowship was extended to Members of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and Council (MLAs & MLCs) representing legislative constituencies in Mumbai. This expansion presented a unique opportunity as well as challenges for fellows. Fellows were divided into a pair and assigned to dedicated MLAs with whom they worked for the duration of the fellowship. Their assignments included regularly interacting with assigned MLAs, and sharing data collected by Praja Foundation on civic services across their constituencies, the city and the state. They also assisted MLAs to frame questions on different subjects and effectively deliberate them in the state assembly. In total fellows dedicated over 11,000 hours to give research assistance to their Elected Representatives.

The fellows were actively engaged in activities such as accompanying data officers to collect data, doing data entries and preparing press conferences for the launching of white papers. This helped them to gain an understanding of the practicalities of collecting data and presenting it to a wider audience. In addition to this, the fellows were also actively involved in the data collection process of national projects under Transforming Urban Governance such as the Urban Government Index 2.0, a study on Fiscal Empowerment of City Governments and Women Empowerment. They travelled to other cities for these studies and explored different models of urban governance. This not only helped them to develop a broader understanding of governance but also exposed them to a wide range of perspectives and experiences. All these assignments were aimed at nurturing their professional and intellectual growth.

Apart from their tasks, enhancing the capacity of youth to understand different subjects under city governance is an

essential objective of the fellowship programme. Praja organised multiple capacity-building activities for the same. The fellowship orientation was a four-day long programme. It included ice-breaking sessions and group activities that would help fellows to bond with each other and Praja Team. They also had an exposure visit to a ward office to get an understanding of the departments under BMC. There were also sessions where the Praja team and external experts shared fundamental insights and concepts of urban governance. We also organised monthly capacity-building workshops where fellows directly got to interact with thematic experts and learn on the topics such as town planning, sanitation and more. A great emphasis was also put on peer-to-peer learning. Fellows were encouraged to share their achievements as well as their shortcomings in weekly and monthly group meetings. The programme coordinator further supported them to self-identify areas of improvement and act upon them.

A key highlight of ER Fellowship 2022-23 was the organisation of Prajatantra: National Youth Festival 2022-23. Prajatantra is Praja's flagship event for youth to understand city government by role-playing a fictional city government. This year, Praja fellows were the driving force behind the Prajatantra. From designing & coordinating the events to reaching out to colleges across India, fellows managed most of the organisational activities. The Grand Finale of Prajatantra became the memory of a lifetime for everyone as it became part of the National Youth Conclave, organised by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) with the support of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs (MoYAS) under the esteemed platforms of G20.

The participating fellows were highly motivated, and their enthusiasm for the programme was evident in their work. The experience gained through the Elected Representatives Fellowship Programme has provided invaluable lessons to them. They were able to understand the ground-level realities of governance and the powers and functions of local elected representatives. Going a step further, it also has strengthened their sense of responsibility towards the community and a desire to be agents of change.

The Elected Representatives Fellowship Programme has been a resounding success. As the journey of the fourth cohort of the Elected Representatives Fellowship Programme comes to an end, participating fellows share their experiences. We are optimistic that it will inspire readers to take up similar initiatives for a better tomorrow.

Acknowledgement

We attribute the success of the ER Fellowship Programme to the unwavering dedication and commitment of all stakeholders involved. As we conclude the ER Fellowship Cohort 2022-23, we would like to express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to its success.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to the MLAs who participated in the programme. We are grateful for their willingness to collaborate with the fellows and their contributions to the success of the programme. Their invaluable time, experiences, and insights have aided young students in their development. We also thank them for arranging a visit to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, where the fellows could witness legislative procedures and discussions firsthand.

We extend our sincere thanks to our panel of advisors for their support and encouragement throughout the journey. Their guidance helped us develop the vision for the ER Fellowship Programme and work actively towards achieving it.

We also thank the Subject Experts from the Civil Society and Academia who participated as resource persons for the capacity-building sessions. Their engagement and expert feedback have helped our fellows develop their understanding of city governance. We also appreciate the college faculty who responded positively to the fellowship's outreach and actively guided their students to participate in the programme.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the donors of the event, UNICHEM Laboratories Limited and Madhu Mehta Foundation, whose generous support made it possible for us to organise and expand the programme's scope.

Our Fellows have our utmost appreciation for their enthusiastic participation in the programme. Their dedication and commitment to the cause of better governance have been commendable. Their hard work, diligence, and willingness to learn have been pivotal to the programme's success.

Finally, a special shout out to the Praja staff who tirelessly facilitated the programme. From the selection process to guiding fellows throughout the fellowship, their contribution has enabled fellows to gain hands-on experience in governance and provided them with an opportunity to be agents of change.

Note: The contents of this publication are authored by the fellows of ER Fellowship 2022-23. In no way, they can be taken to reflect the views of the Praja Foundation and other funders.

***“Harmony between Citizens,
ERs and administration
as a result of immediate
transparency, accountability,
sincerity and initiative on
their respective part is Good
Governance.”***



Adithya Rao

S.Y.B.A., D.G. Ruparel College of Arts, Science and Commerce

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In January 2022, I attended a workshop organised by the Political Science department of my college in collaboration with the PRAJA Foundation. The workshop was centred around the challenges faced by the governing body of Mumbai, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), while delivering civic services. During the workshop, I was surprised to learn that the annual budget of BMC was over RS 45,000 crores. The number was way beyond my anticipation.

During the workshop, Praja Team also offered the opportunity of ER fellowship where college students get to work with elected representatives and address the city’s challenges. I was intrigued by the fellowship, especially the opportunity it opened to learn more about my city and enhance my knowledge of local self-government. Hence I applied for the fellowship and went through a selection process, which included a written test and an interview. I was thrilled to get selected.

My fellowship experience has been extremely fruitful, thanks to the guidance of my mentors at Praja. The orientation educated us on the history of local self-government, urban local bodies, the structure and functions performed by BMC, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act 1888, three-tier governance, and the constitution, among other topics.

While the term “government” often brings to mind corruption and ignorance, I have realised that both the elected and administrative wings of the government work tirelessly to address public issues. Qualitative and innovative policies are drafted and passed, but active participation from all stakeholders is crucial to ensure good governance.

Despite the challenges, such as getting an appointment with MLAs, I found the fellowship to be an enriching experience. I met some MLAs who were interested in our work and encouraged us to ask questions. I also learned how to simplify insights from white papers and present them in a crisp form that will facilitate active deliberation.

I also had the opportunity to visit the Municipal Corporations of Coimbatore and Chennai in Tamil Nadu for the Study of Fiscal Empowerment and Women-Elected Representatives. During my visit, I had the chance to meet with key elected representatives, administrative officials from ULBs as well as the State Government. I was able to meet with the Mayor of Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation and the Standing Committee Chairperson of Greater Chennai Municipal Corporation.

This visit proved to be incredibly informative and taught me a great deal about the status of urban governance in cities other than Mumbai. I was able to learn about how different cities are innovating in their unique ways to make a substantial change in the lives of citizens of their cities. This experience provided me with invaluable insights into urban governance and the challenges that come with it.

As a result of this fellowship, I am now a more informed and aware citizen. The knowledge I gained in areas such as presentation skills, communication skills, networking, and the use of tools such as the Right to Information (RTI) will undoubtedly benefit me in my future career and life.

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“Good governance hinges on the principles of transparency, citizen engagement, and awareness, whereby each person assumes accountability for their actions and obligations.”



Afreenbano Shaikh

S.Y.B.A., Kirti M. Doongursee College of Arts, Science and Commerce

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The Praja Foundation fellowship caught my attention for two reasons: firstly, their slogan “Making Democracy Work” resonated with me, and secondly, I have always had a desire to contribute to society. The opportunity to apply for a 10 months fellowship program, with the added incentive of a stipend, excited me.

The fellowship began with a week-long orientation session, during which we learned about Praja’s work to date and were introduced to various subjects of public administration. The training and practical knowledge provided by Praja during the sessions will undoubtedly aid in my professional and personal growth. I gained valuable insights into the functions of various departments, the duties of councillors and MLAs, and the norms of governing the city. I also learned about measures to bring in transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the functioning of all BMC bodies. Before joining Praja, I was unaware of the various bodies of BMC, such as the complaint registration toll-free number 1916 and the simple usage of RTI. Additionally, I developed an interest in politics that I did not possess previously, as I had been anti-politics. The guest lectures, organized by the Praja once a month during the fellowship, enhanced my knowledge of governance, and helped in shaping my personality as all these guest lectures were delivered by prominent faces working for the betterment of society.

During my fellowship, I faced several challenges in collecting data and persuading MLAs for appointments. I had to be patient and persistent in waiting for RTI data and following up with authorities to ensure they did their work. At first, it was frustrating to get appointments with MLAs and their PAs, but through perseverance, we were able to engage with them on issues such as health, education, and crime. This experience taught me the importance of being a responsible citizen and the value of slow and steady progress. Despite limitations, I learned a lot about life and governance through these meetings.

Throughout this fellowship, I have acquired numerous valuable life skills that will benefit me both personally and professionally. One of the most significant skills I have developed is communication. Thanks to the fellowship, I can now confidently speak to anyone, even a high-level government official such as an Urban Development State Minister. Being a college student, it can be challenging to balance both studies and work. Furthermore, coordinating a grand national-level event like the Prajatantra National Youth Festival while juggling my college studies has taught me a great deal about multi-tasking, patience, tolerance, and teamwork.

As a result of this fellowship, I have become a more responsible and aware citizen. I have learned that democracy requires effort and that it can only work if individuals put in the effort to make it work. All of these life skills will undoubtedly prove useful in all aspects of my life going forward.

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“Good Governance is not about creating a perfect System, but about making decisions that are fair, transparent and accountable to the people.”



Ashwini Bhagane

M.A. Kirti M. Doongursee College of Arts, Science and Commerce

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The quote by Frank Herbert, “one learns from books and example only that certain things can be done. Actual learning requires that you do those things,” accurately reflects my experience as a fellow at Praja Foundation.

As a student of political science, I was intrigued by the prospect of engaging in hands-on work that would not only enhance my professional prospects but also allow me to gain practical knowledge.

My experience as a Praja ER fellow has been a transformative journey, where I have learned the importance of taking action to address civic issues in our society. This fellowship has allowed me to closely study the role and responsibilities of MLAs, and I have been amazed by their commitment to serving the people.

The fellowship taught me the simple actions we, all can take to address the civic issues we face. Praja’s research papers on topics like education, health, and crime have also helped me understand the challenges faced by people in our society.

As a fellow, I have also had the opportunity to participate in capacity-building programs, where I could deepen my understanding of various topics and learn from experts in the field. The Prajatantra event, where I served as the event coordinator for the policy presentation on e-Governance, taught me valuable skills like effective communication and time management.

I also got an opportunity to go for a field visit to the Nagpur Municipal Corporation for Praja’s Urban Governance Study. The visit in itself was an altogether different learning experience. It increased my understanding of the functioning of urban governance in different cities of India, my understanding of Acts and by-laws and how different yet similar the functioning of Mumbai and Nagpur is, despite different Acts and bylaws. I learnt a great deal through my interaction with the administration officials and elected representatives from Nagpur.

Weekly meetings with my fellowship group allowed us to share our experiences and have healthy conversations about our work. The support and guidance provided by Praja Foundation’s staff have also been instrumental in making this fellowship a valuable learning experience.

Undoubtedly, my time as a fellow at Praja Foundation has been an enriching experience that has broadened my comprehension of urban governance while equipping me with practical skills that I can apply in my future endeavours. Initially, I was quite shy and found it challenging to engage in conversations. However, throughout my fellowship, I gained valuable leadership skills, which have boosted my confidence and transformed me into an individual who can lead and make a positive difference in society.

Overall, I am immensely grateful for this fellowship and the opportunities it has presented me. It has helped me develop into a confident, competent, and well-rounded individual, ready to take on leadership roles and make meaningful contributions to society’s betterment.

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“Good Governance is not just about leading, but also listening, learning and responding to the needs of the people you serve.”



Durgesh Rathore

S.Y.B.Sc., (Computer Science), Somaiya Vidyavihar University

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As a Computer Science student at Somaiya Vidyavihar University, the subject of city governance was unfamiliar to me. However, I stumbled upon Praja’s social media handle, where I saw the post about the ER Fellowship. The tagline, “Are you interested in running your government?” caught my attention, as I have always been fascinated by the functioning of politics and government. Despite my technical background, I applied for the fellowship and was fortunate enough to pass the interview process.

During our week-long orientation session, we were given a detailed introduction to Praja’s activities, white papers, report cards, and different committees and departments of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). We also interacted with fellows from previous batches as well as MLAs who were invited for the orientation. The orientation helped me understand what Praja does and what we, as fellows, would be doing for the next ten months.

As someone new to governance, this fellowship was the best way for me to enter the system and gain knowledge. Through the program, I participated in fieldwork and collaborated with elected representatives. Working with Praja gave me a better understanding of civic issues and how to effectively address them. My negative perception of elected representatives changed as I worked closely with them and discovered their genuine interest in improving the city.


Before the fellowship, my understanding of the BMC was limited, but through the program, I learned about the different departments of BMC, their roles and responsibilities, and their authority. Praja ensured that fellows understood the crux of BMC’s functioning, which helped us in our meetings with elected representatives. Learning to use devices to raise questions in ward committees and GBMs was one of the most interesting things I learned.

Comparing the day, I paid a stranger 250 Rupees to drop me off at Praja’s office for my interview to the day I was able to travel there for only 5 Rupees, I reflect on how much I have grown. Praja became like a family to me, and I learned theoretical and practical knowledge and skills that I can apply in both personal and professional contexts. The most significant takeaway for me was learning to survive and thrive in a new environment. I express my gratitude to Praja Foundation and our coordinators for their support and guidance throughout the fellowship.

As a result of the ER fellowship, I am better aware of the governance of my city and am motivated to contribute to its improvement. I believe that Praja’s work is essential in ensuring that the voices of citizens are heard, and their concerns are addressed.

The fellowship was an incredible experience that not only broadened my perspective but also enabled me to contribute to the development of my city.

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A portrait of Harshada Thanekar, a young woman with long dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a white patterned top and a yellow and white shawl. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and greenery.

***“Participatory, accountable,
transparent and efficient
governance is good
governance”***



Harshada Thanekar

M.A. (Economics), Mumbai School of Economics & Public Policy

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I was inspired by Rohini Nilekani’s quote, “We cannot be mere consumers of governance, we must be co-creators,” which led me to join Praja Foundation as a fellow. As a student of social sciences with a keen interest in politics and government, I applied for the fellowship program after learning about Praja from my University’s Placement Cell.

During the week-long orientation program, we learned about how the government works, with a specific focus on city governance. Praja provided us with in-depth knowledge about ward offices, constituencies, and the functions performed by BMC work, and even arranged for us to visit the ward offices to explore the various departments. In April, we learned about the importance of RTI and even had the opportunity to visit the BMC head office and Vidhan Bhavan for RTI submissions.

Throughout the fellowship program, the capacity-building session every third Saturday followed by the monthly meetings were the constant support for skill-building. The monthly meetings were also a platform to discuss the last month’s activities and plan for the next month. Prajatantra was a great experience, and as the Municipal Secretary for many events, I was responsible to manage participants, as well as judges, and laying out the agenda. It taught me so much about the importance of a Municipal Secretary in a city’s governance functioning.

I also had the opportunity to meet MLAs from the assigned constituencies and learned how to frame questions for assembly meetings. We discussed a range of topics, such as budget allocation, MPS schools, teacher recruitment, health check-ups at BMC schools, mid-day meals, and data management of BMC schools. Praja also organized a Maharashtra consultation program where MLAs and the Praja team discussed topics related to corporation procedure rules, councillor training, e-governance, and citizen engagement.

As an Economics student, I was privileged enough to work on a consultation on the Fiscal Empowerment of City Governments, where I called and had conversations with Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Commissioners, Chief Account Offices, and CFOs. This experience helped me boost my confidence as well as my communication skills. Praja also helped me develop my knowledge of Microsoft Office and MS Excel.

Throughout this fellowship journey with Praja, I have become a confident and responsible citizen with knowledge in education, health, law and order, civic issues, and urban governance sectors, respectively. Praja releases white papers on these subjects, which provided valuable insights.

Overall, it was a great experience with Praja, and I am grateful I applied for the fellowship. I met supportive, knowledgeable, and creative Praja staff and colleagues, which made every day a new learning experience. I am sure the practical knowledge and learnings gained from this experience will help me in my future endeavours.

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“A responsible leader, a transparent administration, and empowered citizens are the perfect recipe ingredients for good governance.”



Krishna Ghode

T.Y.B.A., PTVA's Sathaye College

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Before joining Praja Fellowship, I interned with the Mira Bhayander Municipal Corporation. My experience led to a keen interest in working with organisations that promote democracy. A friend told me about the Praja Foundation fellowship program, so I decided to apply. I must admit that I only filled out the application form because my friends were doing it, but I soon found myself excited about the opportunity.

The interview process was nerve-racking. Honestly, it was my very first interview. I remember waiting anxiously for my turn and feeling intimidated as I was ushered into the interview room. When asked why I chose Praja, I responded with the slogan “Making Democracy Work.” I was elated when I found out I had been selected.

The fellowship began with a week-long orientation program that covered various topics, including white papers and reports from the Praja Foundation, the Indian Constitution, the structure and functioning of the BMC and the Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha, and various government departments. We also attended weekly and monthly meetings, as well as capacity-building workshops that focused on developing skills such as mastering Excel, understanding municipal budget, and using the Right to Information Act.


Over the past ten months, we had the opportunity to work with MLAs from our assigned constituencies and observe how they address people’s grievances and resolve problems. We learned how to frame questions, conduct policy research, and perform other key legislative functions. Despite facing challenges such as political turmoil in Maharashtra and balancing our fellowship work with college lectures and extra classes, we learned valuable life skills such as time management and multitasking.

Two of the most significant projects I worked on during the fellowship were; research on the Air Quality Index (AQI) and Prajatantra 2022-23. AQI research helped me understand the importance of air quality for the entire city, and I used this information to raise questions in the assembly sessions.

I role-played as Municipal Secretary for different events in Prajatantra 2022-23 and got the opportunity to listen to youth voices from all over the country on urban governance space. It was in itself a quite fruitful exercise. Overall, the fellowship was a life-changing experience that taught me how to be a responsible citizen and further participate in democracy. The experiences and skills I gained during the fellowship will stay with me throughout my life.

The fellowship program was an enriching experience that taught me how to navigate the complex workings of government and the legislative process. It allowed me to work with MLAs, learn important skills such as time management and multitasking, and contribute to important research projects. The fellowship was a life-changing experience that helped me grow as a person and will stay with me throughout my life.

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A portrait of Lekhani Raja, a young woman with dark, wavy hair and glasses, wearing a black jacket over a pink and green sari. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is blurred, showing other people in a similar setting.

“Good Governance works effectively when citizens contribute efficiently along with representatives to make a system which is balanced, transparent and aims at the development of the city.”



Lekhani Raja

T.Y. B.Com , Mithibai College of Arts, Chauhan Institute of Science & Amrutben Jivanlal College of Commerce and Economics

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The prospect of “running your city” caught my attention when a professor introduced me to the Praja Fellowship. As someone who aspired to have a career in administration services, the opportunity to participate in local governance was appealing.

Participating in the Praja fellowship proved to be a rewarding experience. I felt a sense of pride to be involved in such an organization. Throughout the fellowship, we engaged with a diverse range of experts in various fields, deepening our knowledge and understanding of their specific areas of research. The insights gained from these programs and workshops could contribute to making our city a better place.

Honestly, I have seen myself grow each day. Whether it was meeting with the MLA or collecting RTI data at the ward office, each experience brought new knowledge and insights. The orientation process was particularly eye-opening, revealing the complexity involved in city administration. Though comprehending the various Acts and committees proved challenging initially, over time I learned to connect theory to practical situations during visits to ward offices and elected representative offices.

My native town is Jameshadpur. Upon returning home, I followed up on my lessons in Mumbai and researched which corporations were operating in my city. I was surprised to discover that there were three. Concurrently, I also delved deeper into Jamshedpur’s corporations, realizing the need to take the initiative to understand how our city operates.

I was assigned the K/E & K/W Ward and found the MLAs there to be highly cooperative. I conducted research for elected representatives on topics in which they needed assistance. I also drafted questions utilizing the white papers that Praja releases annually. Through this work, I gained a better understanding of how the system operates and the challenges faced by elected representatives.

Prajatantra 2022-23 was one of the projects closest to my heart. I was a part of the core team responsible for organizing and managing the Grand Youth Festival from the very beginning. The journey of six months was a dream come true as we managed a team of over a hundred volunteers, promoted the festival to more than a thousand colleges, organized registrations, quarter and semi-finals, and finally, the Grand Finale in Delhi as a part of the National Youth Conclave. Managing the travels, events, and everything in between was a challenge, but the feeling of accomplishment after it was hard to describe in words. .

The fellowship has made me more responsible and motivated me to take action rather than wait for someone else to do so. The experience has transformed me into an active youth who can make a difference in the system by participating in its functioning. This has brought me closer to my dream of pursuing a career in administration and has given me the confidence to excel in this field.

The fellowship has opened my eyes to various other career options, such as policy-making and development studies. Overall, it has been a life-changing experience that has enriched me both personally and professionally.

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“As more and more citizens raise their voices and become active in local government, and more local leaders take action, change happens.”



Nishant Tawade

M.A. (Economics), Mumbai School of Economics & Public Policy

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Participating in the fellowship was an amazing opportunity for me to gain practical experience in governance in the real world. I knew I had to apply for it when I stumbled upon the fellowship as it gave me the chance to work for the betterment of society.


Praja provided us with a week-long orientation program that trained us on how to interact with elected representatives and the administration. I gained knowledge on several topics, including the Right to Information Act, town planning, law enforcement, and more. Studying data for Praja's white papers provided me with in-depth knowledge on several critical issues, such as civic issues, health, crime, and education, as well as sessions on budgeting, development planning, the 74th Amendment Act, urban development, the CCRS helpline number, and press conferences, among others.

I would also like to acknowledge my co-fellow, Palak, for her cooperation throughout my fellowship. This was an opportunity for us to learn about each other's strengths and overcome our weaknesses. Our weekly meetings with other fellows from the city taught me the importance of teamwork. I was thrilled to learn how the MLAs framed and raised questions in the assembly. Working directly with them and their staff taught us everything from the ground up. We also had the opportunity to visit Assembly sessions in Mumbai as well as Nagpur. It was a memory of a lifetime for me.

During the fellowship, I acquired valuable professional skills such as data entry, professional use of Master Excel and hosting Prajatantra, a youth festival. I also improved my communication skills and my ability to interact with people. In the process of organizing Prajatantra, I learned coordination, communication, account management, and most importantly, time management. During the Quarter-Finale and Semi-Finale rounds, I had the opportunity to role-play as the Municipal Secretary. This experience helped me understand the various challenges and responsibilities that come with this position. I had to ensure that all the rules and regulations were followed and that the competition was smoothly conducted. This experience taught me the importance of being detail-oriented and proactive in managing tasks. During the Grand Finale, I was also the event coordinator for the Op-Ed Competition. This role allowed me to showcase my leadership skills and ability to manage a team. I also regularly coordinated with the participants for logistical support. This experience taught me the importance of effective communication, coordination, and time management.

Overall, I highly recommend this fellowship to my peer group. It is a great platform for enhancing and developing skills, abilities, and knowledge. However, I also believe that the ten-month duration of the fellowship was only a starting point to delve deeper into the intricacies of governance. Nonetheless, participating in this fellowship was an incredibly enriching experience that helped me grow both personally and professionally.

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*“Responsibility, not
authority, is the key to good
governance.”*



Palak Dubey

T.Y.B.L.S. LLB, Pravin Gandhi College of Law

I came across Praja Foundation’s ER Fellowship Application Forms in my second year of college. The slogan “Are you interested in running your city?” caught my attention immediately. The idea of working with elected representatives initially seemed thrilling, but also intimidating because I was going to work alongside veterans who possessed extensive knowledge and understanding of local governance. Having recently moved to Mumbai, I was not very familiar with the issues that the city faces.

Our orientation included an introduction to the tools that elected officials use to deliberate their concerns during legislative proceedings. We also learned about the potential for data-driven solutions to effectively address these issues. The orientation boosted my confidence, and throughout the Fellowship, we had the opportunity to interact with multiple experts who were passionate towards reforms. For example, we heard from Shailesh Gandhi, who led a session on the Right to Information Act. Anand Jagtap, who is currently serving as a Sanitation Specialist on UNICEF projects, spoke to us about sanitation issues in the city. The fellowship allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of local government and how it operates at the grassroots level.

I was pleasantly surprised by the positive response from the assigned MLAs. They taught me how to draft effective questions based on the issues highlighted by Praja’s reports. I also came to understand the process of drafting, filing, and organizing the RTI data during my interactions with the assigned MLAs. These workshops and efforts were essential in making me feel confident and well-equipped to discuss the challenges we had discovered with these experienced leaders. Despite having many locals in their offices, these leaders were receptive and willing to hear about the issues we had identified and our recommendations. Our discussions covered a variety of topics, including improving BMC’s centralized complaint redressal mechanisms, decreasing enrollment in BMC schools, extending BMC dispensaries’ hours, and addressing pendency in cases of crimes against women and children.

I also filed RTIs in different educational and health institutions across the city. The data that we acquired through these RTIs was not just theoretical but actual issues that the city residents were facing. It was important to organize and document them comprehensively so that Praja Foundation could present this information to the relevant authorities and advocate for more effective governance. The process was not only about data collection but also about understanding how grassroots issues impact people’s lives and how data can help improve their living conditions. The experience of working on these issues gave me a sense of purpose and motivation to continue working towards creating a positive impact in society.

Being a part of this fellowship was an enriching learning experience for me. It was heartening to witness a collaborative effort between NGOs and elected representatives/administration to work towards a shared objective. Working with Praja felt more like a responsibility than an internship, and I am grateful to have been a member of a team that is creating a positive impact in the community by promoting transparency and accountability in local governments, thereby ensuring the efficient use of public resources.



“Good governance goes beyond transparency in achieving openness. Openness means involving the stakeholders in decision-making process.”



Prathamesh Mokashi

T.Y.B.A., D. G. Ruparel College

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The Praja ER Fellowship for 2022-23 caught my attention due to my curiosity about how Mumbai functions as well as the opportunity to explore the work portfolio of a fellow. Throughout my time in the fellowship, the Praja staff has been incredibly cooperative, kind, enthusiastic, efficient, and supportive. They were always there to assist us like family members and their punctuality and dedication to each task were admirable, and they helped us form opinions based on proper information.

The orientation process for the Praja Fellowship was well-planned and executed with great success. The lectures were well-structured, with a clear connection between the previous and current sessions. We began with an overview of the Constitution, followed by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, and ended with a discussion on our responsibilities, duties, and assigned wards. The following capacity-building sessions covered a wide range of topics, including budgeting, town planning, the Constitution, women’s empowerment, and development plans. These monthly sessions provided insightful lectures that not only helped me complete the fellowship more enthusiastically and efficiently but also taught me valuable life lessons.


During the Praja ER Fellowship, I had the opportunity to interact with many people, which helped me develop my communication skills. It was challenging, but I learned to keep a calm and enthusiastic mindset when communicating with others. One of the most valuable lessons I learned was to never form extreme opinions about any person, political party, or organization. Opinions can change frequently based on various factors.

Through this fellowship, I learned a lot about how the city functions, including the roles of MLAs, administrative officials, police personnel, and the general public. I read the Mumbai Municipal Act of 1888. The Act became our go-to resource for basic questions regarding the powers of an officer, the functions of the municipality, and more. These may seem like simple technical aspects of urban governance, but they are crucial to understanding, and I am grateful for the opportunity to learn about them during this program.

Managing my studies and the Praja ER Fellowship simultaneously was quite challenging but I could balance them quite efficiently. During the fellowship, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue of slums near the airport area with an MLA. I shared my observations about how people living in such areas suffer from severe health issues due to unhygienic and suffocating surroundings. The MLA assured me that he would raise this issue in the assembly sessions. Additionally, Praja’s white papers on civic issues, crime, and education were helpful to the MLAs and local elected representatives.

This fellowship has taught me life lessons that cannot be learned from reading books alone. The values I imbibed from this experience are significant and will stay with me for a long time. I am grateful to the Praja Foundation for their relentless work in making the ER Fellowship 2022-23 a grand success, building upon the achievements of the previous three cohorts.

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“Governance is not a one-way responsibility. Participation of citizens is essential for transparency, coordination & benefits”



Riddhi Parab

T.Y. B.Sc. G.N. Khalsa College

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As a keen learner, I always seek out new opportunities to explore and gain knowledge. Despite my initial lack of interest in politics, I applied for the fellowship programme to improve my knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to navigate the complex landscape of urban governance. To my great surprise, I was accepted.

The fellowship program was a combination of data-based learning, practical experience, ward visits, data collection and analysis, citizen engagement and mentorship. The program provided a wealth of insights into the functioning of the Maharashtra State Government and BMC, including the function of Acts, bylaws, the 18 functions, and different departments. I even had the chance to look into the BMC records for health, crime, civic, and education-related data, which sparked new ideas and strategies for better functioning.

During the fellowship, I learned valuable skills such as the use of Microsoft Office, preparing strategies, and maintaining documentation. I also learned the importance of properly maintaining records of my activities and learnings, which helped me keep track of my progress.


One of the best experiences during the fellowship was coordinating a debate competition for Prajatantra National Youth Festival organized by Praja. It allowed me to work in a team, reach out to students from all over India, and manage competitions both online and offline.

I also had the opportunity to visit Vasai-Virar, Pune, and Pimpri-Chinchwad Corporation to learn, research, and talk about the making of the Corporation Procedure Rules (CPR) for better governance of cities. I learnt how to effectively communicate, find ways to meet with concerned officials, and submit relevant data to them through my field visits. I also gained a wider perspective on how different cities overcome their unique challenges by adopting their strategies.

The Fellowship provides an excellent opportunity for young professionals to gain practical experience in the field of public policy and social impact. Through this program, fellows can develop the skills and knowledge they need to become effective leaders in the field, while also making a positive impact on the communities they serve. Not only did I enjoy learning and working professionally, but I also enjoyed the company of my fellow mates, who came from diverse backgrounds. We learnt a lot from each other and made many memories together.

The fellowship program has been an amazing experience for me. It has allowed me to develop my skills and knowledge, and explore new places, constituencies, documents, events, and knowledge sessions. I am grateful to Praja for providing me with the perfect environment to work in and use my skills to make a positive impact.

27



*Good governance
is the foundation of
development and
stability in any society.*



Sakshi Ghule

T.Y. B.Sc., G.N. Khalsa College

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I stumbled upon ER fellowship opportunity through a career readiness group. Although I was not familiar with Praja Foundation and their work, I hastily filled out the application form based on recommendations from friends. Despite feeling a bit nervous, I was eager to learn about the intricacies of government and councillors.

Initially, when I got selected, I was hesitant to accept the fellowship opportunity. However, during the orientation, I found the activities to be informative and intriguing. I learnt so many new things about budget, governance, Acts, legislative and executive wings, corporation, and the three tiers of governance. We also had the chance to visit the M/E ward office, where Nilesh sir gave us an overview of the departments in the ward offices.

After that, we began our fieldwork, which involved data collection from hospitals, police stations, and BMC ward offices. This experience helped us build our confidence and develop our approach when collecting data related to health, crime, civic issues, education, etc. Once we had collected the data, we started with data entry in the office, which improved our computer skills and proficiency in Microsoft Excel, including the use of shortcut keys, which saved time. Additionally, we had a paper release event at the press club where we invited media personnel for the press release. This experience helped us overcome the awkwardness to speak to strangers and invite them to our events.

As we started with the fellowship we also had weekly meetings in which everyone shared their experiences and one of us used to take a random topic and prepare a PPT. Then we also had capacity building programs in which resource persons use to come and give us brief information such as urban development, police and crime, town planning etc. then after that we had our monthly meeting in which all fellows shared their experiences and difficulties faced on the field.

The Organisation of Prajatantra 2022-23 and the Diwali Party were my most memorable experiences during the fellowship. We were responsible for promoting Prajatantra. I reached colleges across India for the same. We contacted NSS coordinators and personally visited colleges in Mumbai and Pune. Also, we worked as event coordinators during the quarterfinals and semifinals of Prajatantra. This involved managing numerous participants, conducting Zoom meetings, running competitions, and tracking attendance. As the event coordinator for the quiz, I also learned how to use software to facilitate the quiz competition and created questions for each round. We all volunteered for the largest Diwali Party in India which was organised at the Racecourse. 1500 children were invited from different NGOs there was an orchestra, gifts, and dinner for all of them. Seeing so many smiling faces was so satisfying.

We also enjoyed Praja's office environment the whole staff is so helpful, kind and talented. There are so many memories and moments we enjoyed throughout the year. This opportunity presented a refreshing and engaging experience for me.

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*Good Governance is not
a luxury; it is a necessity.
Good Governance is not
about power, it is about
responsibility*



Shubham Sharma

T.Y.B.A. (Political Science), SIES College Of Arts, Science & Commerce

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I applied for this fellowship to learn more about the workings of government and government organisations. As a fellow, I got the chance to work closely with professionals in government, learn about their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities, and gain a deep understanding of how government policies are formed and implemented.

The fellowship began with an orientation session that helped us fellows to understand the work done by Praja Foundation and the structure and governance in Mumbai. It also provides an opportunity to bond with other co-fellows who share similar interests. After the orientation, we get to experience real work through field visits and meetings with the Municipal Secretary.

One of the most interesting aspects of the fellowship is the capacity-building sessions that are conducted every month. These sessions are enlightening and cover various topics related to governance. The most interesting session for me was the capacity building on the police force. I want to join the police force one day, so I could learn a lot from the session. We discussed the department of Mumbai Police, various zones, new measures and squads that are being formed. It was disheartening to see how short-staffed the city force is and the mental and physical stress they face while working. The session also discussed how as citizens we can support the police force. The fellows also get to interact with elected representatives and have discussions with them. They provide them with questions to raise on the issues they are working on and also do research on issues of their interest.

The fellowship also provided an opportunity to work with elected representatives, like MLC Satyajeeet Tambe, to help with issues specific to Nashik and the module. Overall, the Praja Fellowship is a life-altering experience that helps individuals develop the mindset and skills required to work in the social or government sector. The fellows are grateful to Praja and its staff for giving them this opportunity and being there with them on this learning curve.

Prajatantra, a national-level event on governance and city development was also a key highlight of this fellowship. We got to see and hear the views of youngsters from all over India. Their opinions and ideas regarding policies and planning showed us the potential that the youth has to transform this system and Praja was in a way encouraging them and giving them a platform. Organising a national event is a huge responsibility and Praja trusted us fellow with this. The initial rounds were conducted successfully and we will be heading to Delhi for the Grand Finale.

Another highlight of the fellowship was the Diwali party, which is the largest one in Mumbai for underprivileged kids. This event required us to work day and night but the happy faces of the children gave us the biggest satisfaction.

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“Governance which considers stakeholders its priority and stakeholders who consider their duty towards governance priority is good governance”



Swaraj Malekar

T.Y.B.A. (Political Science), PTVA's Sathaye College

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As a Political Science student, I always yearned to gain first-hand experience in the process of governance instead of just studying it. When I read the theme of the fellowship, I realized that it was exactly the kind of experience I was looking for. After a rigorous selection process, I was fortunate enough to be chosen for the fellowship.

From the very start of the program, I understood that it would be a great learning opportunity. During the orientation sessions, I learned about various aspects of the Mumbai Municipal Act 1888, the Corporation Procedure Rules, the functions of the Municipal Corporation, and other by-laws. As the fellowship progressed, I had the chance to attend capacity-building workshops on various topics such as town planning, the Right to Information Act, development plans, and municipal budgets. It was truly inspiring to hear from scholars and experts from various fields who were working towards improving urban governance.

My experience with the Praja Foundation's ER fellowship has been a truly enriching one. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and contribute to the cause of better urban governance, and I am confident that the knowledge and skills I have gained during this fellowship will be invaluable in my future pursuits.


One of the most significant aspects of my Praja Foundation ER fellowship was the opportunity to interact with elected representatives. These interactions provided me with a chance to closely observe the roles played by elected representatives in the governance process. I had the opportunity to witness first-hand how citizens approach their elected representatives with various issues and how these representatives work to resolve these issues.

I also observed how elected representatives frame questions for the state assembly and how their questions raise important issues affecting their constituency. I also saw how these questions were backed by thorough research, with Praja Foundation's white papers and reports providing valuable research assistance in framing them. Through these interactions, I gained a better understanding of the functioning of the Maharashtra state government and state legislative assembly.

The experience of interacting with elected representatives has been an eye-opening one for me. I have gained a deeper appreciation for the work done by these representatives and the importance of research in their decision-making process. Capacity-building workshops taught us how to interpret and implement development plans for Mumbai, as well as how to interpret the BMC budget. These technical aspects of urban governance were new to me, and I found them to be incredibly valuable.

One of the main challenges I faced during the fellowship was balancing my academic schedule with the fellowship commitments. However, as time went on, I learned how to manage both effectively. The Fellowship helped me to develop my communication skills and taught me to be humble. I also learnt the importance of being an informed citizen to help make governance more transparent and accountable.

33



“Good governance, is when a citizen feels comfortable to be in a Government office and sees in the official a friend, rather than a superior authority.”



Vedank Gaikwad

S.Y.B.A. Mithibai College of Arts, Chauhan Institute of Science & Amrutben Jivanlal College of Commerce and Economics

Democracy isn't just a form of government; it is a social institution that requires us to make democracy work every day, and Praja is one such organisation striving towards it. In February of last year, our Political Science teacher introduced us to Praja Fellowship. Several students, including myself, attended an online orientation program. I found it to be a wonderful opportunity to learn and be a part of governance at the grassroots level.

At the beginning of the fellowship, Praja conducted an orientation program that familiarized us with laws such as the 74th Amendment, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act 1888, and various departments of the BMC and Maharashtra government. We then began meeting with MLAs to learn from them and assist them in making governance better. We learned about the various devices used in legislative proceedings, such as starred and unstarred questions and half-hour discussions. Using Praja's annual reports on health, crime, and civic issues, we framed questions that were useful to the elected representatives to raise in the assembly. Participating in timely capacity-building programs and attending monthly and weekly meetings helped enhance our knowledge.

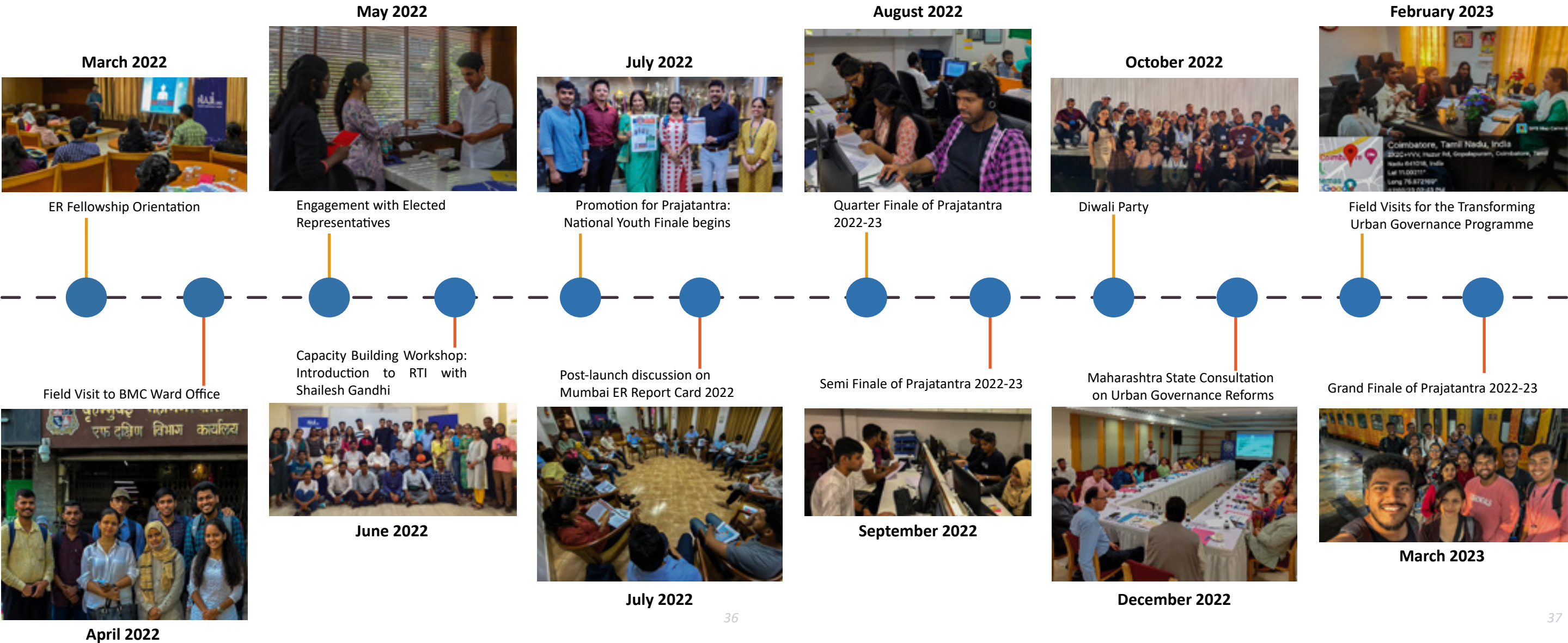
Throughout the fellowship, we regularly filed RTIs to collect data on various civic services. We learned about the RTI Act from Shaileshji Gandhi. I also participated in Prajatantra, a national-level event celebrating and propagating local governance. It was a wonderful experience to interact with participants from all over India.

I had the opportunity to be part of the organising of the Quarter Finale and Semi Finale of Prajatantra 2022-23. During this experience, I was involved in a range of tasks from the conceptualisation of events to the promotions of Prajatantra. One of my key responsibilities was managing outreach emails sent to approximately a thousand participants. It was my very first time, handling an assignment of this size. It is a unique and valuable experience that helped me develop my organisational and communication skills.

As an individual, the fellowship helped me grow. It taught me how to manage my time between studies and the fellowship, get more organised, and keep proper track of my work. It also taught me how to use public transport effectively and discover different localities within the city. The best part was interacting with people from different backgrounds and sections of society, which helped me gain different perspectives on life. This knowledge will help us fellows in our future endeavours and enable us to contribute more.

The fellowship made us aware of the ground realities of governance and the problems associated with it and compelled us to formulate ways to solve the problems. It was a memorable and worthwhile experience.

ER Fellowship 2022-23 Highlights



Stakeholder Testimonials

“Praja’s ER Fellowship Programme gives youth an opportunity to study public policy and the political system at large administration.

I was amazed by the research done by fellows and the data they shared with me. They also brought in fresh perspectives and outputs towards different subjects which I, a person sitting inside the system, cannot think of.”

Shri Ameet Satam Ji,
Member of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly

“As a teacher, I have often discussed concepts of civic and political participation in my classes. Praja Fellowships helped to extend the learnings in the classroom to a larger domains of public life”

Dr Ajinkya Gaiwad,
Assistant Professor, Department of Politics,
SIES College of Arts, Science & Commerce
(Autonomous), Mumbai

“Praja’s ER Fellowship Programme is excellent. I am very grateful to Praja for assigning two fellows with me. Both have worked with me with a great commitment and dedication and I really appreciate their help by working on ground.”

Shri Amin Patel Ji,
Member of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly

“Praja Foundation and ER Fellowship Programme play a significant role in developing young students towards being good citizens and contributive participants in the society. It provides young fellows a great opportunity to work with legislators and corporators and build mature opinion about critical urban issues.”

Dr Anuya Warty,
Assistant Professor, Mithibai College of Arts,
Chauhan Institute of Science and Amrutben
Jivanlal College of ommerce and Economics
(Autonomous), Mumbai



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