

# Helping charity work:



Photo courtesy of American Red Cross

## *Paid jobs in charitable nonprofits*

by Olivia Crosby

“This is more than a job,” says Michelle Dalva of her work with Habitat for Humanity International, “it’s a mission.” Dalva is one of millions of workers in the nonprofit sector who put their values to work for a paycheck. And nonprofits provide unique employment experiences, sometimes in occupations not usually found in other sectors.

Nonprofits—organizations that are neither businesses nor part of governments—employ more than 10 million people, according to Independent Sector, a Washington, DC, research organization dedicated to nonprofits. Charities, foundations, private schools, churches, professional and trade associations, many scientific institutions, and more than half of the Nation’s hospitals belong to the nonprofit sector. These organizations don’t amass profits, and they rarely

Administrative work in nonprofits can be both personally and financially rewarding. Turn your commitment to a cause into a full-time career.

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pay Federal taxes. But for many workers, they do make good employers.

Some jobseekers overlook nonprofits, assuming that opportunities are limited and salaries are uniformly low. In reality, nonprofits include nearly every type of occupation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not distinguish between nonprofit and for-profit establishments, so it does not have employment or earnings data for workers in nonprofits. Although salaries for workers in nonprofits are often lower than those for employees in profit-making organizations, many nonprofit workers earn high salaries—well above the average for all workers.

Charitable nonprofits work for diverse causes, from homelessness, hunger, and health to education, the environment, and the arts. But the desire to help a cause is only the first step to a good career match. As nonprofit Chief Executive Officer James McClelland says, “If you want to be happy in a job, be sure you like what you’ll be doing every day.”

Keep reading to see if you might like the daily work of a nonprofit career. This article describes five behind-the-scenes occupations found in almost every type of charitable nonprofit. On the following pages, you’ll learn about the duties of these occupations, some of the rewards and challenges of the work, and some ways to prepare for it. The sidebar on pages 18-19 highlights some nonprofit occupations that serve the public directly and are found only in particular types of causes.

The article does not describe jobs specific to nonprofit labor unions, professional associations, or trade associations. These groups exist primarily to benefit their members; thus, many of the occupations they include are not found in other nonprofits.

## Careers backing the cause

Charitable nonprofits tackle problems, conduct research, fight for their points of view, fund the arts, and do a myriad of other tasks. Resources are required for almost any of these activities to succeed. It also takes organization, new ideas, and a connection to the community. A unique group of workers makes sure nonprofits have these things and whatever else is needed.

This group recruits and trains volunteers, solicits donations, publicizes the nonprofit’s mission, and focuses its goals. In organizations with only one staff member, this person does all these tasks with the help of volunteers. In larger organizations, work is divided into specialized, paying occupations.

## Managers of volunteers

Every day, 50 to 100 volunteers come to Martha’s Table, a nonprofit service organization in Washington, DC, that distributes food to the homeless and runs a daycare center and tutoring program. Volunteers make up the bulk of the charity’s labor

force, and they come in large part because of the efforts of Director of Volunteers Juliet Orzal. Orzal turns volunteers’ enthusiasm into results, creating jobs for volunteers and then recruiting, training, and thanking the people who fill them. In the process, she discovers—and puts to use—volunteers’ hidden talents.

Managers of volunteers, sometimes called volunteer coordinators, analyze the mission of a nonprofit to find ways for volunteers to help. They ask the paid staff to describe the work that needs to be done and then write specific job descriptions for volunteers to fill.

Next, they search for a willing workforce. Managers contact local schools, churches, community groups, and businesses, making phone calls and presentations. They find a way to fit volunteers’ hopes and schedules with the needs of the organization. Arranging both short- and long-term assignments on weekends and evenings increases the chances of finding volunteers, as does creating programs for people of different ages and skill levels. “A major trend,” says Theresa Zechowski, manager of volunteer services at Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, DC, “is to create programs for families to do together.”

When volunteers apply for a job, managers interview them to identify their skills, interests, and potential time commitment. “People call or walk in, and I ask questions and show an interest in them,” says Orzal. “Sometimes, I find out they have a skill, like teaching, that fits with a program they didn’t know we had.”

Finding the right posts for volunteers takes insight into personalities. “They’re doing work and not getting paid,” says Orzal. “You have to find out what motivates them and set up assignments that will give them fulfillment.”

Volunteers starting work usually receive training from managers. Training might range from a short orientation and demonstration at the beginning of the day to a series of classes designed to teach specialized skills. Volunteer coordinators at Children’s National Medical Center, for example, organize and direct a 6-day training program for volunteers. They design a curriculum and find hospital experts, such as nurses, doctors, and childlife experts, to teach volunteers how to entertain and interact with patients and to maintain infection-free environments. The managers teach some of the classes themselves. Their goal is to make sure their recruits know what to expect.

Even after the training period, managers of volunteers are an important resource for volunteers. “I talk to volunteers every day to find out how they are and if they need anything,” says Michelle Dalva, director of volunteer services at Habitat for Humanity International in Americus, Georgia. Her volunteers live on site, so Dalva ensures that their living quarters are in order and that they know about activities in the community.

Showing appreciation is another major responsibility of managers of volunteers. “Volunteers need to know their work is



Managers of volunteers recruit, schedule, train, and thank the unpaid staff who are vital to a nonprofit's mission. These managers may need knowledge of an occupation or industry—such as construction, for home-building projects—to prepare volunteers for tasks.

valued,” says Dalva. Showing volunteers their worth could be as simple as saying “thank you,” but it also includes more formal recognition, ranging from small ceremonies to elaborate banquets with speakers and award presentations. Managers of volunteers budget for and organize these events.

Like human resource managers in the business world, volunteer managers also have administrative tasks. They record each volunteer's hours on the job. They create forms and applications for volunteers to fill out and conduct reference checks. They create a schedule to make sure volunteers are onsite when needed—a task that can be challenging, especially when some volunteers change their plans without warning. “The most stressful part of the job,” says Orzal, “is when a big group of volunteers doesn't show. The food still has to go out, so I start making calls to a dedicated corps of volunteers I have met over the years.”

**Traits and training.** Managers of volunteers need flexibility. They often have to abandon their planned work to help volunteers solve unexpected problems. “You can't be too task oriented,” says

Zechowski. “You can't mind being interrupted.”

At the same time, managers need to stay organized so they can keep the program running smoothly. “Volunteers and staff look to you to provide structure,” says Zechowski.

Experience with technology is another asset. Computer proficiency is becoming increasingly important as more managers create databases to keep track of volunteers.

There are no established educational requirements for managers of volunteers, but most have a bachelor's degree. Social work, psychology, and human resource management are common degree majors for these professionals. Education and communication classes are also good preparation. Zechowski recommends that students take speech classes so they feel comfortable teaching volunteers.

Managers of volunteers sometimes need experience in a particular occupation to teach specific skills. A manager who trains people to build homes, for example, needs construction experience.

Learning volunteer management theory and technique also helps. Several colleges and universities offer courses in volunteer management as part of their graduate programs in public administration, business administration, or nonprofit management. A few offer certificates in volunteer management or the opportunity to design an individual course of study. Current and would-be managers of volunteers can also attend conferences and seminars provided by professional associations. The Association for Volunteer Administration offers certification to members who pass an exam, submit a portfolio, and have at least 3 years of experience.

**Employment and earnings.** The Association for Volunteer Administration includes more than 1,800 members, most of whom are paid to manage volunteers.

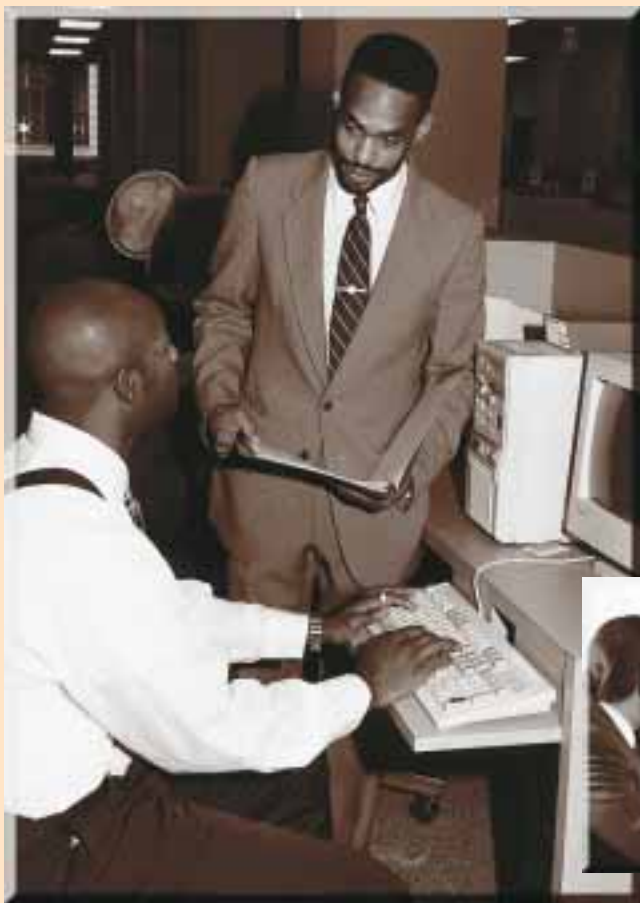
Not all managers of volunteers work in the nonprofit sector. Federal, State, and county governments hire managers of volunteers to work in the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Volunteers In Service To America programs and in other

agencies, such as the National Park Service and county volunteer offices, that collaborate with volunteer groups. Some businesses hire managers of volunteers to set up community volunteering programs for employees.

According to a survey by management research firm Abbot, Langer, and Associates, Inc., volunteer managers had median earnings of \$32,000 in 2000—meaning half earned more than that amount and half earned less. And according to the *Annual Salary Survey 2000* by the industry newspaper *Nonprofit Times*, salaries varied by organizational size in 1999, from an average of \$77,268 in organizations with operating budgets of more than \$50 million to an average of \$24,395 in organizations with budgets of less than \$500,000.

### Fundraisers

Earning no profits does not mean having no expenses. For nonprofits, money and supplies can be the difference between starting new, exciting projects and shutting down existing ones.



“I talk to volunteers every day to find out how they are and if they need anything. Volunteers need to know their work is valued.”

Michelle Dalva,  
director of volunteer services  
Habitat for Humanity International



Charitable nonprofits earn money from many sources. Some charge fees for the services they provide. A few sell merchandise or memberships to the public. Even if they have additional sources of income, however, nearly all nonprofits need donations to bridge the gap between income and costs.

Fundraisers, usually called directors of development, find the money and other gifts needed to keep nonprofit operations thriving. There are five primary ways fundraisers get donations: asking for large gifts from individual donors, soliciting bequests, hosting special events, applying for grants, and launching phone and letter appeals. In small nonprofits, the director of development does all these things; in large ones, fundraisers specialize.

*Large-gift directors: capital contributions.* Searching for a few million dollars here, a few thousand there—these workers look for big money. A director of large gifts asks people to give large sums of money to a nonprofit. The gifts they solicit are often used for major expenses or new projects. Large-gift directors meet potential donors at fundraising events or find them through contacts with colleagues and other donors. Lunches with donors, meetings in donors' offices or homes, and casual conversation at fundraising events form an important part of a large-gift fundraiser's duties. "To do this job, you have to be good at listening to people," says Dave Perrett, director of the Annual Fund at the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia. "You need to be good at recognizing what people are interested in and seeing where that might intersect with the mission of your organization."

Large-gift fundraisers write reports describing the meetings they have. Most keep a database of the interests of potential donors. Development Associate Nancy Torns at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, uses her database when trying to fund a new project. "During a conversation, I might learn that someone is interested in helping cure cancer," she says. "I record that, and then if one of our researchers is studying the causes of cancer, I know who I might call."

Many nonprofits encourage gifts by offering donors unique benefits, such as special tickets to a performance, a parking space, or even their name on a building. Large-gift fundraisers decide what to offer.

Soliciting large gifts takes time and patience. "You can't just ask someone for \$500,000 the first time you meet," says Beth Brumell, director of the Capital Campaign at Children's Medical Center. "Fundraising is about establishing relationships—making a connection between the mission of the organization and the people who can give." It could take over a year to receive a gift from a donor. In that time, fundraisers talk regularly with would-be donors and arrange for them to meet people doing the work they would be supporting. "We aren't just asking for money," says Perrett. "We're really offering a service. We're giving people

the opportunity to be a part of work they believe in."

*Directors of planned giving: enduring endowments.* Directors of planned giving specialize in helping people make charitable endowments and bequests—gifts that the charity will receive later or over time. Like large gift directors, they nurture relationships and solicit donations. However, planned giving specialists use their expertise in tax, gift, and estate law to help donors understand their giving options. Their expertise enables donors to receive the best tax benefit for the donation they leave to nonprofits.

*Event coordinators: parties with a purpose.* Celebrity galas, black-tie dinners, walk-a-thons, charity bowling tournaments, and other social gatherings large and small are all part of some fundraisers' repertoires. Event coordinators organize entertainment, competitions, and other activities to raise money for nonprofits—and to meet and entertain supporters.

Putting on an event is about managing details, according to Torns. She coordinates her organization's annual benefit, Symphony at Salk. "Everything—from the invitations and the opening speech to the refreshments and the number of chairs—is planned," she says.

Torns checks to see that the caterers have kitchen space, the musicians have places to rest, the decorators have the proper centerpieces, and each part of the event happens on cue. "Until the moment the orchestra begins," says Torns, "it's crazed."

Even with the best-laid plans, managing an event can be harrowing. "You have to be a person who can manage crisis," says Debbie Denmark, an event coordinator for Junior Achievement, Inc., in Colorado Springs, Colorado. One of her most alarming emergencies was when the keynote speaker for an event had not arrived 5 minutes before he was scheduled to speak. The speaker came just in time, but not before Denmark had tracked down her organization's president and executive director and prepared them to go on in his place.

Event coordinators are also concerned with the budget for their events. They work to keep costs low so more of the event's proceeds go to the cause. "We once hosted a big gala," says Denmark. "It was exciting to see the limos and celebrities, but it was expensive. Sometimes, smaller events, like the breakfast we gave this year, have lower overhead and higher rates of return." To minimize costs, event coordinators often ask for donations of supplies from businesses, such as discounts on food from a local restaurant. Many coordinators make donated items the center of the activity, as in the case of charity auctions.

Some fundraisers combine event management with hands-on donation collection. Mary Beth Phelps, director of development and community relations for Goodwill Industries of Northeast Indiana, arranges clothing drives by choosing an easily accessible drop-off location for the clothes and designing posters and fliers to advertise the event. On the day of the clothing drive, she stands

An organization with no profits still has expenses. Fundraisers find the money and donations that keep nonprofits operational.

Photo courtesy of Goodwill Industries



in the nearest parking lot taking clothes from drivers and loading their donations onto trucks.

**Grant writers: funding from foundations.** In addition to individual donors, nonprofits seek money from corporations, foundations, and government agencies. Grant writers, also called directors of foundation relations and directors of corporate relations, write proposals describing why they need money and exactly how they would use it if they got it. For instance, when the employees at Central Arizona Shelter Services in Phoenix, Arizona, wanted to open a dental clinic, grant writers wrote to foundations and businesses explaining why the community needed a clinic and how the clinic would operate. They included details, such as the total amount of money, staff, and supplies needed and a description of the clinic's location and services. The proposal was accepted—and when the money came, the clinic opened.

But winning a grant doesn't start with writing proposals; it starts with research. Grant writers make sure their proposals have a good chance of success before they begin to write. They comb through databases of foundations and government

grantmaking agencies, looking for organizations with the same goals as the nonprofit. "It's important for grant writers to show how they fit in with the mission of the grantmakers," says Maggie Martin, development director at Central Arizona Shelter Services in Phoenix. Organizations that have given to similar projects in the past are particularly good prospects. In a few large charities, researching donors is a full-time specialty.

Grant writers often meet with grantmakers before submitting a proposal. They might invite a grantmaker to tour the nonprofit's facilities. Establishing a relationship with a donor increases a proposal's chances of success.

**Director of mailing and direct marketing: Missives with a mission.** Many fundraisers send form letters and make phone calls to large numbers of potential donors. An entry-level fundraiser's first job might be to draft a letter asking for donations as part of an organization's annual campaign. Directors of mailings often buy lists of names and addresses from marketing companies. They decide which types of lists would include the most likely prospects. Mailing directors also recruit and train volunteers to stuff envelopes and make phone calls. When they receive a donation, mailing managers or their assistants record the gift and send a thank you letter.

**Traits and training.** Good fundraisers are outgoing, confident, and service oriented. "I look for people who can be gracious—people who can feel and show gratitude and pay close attention to what interests another person," says Perrett.

Fundraisers need to be persuasive communicators so they can convince others that a cause is worth supporting. A fundraiser's communication skills include the ability to write well. "I'm sure I was given this job because of my writing ability," says Martin. When hiring new employees, she looks for people who can write request letters, thank you notes, and grant proposals.

In addition to these skills, fundraisers need a dash of courage. Torns explains, "You can't be too shy to ask for the money."

Most fundraisers have a bachelor's degree. Often, they major in marketing, public relations, or English, but people with any major can enter the field. Planned giving specialists, who help people make bequests or set up endowments, must understand the latest gift and tax law. They often have law or finance training.

More than 70 colleges and universities offer courses in fundraising. In these classes, students learn how to locate donors, write grants, create fundraising budgets, and cut fundraising costs. The National Society for Fundraising Executives also offers courses and certifies development professionals who pass an exam on fundraising theory, ethics, and technique.

Many fundraisers begin their careers as development associates in nonprofits, updating the database of donors, doing other clerical tasks, and later writing grants and setting up special

events. "Doing office work is a good way to start learning about an organization and the process of raising money," says Perrett.

Certain kinds of business experience can also help prepare people to raise money and secure other nonmonetary donations. More than 90 percent of all fundraisers begin their careers doing something else, according to the National Society for Fundraising Executives. Often, they transfer into the occupation after working as public relations specialists, sales workers, or market researchers.

**Employment and earnings.** The majority of fundraisers work for charitable nonprofits. But some work for for-profit consulting companies.

The National Society for Fundraising Executives reported about 19,000 members in 1999; 11,217 were directors of development or associate directors, and 1,254 were consultants in fundraising firms. The rest were executive directors or other staff involved in raising funds.

Fundraisers with less than 3 years of experience earned median salaries between \$33,000 and \$40,000, according to the Society's membership survey. Those with 10 to 14 years of experience earned between \$50,000 and \$60,000.

Salaries also vary with specialty. According to a study by

Abbott, Langer, and Associates, Inc., planned giving managers had median earnings of \$50,003 in 2000; grant proposal writers earned \$38,500; donor research managers earned \$37,750; and special events fundraising managers earned \$31,992.

### Foundation program officers

Fundraisers make a career out of asking for money; program officers make a career out of giving it away. Every year, foundations give billions of dollars of grant money to nonprofits. Workers like Peter Martinez, a senior program officer at the McArthur Foundation in Chicago, help decide who will receive the money and ensure recipients use it well. Program officers usually don't make the final decision about who will receive a grant; foundations' unpaid boards of directors do that. Instead, program officers solicit and accept applications and make recommendations to the board of directors.

Martinez is in charge of a \$40 million fund earmarked for nonprofits trying to improve Chicago schools. His first task as the manager of the fund was to write guidelines describing the kinds of projects the foundation hoped to finance. "Program officers analyze the problems the foundation wants to address. We decide what kinds of solutions we want to focus on," he says. "For the fund, I analyzed the current condition of education, identified areas for improvement, challenges, and possible solutions. Given all of that, I decided what kinds of grants we should be making and to whom."

After writing guidelines, program officers help organizations apply for grants. "I can't just sit back and wait for the perfect application," says Martinez. "I go out and hit the streets, where the work is being done. I talk to people about their ideas and give them suggestions on how to sharpen their proposals."

Martinez stays in close contact with grant recipients. He requests and reviews periodic progress reports and sometimes makes site visits to see how a charity operates.

Program officers stay up to date by reading studies and reports about their issue. And they search out community leaders and organizations with new ideas.

Debbie Barter, a program officer at the Orange County Community Foundation in Irvine, California, works for a different kind of foundation. The money her foundation distributes comes from individuals and groups instead of from one major donor. In addition to making recommendations about grants and scholarships already in place, Barter helps individuals and groups find local charities to support. "People tell us what interests them, and then we find nonprofits to match. You learn a lot about what's happening in the community when you do this job."

Community foundation workers also publicize local grants. Mary Mitchell is the program associate at a community foundation who administers a college scholarship fund. She meets

Photo courtesy of Wolf Trap Opera Company



Foundation program officers review grant applications and recommend which organizations should receive funding.

# Paid occupations



with guidance counselors to tell them about the scholarships. Then, she keeps track of the money and makes sure recipients remain eligible after the scholarships are awarded. Much of her work is administrative—maintaining a database, sending letters, cutting checks—but some tasks are more visible to the public: every year, she presents awards to scholarship winners at school assemblies.

**Traits and training.** Program officers uncover innovative approaches to social problems or—for those focusing on the arts—creative theater, music, art, and television projects worthy of funding. To do that, they need to understand the cause well enough to spot people and organizations with good ideas. They also must be studious enough to read and research.

Communicating the results of their studies is equally important for program officers. They must write clear summaries of grant proposals for members of the deciding board. And they need the interpersonal skills to teach, guide, and collaborate with grant applicants.

In large foundations, program officers almost always have advanced degrees. A program officer specializing in health programs, for example, often has a master's or doctoral degree in public health.

Program officers also need experience working in the kinds of nonprofits that receive grants. Before Martinez became an officer, he worked as a community organizer, identifying, recruiting, and teaching local volunteers to solve education problems.

Some people with less education and experience work as foundation program assistants. Those with bachelor's degrees often research issues and draft reports. Other assistants sort incoming grant proposals, update foundation databases, and draft acceptance and rejection letters.

At small foundations, assistants might run a particular grant or scholarship program. They need good writing and computer skills, but they don't always need a college degree.

**Employment and earnings.** There were about 15,471 people employed at foundations in 2000, according to a study by the Foundation Center. The number of foundation employees has been growing, nearly doubling since 1990. Some foundation staff are program officers, but many are in other occupations, including chief executive officer, research assistant, computer specialist, financial analyst, and secretary.

Program officers had median earnings of \$65,000 in 2000, according to a survey by the Council of Foundations.

## Communications directors

Communications directors increase awareness of a nonprofit's activities. They write press releases and make phone calls to entice the media to publicize their events. Communications directors are

If hands-on service appeals to you more than the administrative jobs profiled in the article, you'll find many employment opportunities in the nonprofit world.

Following are some of the most well-known jobs in the nonprofit sector. Education and training requirements vary from on-the-job training to a bachelor's or graduate degree. Several of these occupations and their training requirements are described in detail in the 2000-01 edition of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. The *Handbook* is available at many public libraries and career centers and online at <http://stats.bls.gov/ocohome.htm>.

## People-to-people occupations

Some nonprofit occupations focus on direct interpersonal interaction with clients. The people in these occupations provide counseling, health, and educational services. They include:

- ◆ **Credit counselors.** Using basic math or more advanced skills, credit counselors help individuals and small business owners in money matters such as managing their finances, getting out of debt, and saving for a downpayment on a home.
- ◆ **Instructors.** Teachers in nonprofit private schools and residential homes usually teach the same academic subjects that public school teachers do. Other instructors teach outside of the classroom—for museums, environmental groups, and other types of nonprofits—guiding field trips, designing hands-on learning activities, and running educational programs. Requirements for non-classroom jobs are flexible, but many instructors have a college degree and experience in the subject they teach.
- ◆ **Medical personnel.** Some doctors, nurses, public health workers, and other medical personnel work in nonprofit hospitals and clinics doing work similar to that in for-profit and government institutions. They also provide medical assistance or training in disaster areas or serve as advisors in health-related or international development nonprofits.
- ◆ **Outreach workers.** These workers find people who need services and invite them to receive those services. Some search for individuals who live near the nonprofit; others manage the nonprofit's intake center. Knowing more than one language helps outreach workers communicate with more potential clients.
- ◆ **Residential counselors.** Residential counselors assist residents in youth homes and halfway houses to gain self-suf-



# on the nonprofit front line



From left, photos 4 and 6 courtesy of Capital Area Food Bank of Austin, Texas; photos 7 and 8 courtesy of American Red Cross.

efficiency and problemsolving skills. They design educational, social, and entertainment programs for residents, and they enforce house rules.

- ◆ **Social workers.** Social workers meet with a nonprofit's clients to monitor their progress and help them solve problems. They counsel clients individually; refer them to outside resources for medical care, job training, and other services; and teach group classes on life skills, such as managing finances, parenting, and cooking healthy meals. If they have a master's degree in clinical social work, they may provide psychological counseling.
- ◆ **Substance abuse counselors.** These workers help people who are or have been addicted to drugs or alcohol. They host classes and group discussions, monitor and meet with clients, and find outside resources.
- ◆ **Other human service workers.** A host of other human service workers manage youth camps, work in clinics and hospitals, and help people directly in other ways. Their responsibilities range from entry level to managerial.

## Food-related occupations

Many nonprofits gather food and prepare meals for people. To fulfill this mission, they rely on workers such as the following:

- ◆ **Cooks.** In residential homes, emergency kitchens, nonprofit daycare centers, and other nonprofits, cooks prepare meals for large groups of people. Some cooks supervise a cadre of volunteers who may be new to cafeteria-style cooking; others teach students to cook as part of job-training programs.
- ◆ **Food bank workers.** Food banks collect donated and surplus food for other nonprofits to use. Food banks hire warehouse managers and agency relations managers to organize and distribute the food. *Warehouse managers*, using inventory-tracking technology and driving forklifts and other equipment, store food so it stays fresh and easy to find. *Agency relations workers* find and register nonprofit groups that pick up food, and they visit their customers periodically to ensure that food is stored safely.
- ◆ **Food service managers.** Food service managers in nonprofits supervise the work of cooks. They plan meals and oversee food safety.
- ◆ **Nutritionists.** Nutritionists in nonprofits decide what food will be on the menu, making sure the meals meet nutritional requirements. Some do less familiar work, such as studying

the nutritional value of foods in countries where an international development organization works.

## Advocacy occupations

Some nonprofits focus on gathering support for their cause and helping other nonprofits grow. To learn more about these types of workers, see Matthew Mariani's article, "Advocates at Work: Three Lobbyists and an Organizer," in the winter 1996-97 issue of the *OOQ*. Some advocacy occupations include:

- ◆ **Chapter relations workers.** These professionals help small nonprofits find and use existing resources. They also offer expert advice; they might travel to a faraway chapter to teach a class on volunteer recruitment or tell a local chapter how to find free books.
- ◆ **Community organizers.** These activists recruit and organize members of a community to work for a cause. As part of this work, they publicize and lead community gatherings and discussions and meet with government agencies and the leaders of other nonprofits.
- ◆ **Nonprofit lobbyists and government relations managers.** Lobbyists garner government support for their organization's ideas and interests: they track and publicize information about upcoming legislation, find arguments for or against legislation, and meet with lawmakers. Sometimes, government relations workers advocate for individuals, helping them resolve difficulties with government agencies.

## Trade and transportation occupations

Many employees with skill in trade or transportation work for nonprofits using their tools and equipment know-how.

- ◆ **Construction workers.** Some nonprofit construction workers supervise volunteer-led construction and capital improvement projects in neighborhoods, schools, and parks. A few construction managers lead projects overseas.
- ◆ **Drivers.** Some drivers working for nonprofits take children or adults to appointments and special events. Others transport food and supplies to distribution centers or to individuals at home.
- ◆ **Maintenance workers.** In nonprofits, maintenance workers repair residential facilities, including senior centers and low-income housing units. They may also teach basic maintenance procedures to volunteers and vocational students.

often in charge of an organization's publications, including newsletters and magazines, which tell the story of its activities.

In disaster relief organizations, for example, communication directors contact the media when their organization responds to disasters. After relief efforts have begun, they make public appeals for assistance; they might create a radio commercial or Web page to solicit donations and volunteers. They find volunteers and recipients of aid for reporters to interview. Later, after the crisis passes, they may write an article for the newsletter they publish describing the nonprofit's efforts. They want to keep the public, donors, and employees aware of their organization's successes.

Communications directors' tasks are similar to those of public relations workers and writers in the business world, but many see differences in nonprofit work. "I'm telling an important story," says Amy Parham, communications director of the Capital Food Bank in Austin, Texas. "In my case, I tell the story of hunger. It's more interesting to me than selling products." According to Jason Smith, public relations manager of the American Red Cross' San Diego chapter, communications workers often spend more time looking for interviewees than they would in the corporate world. "We want to find volunteers or members of the public to talk about us," he says. "That can be more difficult than just setting up an interview with employees."

Communications directors work in an office for much of each day, either writing at a computer or talking on the phone. But they also visit the sites where an organization is working. When the American Red Cross responds to a crisis or hosts an event, Smith calls reporters he knows and then moves to the site to watch what's happening and interview people on scene.

**Traits and training.** Communications directors need to be outgoing and aware of the attitudes and opinions of the community. They need to be good at establishing and maintaining a network of support for the organization.

They should be able to write compelling stories, without being overly melodramatic or emotional in their prose. They find good facts and let the story tell itself.

Most communications directors have college degrees, often in public relations, marketing, or English.

**Employment and earnings.** There are no recent data available on the number of communication directors working in nonprofits. But according to a study by Abbott, Langer, and Associates, Inc., directors of public relations in nonprofits of every type had median earnings of \$44,000 in 2000. Median earnings in charitable nonprofits were probably lower, especially in small organizations.

## Executive directors

"Running a nonprofit is a lot like running a business," says James McClelland, who directs Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana. "I recruit and manage a staff, oversee a budget, and make decisions about programs."

Executive directors, sometimes called chief executive officers, manage nonprofits. They search for new project ideas and for government, nonprofit, and business leaders who can collaborate with their organization to help it grow.

Choosing which projects to undertake and which to set aside is central to a director's job. "I look at whether a project fits with our core mission and if it is something we can do well," says McClelland. "We want to be innovative and do what is needed, but we have to be careful not to stretch our resources too thin." He checks that the nonprofit has the resources to run the program successfully.

But executive directors don't have the final say when deciding how a nonprofit will operate. They report to an unpaid board of directors, including a president, treasurer, and secretary. The board oversees the nonprofit and approves major initiatives. Directors regularly make formal and informal presentations to the board.

Executive directors are generalists, watching over every part of the organization. And in organizations where they are the only paid members of the staff, directors step in to help with the daily work of each department.

In many organizations, executive directors spend at least a quarter of their time raising money. Even if they manage a fundraising staff, directors also write grant proposals themselves and meet with donors.

**Traits and training.** Successful executive directors like making plans and setting goals. They recognize good ideas and predict what resources new projects will require.

And executive directors need to be good managers. Even if a director is the only employee, he or she will likely supervise a staff of volunteers.

Communicating well is another must for executive directors. Many serve as spokespeople for their organization. And in small organizations, executive directors are usually the ones to write grants and raise funds.

Math and budgeting ability are also essential because executive directors need to oversee budgets and present them to the board.

There are many ways to prepare for the job of running a nonprofit. Most paid executive directors in large nonprofits have graduate degrees, often in business or public administration. Many colleges and universities offer programs tailored to nonprofit management. There are more than 70 master's degree programs, usually in business administration or in public

administration, with a focus on nonprofit or philanthropic studies.

A few large nonprofits run executive training programs. James McClelland attended a program like this before starting at Goodwill Industries. To qualify for these programs, applicants need leadership experience, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated interest in nonprofits.

Some executive directors start their careers in other nonprofit positions, such as fundraiser or communications director. Others start on the program side of an organization, offering services directly to the public. They might be teachers, health care workers, ecologists, or another type of professional.

Finally, many executive directors find their jobs by beginning their own nonprofits. Before they draw a salary, though, they have to raise enough money to pay for it. Many executive directors continue working at another job until the nonprofit becomes well established.

**Employment and earnings.** There are no reliable data on the number of executive directors employed in charitable nonprofits. According to Abbott, Langer, and Associates, Inc, the median earnings of executive directors were \$75,000 in 2000. That survey includes the directors of professional and trade associations. Directors in small, charitable nonprofits often earn less.

### Other administrators

Nonprofits also need workers in other administrative occupations. Many organizations have at least one director of finance, comptroller, or accountant, for example. These workers watch over an organization's financial health, prepare annual reports on income and expenses, track donations and purchases, and file financial information with the IRS. Accountants also contribute to fundraising efforts by figuring the costs of new programs and including those estimates in grant proposals.

Nonprofits also hire secretaries, facilities managers, data entry clerks, human resources managers, and other workers commonly found in most business organizations. The larger the nonprofit, the more administrative occupations it needs.

### Nonprofit culture: Charity work's charms and chores

What is it like to work in a nonprofit? It depends. Some large and well-established nonprofits have offices that rival those of large corporations. They have plenty of resources and a clear chain of command. But most nonprofits are small and have few amenities, scarce supplies, a casual environment, and flexible job descriptions.

Earnings for workers in many charitable nonprofits are



Photo courtesy of Wolf Trap Institute of Early Learning Through the Arts

**"I get a lot of satisfaction from what I do for a living. I see rewarding results every day."**

James McClelland, executive director  
Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana

lower than those of for-profit workers in similar occupations. But some nonprofits offer wages comparable to those found in other sectors. And even in low-paying nonprofits, other financial rewards often come with the jobs. Like many for-profit companies, many nonprofits offer good benefits, such as paid leave, medical insurance, and, increasingly, retirement plans. Even more common in nonprofits are low-cost advantages that include flexible scheduling, sabbaticals, telecommuting opportunities, and a relaxed work environment.

But more important than pay and benefits are the intangible compensations. "I get a lot of satisfaction from what I do for a living," says McClelland. "It's a good fit with my value system. And I see rewarding results every day." Rewarding results in nonprofits could include starting a new program, seeing people helped or a problem solved, bringing out the best in a volunteer, or uncovering a new source of funding.

Many workers say they also enjoy the camaraderie of their office. The combination of small staffs and common goals creates a strong sense of teamwork. "The people I work with are probably the best part of the job," says Phelps.

And because so many nonprofits have small staffs, employees have the chance to learn new tasks and fill new roles. Susanne

Hechmer, the manager of finance and administration at DC Central Kitchen in Washington, DC, is one example. Hechmer, whose formal education is in Latin American studies, learned her budgeting skills on the job at a nonprofit. Her organization was short staffed, so employees took turns administering the office. After a stint as a credit counselor at another nonprofit, she put her love of math to use by moving into a budgeting position at DC Central Kitchen.

But the small size that makes many nonprofits attractive can also create difficulties. Nonprofits with low operating budgets often cannot afford the latest or best office equipment. “For example,” Hechmer says, “until recently, I was working with software that was 5 years old.” Employees learn to work around these limitations and improvise.

Low budgets can also lead to unstable earnings. Jobseekers who want long-term job security need to research employers before taking a job with a nonprofit. Sometimes, salaries are paid for with grants that end after a set time. Jobseekers can find out about a nonprofit’s financial status by asking its employees and by reviewing its annual report and tax returns.

No matter what the budget of the nonprofit, however, working for a cause takes grit and perseverance. “When I’m hiring, I’m not looking for people who are just do-gooders,” says Robert Egger, executive director at DC Central Kitchen. “The problems we face are very difficult. The challenges make some people give up. I need people who will be determined and use their heads.”

## Volunteering for a job

The best way to prepare for a job in a nonprofit is to gain practical experience as a volunteer. “Volunteering lets you try out an organization to see if you like it,” says Smith. “It’s also a good way to network—to meet people in the field and show them the work you can do.”

And volunteering demonstrates commitment to a cause, a trait most workers say is a prerequisite to a good career in nonprofits. “When I have an opening, I look at volunteers as an applicant pool,” says Zechowski. “They have already shown they’re interested.”

When choosing volunteer work, it is important to balance short-term and long-term assignments. Testing a variety of positions in several agencies gives jobseekers a broad perspective of their options. But a long-term assignment allows volunteers to take on greater responsibility and learn more about the inner workings of the nonprofit world.

Finding volunteer work is easy, if you know where to look. Career and guidance counselors at high schools and colleges often maintain a database of opportunities. County libraries and governments often have lists of opportunities as well. And many local churches, school, and social and community groups—all of which are good places to gain volunteer experience—can identify organizations that need volunteers.

Surfing the Internet is another good way to find volunteer openings. Each of the following sites lists opportunities:



Photos courtesy of Capital Area Food Bank of Austin, Texas



Volunteering for nonprofit work not only helps you gain practical experience, it shows your commitment to a cause—a trait hiring managers look for when filling paid positions.

- ◆ <http://www.citycares.org/national>
- ◆ <http://www.unitedway.org>
- ◆ <http://www.volunteermatch.org>
- ◆ <http://www.volunteersolutions.org>

Most would-be volunteers don't have to wait for an opening or announcement to start work. Consider finding a nonprofit you like and contacting it. Most nonprofits are happy to talk with people who'd like to volunteer.

When applying for a job, remember to include volunteer and community work on your resume or application. For best results, give the work a descriptive title that says what you do or did, such as "tutor" or "cook," instead of using the generic "volunteer" as a job title.

Paid work also can prepare jobseekers for nonprofits. Many nonprofit professionals began in for-profit business, an experience they say helps them in their current jobs. "I was able to bring entrepreneurial perspective and bring new results," says Martin, who worked in sales before becoming a grant writer and, eventually, a director of development. Many nonprofits need marketing or technological expertise and often hire someone from the for-profit sector—especially if that person has volunteer experience.

The work you do to prepare for a nonprofit job does more than build your skills: it gives you the opportunity to try different jobs and causes until you find a career that suits you. "The best advice I can give anyone," says Dalva, "is to find a job you can give your heart to."

## Continuing the quest for information

Reading this article is only a first step to finding a nonprofit job. There are several other sources of information. Many public libraries have books describing the nonprofit job search and directories of nonprofit organizations. Some also subscribe to professional magazines and newspapers, including *The Nonprofit Times* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. The Foundation Center, listed below, operates five libraries that specialize in books and information about nonprofit work.

Counselors at high schools and in guidance and career centers can also help students find volunteer opportunities and academic programs in nonprofit management.

Associations are another good career resource. Each of the following has career or educational information:

American Society of Association Executives  
1575 I St. NW  
Washington, DC 20005-1103  
(202) 626-2723  
<http://www.asaenet.org/main>

Association for Volunteer Administration  
PO Box 32092  
Richmond, VA 23294  
(804) 346-3318  
<http://www.avaintl.org>

Association of Professional Researchers for Advancement  
414 Plaza Dr., Suite 209  
Westmont, IL 60559  
(630) 655-0177  
<http://www.aprahome.org>

Council on Foundations  
1828 L St. NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 466-6512  
<http://www.cof.org>

National Society for Fundraising Executives  
1101 King St., Suite 700  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(703) 684-0410  
<http://www.nsfre.org>

Foundation Center  
79 5th Ave.  
New York, NY 10003-3076  
1 (800) 424-9836  
<http://fdncenter.org>

Independent Sector  
1200 18th St. NW., Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 467-6100  
<http://www.independentsector.org>

Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy  
2100 M St. NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
(202) 261-5801  
<http://nccs.urban.org>

National Committee on Planned Giving  
233 McCrea St., Suite 400  
Indianapolis, IN 46225  
(317) 269-6274  
<http://www.ncpg.org>

