

Career Options in the Nonprofit Sector

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Definition

It is important to recognize that the nonprofit sector is composed of many different types of organizations. Sample nonprofit organizations include: Yale University, St. Jude Children's Hospital, American Red Cross, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Ohio State University, Chicago Art Institute, Planned Parenthood, Catholic Relief Services, and the Audubon Society.

Nearly 11 million people worked as employees of nonprofit organizations in 1996, or approximately 7% of the nation's workforce. This was more than three times the number employed in agriculture and larger than the number employed in construction, in transportation and communication, and in finance, insurance, and real estate (Salamon, 1999).

There are more than 1.6 million organizations in the third sector, which is more than 6 percent of all organizations of all types (nonprofit, business, and government) in the country. The nonprofit sector is made up of member-serving organizations and public-serving organizations. There are more than 400,000 member-serving organizations that include: social and fraternal organizations; business and professional associations; labor unions; mutual benefit and cooperative organizations; and political organizations. The remaining 1.2 million public-serving organizations include: funding intermediaries, churches, service providers, and action agencies.

Salamon (1999) notes that most nonprofit sector employment, 79%, occurs in public-benefit service and action organizations. In the remainder, he finds that 10% are employed by religious organizations, 10% are employed by member-serving organizations and a final 1% are employed by funding intermediaries.

Nonprofit organizations hire for all types of positions, from chief executive officer to receptionist. Moreover, most nonprofits need individuals with strong communication and fundraising skills. Examples of jobs with nonprofits include: development directors, public relations managers, fundraisers, museum curators, artists, administrative staff, counselors, teachers, researchers, writers, public policy specialists, community activists, program officers, and librarians.

In *Jobs and Careers With Non-Profit Organizations*, Ron and Caryl Krannich dispel myths related to the nonprofit sector. In particular, they state it is untrue that nonprofits offer few job opportunities and are primarily volunteer organizations engaged in charitable activities. The Krannichs argue that it's easier to enter the nonprofit employment arena than to find jobs in government or business. Moreover, they state that nonprofit jobs are not dead-end jobs. Instead, many individuals develop long-term careers in the sector. Similarly, they dispel the myth that nonprofits only offer low salaries and few benefits; in fact, many organizations,



especially health groups, research organizations, foundations, and business and professional associations, offer excellent salaries and benefits.

Additional assertions made by the Krannichs speak well of nonprofit organization employment. They repudiate the notion that nonprofits lack accountability. They note: "similar to thriving businesses, nonprofits must increasingly advertise their activities and vigorously market their services" (Ibid, 21). Also, they explain that most nonprofits are tied to a community-based grass roots initiative, that nonprofit organizations are not just located in the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago and Atlanta. Many of the national and international nonprofits are headquartered in major cities; however, more than 90 percent of all nonprofits operate at the local level as community-based organizations.

More to the point, the Krannichs consider the benefits of working in the nonprofit sector to be: rewarding work; interesting and exciting work; positive work environments; easy entry and valuable experience; and career advancement. The greatest asset they identify is that nonprofits allow people to pursue their passions while getting paid.

Historic Roots

In the United States, community groups formed before government institutions were in place. The members of these groups offered mutual support and found solutions to problems. They formed voluntary organizations. After governments were created, Americans continued to rely on voluntary organizations to provide certain services. Initially, volunteers fulfilled the needs of these organizations. Yet, as the nonprofit sector grew, hired staff began to replace volunteers.

Importance

The nonprofit arena continues to be "one of today's least understood but most important employment arenas" (Krannich, Preface). Foremost, the field offers a great deal of variety to allow for selection by personal interest. Individuals exploring the nonprofit sector for careers can consider the categories of arts, culture and recreation; clinics and home health care; nonprofit sector research; nursing homes; religious congregations; and social services organizations. Salamon (1999) reports that just over 2 million people are employed in the recreation and arts field. Of these, the majority (93%) are employed in sports, recreation and entertainment. Seven percent are employed by arts and culture organizations - theaters, symphonies, museums, and galleries. Religious organizations are also major employers. Over one million people worked for religious congregations in the United States as of 1994, a near equivalent to the number who work for nonprofit social service agencies.

A key to opportunity and success in the field may be how well a person is prepared for their work. In *From Making A Profit to Making A Difference*, Richard King suggests that nonprofits place a high value on education. According to King, it is not uncommon for job postings to require a bachelor's degree and prefer a master's degree. Moreover, he states, a job candidate who pursues continuing education in his field will have more appeal in the nonprofit marketplace.



Ties to the Philanthropic Sector

As a result of the United States' strong economy in recent years and the success of Internet companies, the employment environment is particularly good for nonprofit (also called philanthropic) organizations today. Paul Schervish and John Havens, authors of a Boston College study on giving, project that baby boomers will leave \$41 trillion to their heirs and to charities in "a philanthropic gold rush;" they predict "a golden era of philanthropy is dawning" (Greenfeld, 50).

Career specialists recommend that the best way to find a job with a nonprofit organization is to respond to the numerous position listings in local newspaper ads, on Internet employment sites, and on the web sites for the particular nonprofit organization of interest. For example, a premier source of position listings is *The Chronicle on Philanthropy*, a publication that lists hundreds of positions each week. Another resource is *The Association of Fundraising Professionals'* monthly newsletter and AFP's web site employment listing. Many positions are also advertised in professional journals such as *Access's Community Jobs* and the *Journal of Philanthropy*. Other key books and directories are: *100 Best Nonprofits to Work For* by Leslie Hamilton and Robert Tragert; *Business Phone Book USA 1999* (Detroit: Omnigraphics); *Directory of Executive Recruiters* (Fitzsimmon, New Hampshire: Kennedy Information); and *Encyclopedia of Associations: National Organizations* (Detroit: Gale Research). (Editor's Note: www.idealists.org is also an excellent resource.)

Key Related Ideas

- Executive search firms
- Internet employment sites
- Nonprofit employment
- Nonprofit organizations' individual web sites

Important Related Nonprofit Organizations

- Arts and culture organizations (e.g., museums)
- Environmental organizations
- Foundations
- Not-for-profit hospitals and health clinics
- Private colleges and universities
- Relief organizations (e.g., American Red Cross)
- Religious organizations (i.e., churches, denominational offices)
- Youth organizations (e.g., Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.)

Related Web Sites



The following are popular employment sites:

America's JobBank:

www.ajb.dni.us

CareerBuilder:

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>

Career Web:

<http://www.employmentguide.com/>

Headhunter.net:

<http://www.careerbuilder.com/>

Job Options:

www.espan.com

Monster.com:

www.monster.com

The following web sites specialize in nonprofit job listings:

Access: Networking in the Public Interest:

www.communityjobs.org

The Chronicle of Philanthropy:

www.philanthropy.com

Community Career Center:

www.nonprofitjobs.org

Idealist.org: Action Without Borders:

www.idealist.org

Internet Nonprofit Center:

www.nonprofits.org

Job Star California, California Job Search Guide:

www.jobstar.org

The Management Center:

www.tmcenter.org

Nonprofit Career Network:

www.nonprofitcareer.com



The Nonprofit Times:

www.nptimes.com

Philanthropy News Network Online:

<http://www.philanthropyjournal.org/>

GuideStar (www.guidestar.org) contains a listing of U.S. nonprofit organizations

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Salamon, Lester. *America's Nonprofit Sector: The Primer*, 2nd ed. New York: The Foundation Center, 1999.

Briefing Paper from the *Learning to Give* web site found at
<http://www.learningtogive.org/papers/index.asp?bpid=7>.

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