

NONPROFIT CAREERS GUIDE



CAREER SERVICES

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WHAT IS THE NONPROFIT SECTOR?

Do you have a passion for a cause or organization? Do you have a desire to serve others or your community? If so, have you considered a career in 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.

There are many groups that make up this sector ranging from hospitals and museums to schools and places of worship. As you can imagine, attempting to classify all the organizations that make up the nonprofit sector is difficult. The scope of organizations vary greatly from organizations with a singular focus such as sickle-cell anemia or the prevention of cruelty to laboratory test animals, to others which have a much broader scope including organizations such as the United Way and Red Cross.

The nonprofit sector can be generally categorized into nine main areas. The following categories, based on the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities-Core Codes, are adapted from *The Nonprofit Career Guide*:

1. *Arts, Culture and Humanities* – missions of these groups largely focus on entertainment, education, preservation, and/or information dissemination. (e.g., ballet, folk arts, media arts)
2. *Education* – aim to prepare a capable workforce and informed citizens. (e.g., religious/private preschool through post-secondary schools, dropout prevention, public policy research)
3. *Environment and Animals* – seek to raise awareness and improve policy to protect the environment.
4. *Health* – composed of three groups: health care providers, administrative support, and organizations seeking to improve community health and health care delivery.
5. *Human Services* – committed to protecting, maintaining, and promoting quality of life.
6. *International and Foreign Affairs* – involve issues that extend outside national boundaries and often include relief, recovery, or development.
7. *Public or Social Benefit* – missions of these groups are likely to address physical, intellectual, social, financial, or political well-being.
8. *Religion-Related* – devoted to member care, social services, and community education.
9. *Mutual/Membership Benefits* – primarily exist to support the interests of members.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS?

Nonprofit organizations can be viewed as organizations that attempt to deliver a wide range of services to society. Employment opportunities vary based on the type and size of the organization. In many nonprofits, the Executive Director reports to a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of citizens within the community. The Executive Director serves in a similar 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 other areas, depending on the individual organization. There are career opportunities for financial specialists, accountants, human resource managers, program specialists, counselors, doctors, lawyers, nurses, and many more.

Smaller nonprofit organizations will likely have fewer employees, who typically will take on multiple roles within the organization. Many nonprofit organizations are not only looking for volunteers, but also seeking 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	Office Manager
Bookkeeper	Planning Analyst
Campaign Organizer	Policy Analyst
Canvas Director	Press or Public Relations Assistant
Case Manager	Program Coordinator/Director
Communications Organizer	Project Director
Community Organizer	Research Assistant
Editor Associate	Residential Counselor
Field Director	Social Media Coordinator
Financial Assistant	Vocational Instructor
Marketing Manager	Webmaster/IT Specialist

Earnings in the nonprofit sector range from none for volunteer service to the six-figure incomes of top executives of some national or regional organizations. Very few employees in nonprofit organizations earn that much, but many organizations offer competitive entry-level salaries, not to mention the intangible rewards that go along with work in this sector. Often, the size and location of the organization impact the salary and benefits that one can expect.

Individuals seeking a career in the nonprofit sector know that this is not the type of career that typically provides a six-figure 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 a more collegial and less competitive work environment as an advantage of working in the nonprofit sector. Because they share a common cause, these professionals have a keen sense of closeness and cooperation with co-workers and enjoy more autonomy and fulfillment than many of their colleagues in equivalent for-profit or government positions. At the end of the day, these employees may also have a stronger sense of work satisfaction believing that they have made a difference in improving the quality of life in their community or in the world.

In addition, entry-level professionals can be given a lot of responsibility right from the beginning. As a result, there can be opportunities to make an impact in the organization earlier on in your career than in the for-profit sector. While it is still true that salaries and benefits have generally lagged behind the for-profit sector, in some areas this trend is changing and more comprehensive salaries and benefit packages are being offered. For example, many small- and mid-size nonprofits offer affordable benefits such as flexible work schedules, shorter work weeks and/or more vacation time to compensate for lower than market salaries.

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 trends.

Nonprofit work does have its drawbacks, especially in small organizations. Nonprofit organizations are often funded by "soft" sources such as charitable giving and fundraising that can result in funding levels that may be uncertain from year to year. Competition to receive soft funding can be fierce and as a result can cause employees to question the job security of their position. Low funding can impact acquisition of adequate equipment, furnishings and employees, which can affect the effectiveness of the organization. As a result, more nonprofits are seeking corporate support versus governmental funding to rectify inconsistent funding problems and concerns.

Many organizations are overseen by a Board of Directors composed of community members. They make decisions at the macro level such as funding and budget cuts, program offerings, and hiring. Decisions made at this level may impact individual positions causing concern or frustration for employees.

Another drawback to working in the nonprofit sector is burnout. Some nonprofit employees may work more than 40 hours a week in positions that require them to fill more than one role. Their responsibilities may include night and weekend work as well as take-home work, and this makes work-life balance a challenge. While accomplishing a wide variety of tasks can be exciting and help build a resume, it can also be draining. In some nonprofits, employees work with those who have few material possessions and lack basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and health care. Constantly, seeking adequate resources to meet the needs of all clients can be one more source of stress that leads to burnout.

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 personal values and what is truly important to you. The following list of questions adapted from the book, *Profitable Careers in the Nonprofit*, 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 strong ideals?
5. Do you like people?
6. Are you flexible? Creative?
7. Would you prefer working for an organization to which you feel personally committed?
8. Do you want to be part of a team effort?

9. Do intangible rewards truly mean more to you than money?
10. Would you rather be a generalist than a specialist?
11. Do you want the opportunity to have sole responsibility for a project?
12. 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.

WHAT ORGANIZATION IS BEST FOR ME?

There are literally hundreds of nonprofit organizations around the world ranging in not only size and scope, but also in mission and purpose, so it is critical to connect with an organization that aligns with your values. So as you begin your job search, you need a clear picture of your personal values and mission. The questions below can help you focus. You can also schedule an appointment with a career advisor to further explore your values.

- What is your dream job? Why?
- What principles would you fight for without compromise?
- What causes or issues interest you?
- To which of those causes or issues would you be willing to devote considerable time and energy?
- To what people, groups, or organizations would you be willing to commit?

As you begin researching nonprofit organizations, you should start by exploring their mission statement and goals. If you discover that your personal values are not congruent with the mission and goals of an organization, it is time to look elsewhere for a good fit.

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

To determine where to look for specific opportunities, you need to research as much information as you can about the nonprofit sector. Career Services has resources to assist you, and you may also wish to consult with a career advisor after you have gained some initial information. Also review the **Internet Resources** list within the Career Services website for related nonprofit websites.

Of course, the nonprofit organizations themselves are a great resource. Do not hesitate to contact a nonprofit to arrange an informational interview with key personnel. Such meetings are an excellent way to gain first-hand information, establish a contact within the field, and demonstrate your initiative. A sample resume, a letter requesting an informational interview at a nonprofit, and a follow-up thank-you letter after an informational interview are included in this guide. Visit Career Services if you need additional information regarding informational interviewing, resume writing, or cover letter preparation.

REFERENCES

- Cryer, S. (2008). The Nonprofit Career Guide. St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance.
- Lewis, W. & Milano, C. (1987). Profitable Careers in Nonprofit. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LETTER

30 Campbell Drive
Highland Heights, KY 41076
joness1@nku.edu
October 14, 201X

Ms. Julie P. Casey
President
Hometown Area Social Agency
39 Main Centre Plaza
Hometown, Kentucky 41004

Dear Ms. Casey:

Presently, I am a Northern Kentucky University senior, and I anticipate graduating in May of 201X 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 on 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

30 Campbell Drive
Highland Heights, KY 41076
jones1@nku.edu
October 30, 201X

Ms. Julie P. Casey
President
Hometown Area Social Agency
39 Main Centre Plaza
Hometown, Kentucky 41004

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 non-corporate options. As I mentioned to you, I hope to gain full-time employment with a nonprofit organization by August 201X. 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

30 Campbell Dr. • Highland Heights, KY 41076 • (859) 448-1111 • jones1@nku.edu

OBJECTIVE

To secure an entry-level position with a public social service agency in order to use my counseling, human relations, and administrative skills.

EDUCATION

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY

Bachelor of Science, Expected May 20XX

Major: Psychology

Minor: Sociology

Overall GPA: 3.35/4.0

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Intern, January – May 20XX

Welcome House, Covington, KY

- 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

Resident Assistant, University Suites, August 20XX – May 20XX

University Housing, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY

- Oversee a hall of 48 men and women
- Assisted students with academic, personal, and career concerns
- Presented six programs each year on topics of time management, stress management, and study skills
- Met weekly with Residence Hall Director to discuss students and their concerns
- Attended weekly meetings with fellow resident assistants for ongoing training and professional development

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Waitress, Summers 20XX and 20XX

Pizza Hut, Highland Heights, KY

- 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, Association of Campus Residents, 20XX – 20XX

References available upon request