



Careers in Nonprofit Organizations

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to define nonprofit organizations, describe opportunities that exist in nonprofits, outline advantages and disadvantages of working in the nonprofit sector, and explain how you can determine if this is an area for you to consider as a career.

WHAT IS THE NONPROFIT SECTOR?

“Nonprofit” is a legal term that the Internal Revenue Service uses to define tax-exempt organizations whose money or “profit” must be used solely to further their charitable or educational mission, rather than distribute profits to owners or shareholders as in the for-profit sector.

Attempting to classify all the organizations that make up the nonprofit sector is difficult. Some of these organizations are somewhat esoteric by nature, especially single-issue organizations like those dedicated to sickle-cell anemia or the prevention of cruelty to laboratory test animals. Other nonprofit groups are much broader in scope, like the United Way.

Nonprofit can be generally categorized into eight main areas:

1. *Health Services* - kidney disease, rape victim relief, HIV/AIDS resources
2. *Education/Research* - religious/private pre-school through post-secondary schools, dropout prevention, public policy research
3. *Religious Organizations* - groups by denominations, missionary activities, religious publishing
4. *Social Service* - transitional care (halfway houses), vocational counseling, homeless shelters, YMCA, credit counseling
5. *Civic, Social and Fraternal Organizations* - minority rights, voter education/registration, United Way
6. *Arts and Culture, including Public TV and Radio* - ballet, folk arts, media arts
7. *Foundations* - community/corporate foundations, volunteerism promotion, international relief
8. *Legal Services* - legal/civil aid, public interest litigation

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS?

Nonprofit organizations can be viewed as organizations that attempt to deliver a wide range of services to society. Typically, the Executive Director reports to a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of citizens

within the community. The Executive Director serves in the same role as a Chief Executive Officer within the for-profit sector. In addition to executive administration, employment is available in development and fundraising, program development, public relations, membership development, publications, marketing, and several other areas, depending on the individual nonprofit organization. There are career opportunities for financial specialists, accountants, human resource managers, program specialists, counselors, doctors, lawyers, nurses, and many more. Nonprofit organizations are not just looking for volunteers, but rather for individuals who believe in the organization and can help it achieve its purposes.

Nonprofits present a variety of entry-level job opportunities. Some positions provide direct service to the public such as tutor, counselor, or early childhood education. Others such as finance manager, program/grants officer, site administrator, and production supervisor are administrative and managerial. For college graduates, multiple entry-level positions exist for a variety of majors. Some examples of entry-level positions are:

- Administrative Assistant/Coordinator
- Campaign Organizer
- Canvass Director
- Case Manager
- Communications Organizer/Administrator
- Community Organizer
- Direct Mail/Marketing Manager
- Associate Editor
- Field Director
- Office Manager
- Planning Analyst
- Policy Analyst
- Press Assistant
- Program Coordinator/Director
- Project Director
- Research Assistant
- Residential Counselor
- Vocational Instructor

Earnings in the nonprofit sector range from none for volunteer service to the six-figure incomes of top executives of some national organizations. To be sure, very few employees in nonprofit earn that much, but many nonprofit organizations offer competitive entry-level salaries, not to mention the intangible rewards that go along with work in this sector.

Typically, individuals seeking a career in the nonprofit sector know that this is not the type of career that provides a millionaire's salary. However, it is a misconception that people in the nonprofit sector cannot make ends meet. In fact, some statistics indicate that in certain sub-sectors of the economy, nonprofit workers are paid better than their for-profit counterparts. The health care field is a good example of this.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF WORKING IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR?

Many professionals mention their work environment as noncompetitive, non-threatening, and less pressured as advantages of working in the nonprofit sector. Because they share a common cause, these professionals have a keen sense of closeness, cooperation, and unity with co-workers. They can also enjoy more autonomy, variety, and challenge than many of their colleagues in equivalent for-profit or government positions. A young professional can be given a lot of responsibility right from the beginning. As a result, there can be greater opportunities to make an impact in the organization earlier on in your career than in the for-profit sector.

In general, nonprofits are becoming more business-like. Economic and political pressures are requiring them to operate as efficiently as possible. Nonprofits are setting more stringent financial goals, discussing strategic planning, and repositioning themselves to take advantage of market niches.

Nonprofit work does have its drawbacks, especially in small organizations. It is still true that salaries and benefits have generally lagged behind the for-profit sector, as mentioned previously. However, this trend is changing and more comprehensive benefit packages and increased wages are being offered. Also, nonprofit organizations are often funded by "soft" sources that can result in funding levels that may be uncertain from year to year. Consequently, job security can be a major concern for nonprofit employees. "Soft" money also hinders the acquisition of adequate equipment and furnishings. However, nonprofits are seeking more and more corporate support versus governmental funding to rectify inconsistent funding problems.

Another drawback to working in the nonprofit sector is burnout. Although the work environment may be less competitive, frequently nonprofit employees work with less fortunate individuals who may have few material resources.

It is important to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of the nonprofit sector. Only after examining these aspects can you make an informed, accurate career decision. What is most important is to get the facts rather than to jump to inaccurate conclusions based on incomplete information.

ARE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS FOR YOU?

In deciding where to look for employment, you need to consider what motivates you and assess not only interests and abilities, but also your personal values and what is truly important to you.

The following is a checklist that was adapted from the book, *Profitable Careers in the Nonprofit*. It will assist you in deciding if a career within the nonprofit sector is for you.

Questions:

1. Is it important for you to work for a cause?
2. Do you want to do something good for society?
3. Are you more humanitarian than materialistic?
4. Do you have a well-developed sense of right and wrong?
5. Do you have strong ideals?
6. Do you like people?
7. Are you flexible? Creative?
8. Would you prefer working for an organization to which you feel personally committed?
9. Do you want to be part of a team effort?
10. Do intangible rewards truly mean more to you than money?
11. Would you rather be a generalist than a specialist?
12. Are you comfortable working in casual clothing?
13. Do you want the opportunity to have sole responsibility for a project?
14. Does your self-image fit a "non-corporate" work environment?

If you have answered decisively "yes" to most of these questions, you may want to seriously consider nonprofit organizations when seeking employment. Your affirmative answers are an indication that you might find working within a nonprofit organization rewarding.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR?

The next step for you is research. To determine where to look for specific opportunities, you need to gather as much information as you can about the nonprofit sector. Both the Career Resource Center within Career Services and King Library have a number of excellent resources to assist you in the research process. Printed in the back of this guide is a selected bibliography with which to begin the process. You may also wish to consult a career advisor at Career Services after you have gained some initial information.

Other sources of information are the organizations themselves. Do not hesitate to contact a nonprofit organization to arrange an informational interview. It is an excellent way to gain first-hand information, establish a contact within the field, and demonstrate your initiative. A sample resume, cover letter and follow-up thank-you letter for an informational interview at a nonprofit organization are included in this guide. Visit Career Services if you need additional information regarding informational interviewing, resume writing, or cover letter preparation.

CAREER SERVICES WEB SITE

For additional information about Career Services, please refer to our Web site at www.muohio.edu/careers/ For assistance in using the Web site, check with our Career Resource Librarian in 205 Hoyt Hall.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

October 14, 20XX

114 North Campus Avenue
Oxford, Ohio 45056
jonessa@muohio.edu

Ms. Julie P. Casey
President
Hometown Area Social Agency
39 Main Centre Plaza
Hometown, Ohio 45055

Dear Ms. Casey:

Presently, I am a Miami University senior, and I anticipate graduating in May of 20XX with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. Dr. Robert Owen of our Psychology Department suggested I speak with you about career opportunities within social service agencies and other nonprofit organizations.

At this point, I am attempting to arrange brief informational interviews with individuals such as you in order to gain additional information about various nonprofit organizations. I feel that this will assist me a great deal when I begin my job search in early January. I would like to schedule an interview with you at a mutually convenient time. I understand that Hometown Area Social Agency funds several nonprofit organizations in the Hometown area. I would very much like to learn more about your agency and the organizations it funds. I am sure your perspectives would be very valuable to me.

I plan to be in the Hometown area during the week of November 10th and hope it will be possible to schedule a meeting at your convenience. I will contact your office the week of October 21st to discuss a possible appointment time. I look forward to talking with you next week.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Jones

Susan A. Jones

THANK-YOU LETTER

November 12, 20XX

114 North Campus Avenue
Oxford, Ohio 45056
jonessa@muohio.edu

Ms. Julie P. Casey
President
Hometown Area Social Agency
39 Main Centre Plaza
Hometown, Ohio 45055

Dear Ms. Casey:

Tuesday afternoon has to be one of the most enjoyable afternoons I have spent while completing my informational interviews on nonprofit organizations. Through my internship experience, I had become interested in Hometown Area Social Agency and other nonprofit organizations. However, until we talked, I was not sure of the extent of my interest. Thank you so much for sharing valuable information with me and for giving me several additional resources to pursue. It is extremely helpful to have an understanding of the types of positions, available opportunities, and the skills a person needs in order to be a successful employee within a nonprofit organization.

I am confident that the information you provided will assist me as I further explore noncorporate options. As I mentioned to you, I hope to gain full-time employment with a nonprofit organization by August 20XX. Based on your suggestion, I intend to arrange additional informational interviews with some local social service agencies.

Thank you again for taking time to share information about your organization with me. I hope to be in contact with you in the future as a professional colleague within the social services sector.

Sincerely,

Susan

Susan A. Jones

SUSAN A. JONES

114 North Campus Avenue
Oxford, Ohio 45056
(513) 523-1111
jonessa@muohio.edu

OBJECTIVE To secure a counseling position with a public social service agency in order to use counseling, human relations, and administrative skills.

EDUCATION **Miami University**, Oxford, Ohio
Bachelor of Science, May 20XX
Major: Psychology, with concentration in Social Work
Minor: Sociology
Overall GPA: 3.35/4.00

RELATED EXPERIENCE **Workplace Project Intern**, May 20XX - August 20XX
Human Rights Campaign, Washington, D.C.

- At nation's largest advocacy group for GLBT equal rights, coordinated research efforts of 3 interns to analyze corporate survey submissions, SEC filings, and foundation giving for Corporate Equality Index.
- Communicated with and educated HR professionals to effectively advocate for GLBT inclusion.
- Researched and drafted corporate implementation of domestic partner benefits packet for presentation to Bill Thomas, Chair, House Ways and Means Committee.

Intern, January - May 20XX
Planned Parenthood, Hamilton, Ohio

- Interviewed clients to compile intake information and to ease concerns.
- Compiled statistical data concerning clientele and use of services.
- Developed and designed brochure to advertise services.
- Performed various administrative tasks at request of Director.

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT **Waitress**, Summers 20XX and 20XX
Pizza Hut, Oxford, Ohio

- Seated customers and received their meal orders.
- Maintained clean and orderly dining environment.
- Assisted cooks during peak business hours.
- Secured establishment each weekend evening after closing.

HONORS AND ACTIVITIES Dean's List, three semesters
Psi Chi Psychology Honorary, 20XX - 20XX
Alpha Phi Omega Service Fraternity, 20XX - 20XX
Student Senator, Hahne Hall Government, 20XX - 20XX

References available upon request

Miami University
CAREER SERVICES
200 Hoyt Hall
Oxford, OH 45056

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE CAREER RESOURCE CENTER FOR STUDENTS SEEKING A CAREER IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

100 Best Nonprofits to Work For, L. Hamilton and R. Tragert, Macmillan.
A Guide to Careers in Community Development, P.C. Brophy and A. Shabecoff, Island Press.
Alternatives to the Peace Corps, Joan Powell, Editor, Food First Books.
Be Bold: Create a Career with Impact, Echoing Green.
The Big Green Internship Book, Career Education Institutes.
Career Opportunities in Politics, Government, and Activism, Joan Axelrod-Contrada, Ferguson Publishing.
Career Opportunities in the Nonprofit Sector, Jennifer Bobrow Burns, Checkmark Books.
Careers for Good Samaritans & Other Humanitarian Types, Marjorie Eberts and Margaret Gisler, McGraw-Hill.
Careers in Education, Alan J. Reiman & Roy A. Edelfelt, VGM Career Books.
Careers in Focus: Social Work, Ferguson Publishing.
Careers in Fundraising, Lilya Wagner, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Careers in Social and Rehabilitation Services, G. Garner, VGM Career Horizons.
Days in the Lives of Social Workers, Linda May Grobman, White Hat Communications.
The Everything Guide to Careers in Health Care, Kathy Quan, Adams Media.
Field Directory: A Resource Guide of Local, State, Regional, and National Arts Organizations, Americans for the Arts.
For the Common Good: Internships with Social and Community Service Agencies, Career Education Institutes.
From Making a Profit to Making a Difference, R. M. King, Planning/Communications.
Great Jobs for Anthropology Majors, B. Camenson, VGM Career Horizons.
Great Jobs for Political Science Majors, Mark Rowh, VGM Career Horizons.
Great Jobs for Psychology Majors, J. DeGalan and S. Lambert, VGM Career Horizons.
Great Jobs for Sociology Majors, S. Lambert, VGM Career Horizons.
How to Live Your Dream of Volunteering Overseas, Collins, DeZerega, & Heckscher, Penguin Books.
The Human Rights Internship Book, Career Education Institutes.
Winning Strategies to Get Your Next Job in the Nonprofit World, Piemonte Press.
Make A Difference: America's Guide to Volunteering and Community Service, Arthur Blaustein, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
National Directory of Arts Internships, W. Christensen, The National Network for Artist Placement.
National Directory of Private Social Agencies, Croner Publications, Inc.
Opportunities in Gerontology and Aging Services Careers, Ellen Williams, McGraw-Hill.
Opportunities in Religious Services Careers, John Oliver Nelson, McGraw-Hill.
Opportunities in Social Science Careers, Rosanne J. Marek, McGraw-Hill.
Opportunities in Social Work Careers, Renee Wittenberg, McGraw-Hill.
Public Art Program Directory, Americans for the Arts.
Public Interest Group Profiles, CQ Press.
Resumes for Social Service Careers, McGraw-Hill.
Vault Guide to the Top Government & Nonprofit Employers, Vault Inc.
Washington Internships in Law & Policy, Career Education Institutes.
The WetFeet Insider Guide to Careers in Non-Profits and Government Agencies, Wetfeet, Inc.
What Can You Do With a Major in Psychology?, Shelley O'Hara, Wiley Publishing, Inc.
The Women's Rights Internship Book, Career Education Institutes.
World Volunteers: The World Guide to Humanitarian and Development Volunteering, Universe.

JOB VACANCY LISTINGS

Current Jobs in Liberal Arts – the national employment bulletin for the liberal arts professions.
Miami CAREERlink – When students register and upload their resume(s) on Career Services' **Miami CAREERlink**, they have access to job and internship listings of employers who may not come to campus to recruit. Access Miami CAREERlink on our homepage (www.muohio.edu/careers/), click on 'Students,' click on 'Miami CAREERlink,' click on 'Jobs'). We receive vacancy announcements for Social Services/Nonprofit internships/jobs which are posted on Miami CAREERlink.
The Job Seeker – a bi-weekly publication of current vacancies in the environmental professions.

Career Services Web site: Be sure to access our Web site for additional resources and job-listing information at www.muohio.edu/careers/students/internetsites, click on 'Nonprofit & Social Sciences.' We have links to nonprofit and social service Web sites from our site.