

Global Employment Connections

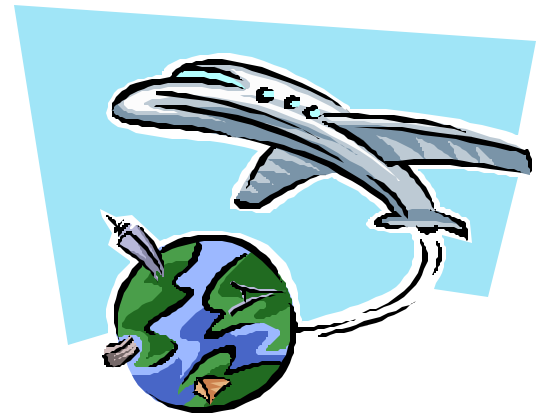


“Your Link to Global Workplace Information”

NGOs as a Possible Career Option

Welcome to *Global Employment Connections*, the newsletter with a practical focus on job-hunting in the global workplace.

This issue explores NGOs as a possible career option for spouses of foreign service employees. Marilyn Wyatt, a consultant to NGOs and a Foreign Service spouse herself, shares insights on working in the NGO world. In addition, two of the Strategic Networking Assistance Program's (SNAP) Local Employment Advisors, Ann Greenberg and Stormy Berney, share their thoughts on the benefits of



working for NGOs, as well as a proactive approach to getting started.

NGOs, or non-governmental organizations (NGO), and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) operate independently from government and often are non-profit organizations. They are found world-wide and address domestic and international issues at all levels. Overseas, NGOs are primarily focused on international relief and development.

Getting Started with NGOs

GEC interviewed Marilyn Wyatt, a former Foreign Service Officer and now a FS spouse working in the NGO world.

GEC: *Can you tell us about your background and experience with NGOs?*

MW: I was in the Foreign Service for nine years before hanging up my officer's spurs. As a tandem couple my husband and I found it difficult to coordinate career and family, especially when one of our children was diagnosed with a long-term illness. I began working with NGOs gradually and on a volunteer basis. I always need to feel plugged in to the local community wherever we're living, and the nonprofit world offers many flexible opportunities to be involved—occasionally,

part time, with a lot of responsibility, or only a little. My first activities were to visit English-speaking patients in a local hospital and to write a monthly newsletter for a children's cancer group. Since that time I've had a number of full and part time positions with different types of organizations. These gradually, in an unplanned way, evolved into a second career, which I was able to solidify during a Washington tour, when I worked full-time with an international organization. I focus now on developing the boards and governing structures of NGOs. It's an unusual specialization and so I usually have no trouble finding consulting work, though not always in the country in which we're

(Getting Started, continued on page 3)

Inside this issue:

The Benefits of Working for an NGO 2

Starting in Non-Governmental Organizations Calls for a Different Approach 4

SNAP Job Search Assistance Tool 6



The Benefits of Working for NGOs

By Ann DeLong Greenberg
SNAP Local Employment Advisor
San Salvador

Are you an idealist? Do you believe that you can make a difference in the lives of others? Are you interested in international, national or local development issues? Are you someone who wants to contribute your time, skills and experience to improve the conditions for others in your host country? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be interested in exploring opportunities to work with non-governmental organizations or NGOs.

"Working for an NGO can provide you with an opportunity to get hands on experience in a culture, make a real impact, and gain invaluable knowledge and insight into the workings of your host country. In addition, you may have greater administrative, budgeting and management responsibilities than you would in a comparable for-profit position."

NGOs, broadly defined, include any private association or organization independent from government control. Many NGOs receive funding in support of their programs from membership dues, fundraising activities, private foundations or companies, or from governments. National or local NGOs focus on specific issues of concern in their country whereas international NGOs may work on local development issues in a number of countries or on global social, development or environment issues internationally.

The activities of NGOs are as diverse as the number of NGOs in existence but tend to be focused on a range of long-term social and development issues in areas such as human rights and democracy; the environment; social programs, including job training, education, poverty alleviation, health, and women's rights; and disaster relief and infrastructure development. Working for NGOs can be

very rewarding as the activities tend to be close to the target population, the working atmosphere is informal and your colleagues will likely be dynamic and committed to change.

The first step in seeking a position with an NGO is to identify your interests and then find an NGO that works on that issue. You can research the organizations active in your country on-line, through informational interviews and by networking with people working in that sector. Think about the skills that you can contribute to the organization. Many developing countries have qualified staff, but may need specialized technical assistance or organizational assistance in proposal-writing, fundraising or management. To be competitive for a position with an NGO, prior education, training and work experience are essential. If you lack this experience but are interested in getting started in the development field, consider starting as a volunteer or setting up an internship (see the last issue of GEC on the Value of Internships and Volunteering).

While salaries at international NGOs are typically lower than salaries in the for-profit sector, the benefit packages (if you are hired through their headquarters as an expat) are similar (i.e. they include moving costs, housing, schooling, return trips to the US, etc.). However, if you are hired locally, you may not receive any of the extra benefits. Salaries at national or local NGOs may be considerably lower.

(Benefits, continued on page 5)



Getting Started...

(Continued from page 1)

posted. Even with this specialization, however, I'll always consider an offer to do something else if it seems like an interesting challenge and meets certain pay and logistical parameters I've set for myself.

GEC: *What are your thoughts about NGOs as a career option for mobile spouses?*

MW: Well, obviously I'm all for it. You're not competing against your spouse in the same career track; you're not isolated within the embassy community; and you're often making a real difference in people's lives. There's usually no lack of openings locally and if you have a spirit for adventure you'll find yourself engaged in some pretty fabulous situations. But there are down sides too and I don't mean to minimize these. The pay can be lousy, you will not have the satisfaction of working your way up a ready-made career ladder, and you must plan on remarketing yourself every few years or even every few months. If you can live with these then it's possible to piece together a very individualized and portable professional life that will gain in richness and opportunity as you stick at it. But you must expect to live with a certain degree of uncertainty, and to be inventive and energetic enough to respond accordingly.

GEC: *If spouses are interested in working for NGOs and do not have development experience, can you recommend ways for them to get started?*

MW: When I was first starting out I found that my greatest asset was being a native speaker of English. This was much more valuable than my Foreign Service or educational background. The international NGO world is very English-oriented, and more local NGOs often find that they lack access to it because none of the staff has good enough language skills. So no matter where you're living there are certain to be organizations that would love for you



to write newsletters, as I did, or proposals for grants, or publicity materials for their website, or make phone calls to foreign offices, or perform similar tasks in English. Or perhaps they'll want you to do a job in which you have relevant professional training, such as book-keeping or teaching. If you don't speak the local language then you'll usually find someone on the staff to communicate through. Then as you pick up these ad hoc jobs you'll begin to accumulate skills and experiences that are very marketable, and you'll meet people who recognize your skills and keep you in mind when new opportunities arise. The important thing is to have modest expectations to begin with but to work constantly on parleying small jobs into something bigger and better. And not to forget that in putting together a resume, volunteer work counts as much as paid positions, and part time activities should be listed if they indicate what you can do and where you want to go.

GEC: *What are some ways to find out the names of NGOs located in specific countries?*

(Getting Started, continued on page 5)

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Starting in NGOs Calls for a Different Approach

By Stormy Berney
SNAP Local Employment Advisor
Geneva, Switzerland

Focus on finding a cause not a position

When working for NGO's you have the opportunity to make a difference in an area you care about. Research many NGO's until you find one whose principles are in line with your thinking. More than just your thinking, find a common belief you feel passionately about. Find a purpose that you want to participate in and contribute to. With this objective, no matter your contribution, it will be rewarding.

Invest your time. In this way you will gain experience and contacts you could never make from outside the inner workings of the NGO's. In the world of NGO's - the more you give, the more you get.

What is your bottom line?

Non-Governmental Organizations are very different because of their goals. Their bottom line is to make a change not to make a buck. It is a different way of thinking than the mainstream corporate world whose focus is on profit. This often means you will find NGO's who have almost non-existent budgets. While I was a representative of an NGO I met people who had saved money to be able to take a year off of traditional work to come and volunteer at the NGO whose cause they believed in passionately.

Size

Not all NGO's are the same. Some are very well funded. These are also more visible due to budget alloca-

tions for marketing. If you are just starting in an NGO, it can be a difficult world to break into. Starting in a large and well-funded NGO can be almost impossible. Smaller NGO's can be easier to access, if you can discover they exist. They are normally running on a very strained budget, so if you are willing to volunteer, you have a better chance of getting your foot in the door. An immediate reward for volunteering is that you will be more likely to step right into the world of the UN: attending meetings, voicing your opinions, defending your and your NGO's shared beliefs. At a larger NGO you may start by doing administrative tasks. Of course you would also have the benefit of being paid.

Network

Once you have your foot in the door, you will start to increase your network. As you gain experience, learn about other NGO's and develop your contacts, your options will flourish. Keep your ears open to learn about new opportunities. It is your networks and experience that will give you the power to choose what and how you want to contribute in the future.

Think in long term

Invest your time. In this way you will gain experience and contacts you could never make from outside the inner workings of the NGO's. In the world of NGO's - the more you give, the more you get.



(GETTING STARTED, continued from page 3)

MW: Networking is very important in the NGO world—there usually aren't well organized professional associations, and a lot is accomplished by word of mouth. A good place to start might be the embassy PAS and AID offices—they usually have contacts with NGOs and would be able to facilitate introductions or at least invitations to receptions where you'll meet the right people. In nearly every country there is a volunteer center that can help locate you in unpaid positions with interesting organizations. Finally, rely on the web. In many countries there are NGO portals or resource centers that post information about local NGOs. You can also use the web to figure out what international organizations are working in the country. These include government agencies such as USAID and dozens of large international foundations and assistance organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Agency for Educational Development, and World Vision. These organizations' web sites should give you the names of the country program officers, descriptions of the types of programs they're engaged in, and information about local partners and sub-contractors.

GEC: *Do all jobs with NGOs require a degree in international development and international experience?*

MW: The answer to the first question is definitely not, and to the second question is no, but it helps. I have an advanced degree in comparative literature, which is not often seen as terribly relevant. More important than education are practical experience, adaptability, and cross-cultural sensitivity.

GEC: *Do you think it is easier to find a job with an NGO while overseas?*

MW: If you're talking about volunteer jobs, yes. Paying jobs are more difficult to find and the salary is not likely to be as high as in the US. There are great regional differences to take into account, too—the

NGO sector in Western Europe is less accessible than that in Africa, for example. If I were looking for work overseas I'd probably pursue two tracks at once—looking into local opportunities directly and, via the internet, exploring openings with US or international agencies or their sub-contractors that are active in country.

GEC: *If spouses are in Washington, D.C., are there ways they can get started with NGOs while they are in the States?*

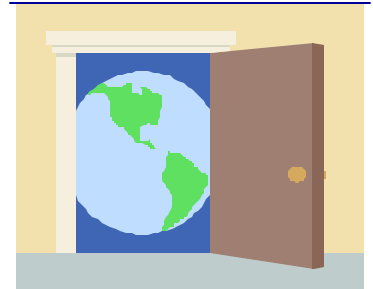
MW: If you want to go the NGO route then think about the experience and contacts you'll need later on when you're overseas. Look for jobs at the

(Getting Started, continued on page 6)

(Benefits, continued from page 2)

Most major international NGOs have their own websites where they post job vacancies and internships. In addition, there are a number of NGO umbrella organizations that list jobs regionally or globally or by sector. Selected links to NGO networks follow:

- ◆ **DEVJOBS:** jobs in development: www.devjobsmail.com.
- ◆ **Communication Initiative:** jobs in development and communications: www.comminit.com/vacancies.html.
- ◆ **ReliefWeb:** jobs in humanitarian aid: www.reliefweb.int/vacancies.
- ◆ **Career Frames:** Jobs in NGOs and non-profits: http://www.careerframes.com/links_main_intl/ngo_links.htm



Working for an NGO opens the door to a global career working on a variety of long-term social and development issues.



(Getting Started, continued from page 5)

large assistance organizations. These have well-developed international networks, and a lower paying position with one of them might be worth it if it positions you to make contacts and establish a credible resume. Also look at work with local community organizations. Much of the experience you get in this way will be directly relevant to organizations at the grassroots level elsewhere. And use the time in Washington to meet people who are involved in the country you'll be going to. There are probably organizations based in Washington that are running programs with NGOs at your next post. Go talk to the people who are involved in the programs and them for advice and local contacts. And of course leave behind a copy of a well-crafted resume.

GEC: *What should spouses know about marketing themselves for NGO jobs?*

MW: My advice to any resume writer is don't be modest. Say what you've done boldly, but truthfully. The important thing is the language you use—you always want to pitch your resume towards your audience. For example, training is a big need in the NGO world. So if you worked as an educator, you might want to describe what you've done with words such as "coaching," "professional development," or "training." Then people will know right

away that you have useful and applicable skills. The same is true of nearly any professional background.

GEC: *When working with NGOs overseas, how important is having speaking skills in the local language?*

MW: Certainly it helps but is not all important. I've met international NGO workers from all over who have no knowledge of the local language but accomplish terrific work. They usually know the local history and issues intimately and have well-developed cultural antennae. So they can function effectively even without the local language.

GEC: *Can you provide some general information about salaries in the NGO*

MW: Let's face it: we're not in it for the money. NGO salaries are often low, especially for local-hire positions. But with perseverance and luck your earnings can compare favorably with what your spouses is making in the public sector, especially if your employer is US based.

GEC: *Why would you work for an NGO when you could make a higher salary elsewhere?*

MW: The needs are huge. The people are inspiring. The sense of personal accomplishment is immediate. These are more important to me than the money.

Global Employment Connections
"Your Link to Global Workplace Information"



Family Liaison Office
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Phone: (202) 647-1076

Fax: (202) 647-1670

Email: FLOASKEMPLOYMENT@state.gov

Internet Site: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo

Intranet site:

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/index.html>

Do you have questions, comments, ideas?

Share your story and we'll share it with other spouses!

E-mail Melissa Hess, Editor
FLOASKEMPLOYMENT@state.gov



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