What is the Non-Profit Sector?

The non-profit sector is one of the three main segments of the formal economy in which most people find paid employment. It’s often called the “third sector” next to the for-profit business sector and the government sector of the economy. The non-profit sector is composed of a variety of fields that respond to a range of societal needs. Non-profit organizations exist to help people improve and enrich their lives; to improve societal conditions, the environment, or animals’ lives; and to generally elevate the well-being of communities and the level of cooperation among them. This mission differentiates the non-profit sector from the other two, which exist to create profit by selling products or services to consumers (the for-profit business sector), and to provide operating structures and guidelines for citizens (the government sector).

This brochure is designed to give you a clearer picture of the non-profit world and opportunities by illustrating the diversity of the sector, the skills needed to be employed in it, some hints for job searching, and some insights from those already working in the sector.

“The greatest benefit of working in the non-profit sector is being able to work with a diverse population of people and getting the feeling of satisfaction knowing that there are people in the community working to improve the lives of others.”

Ruth Rodriguez, Volunteer Coordinator, Hubbs Center for Life-Long Learning, St. Paul School District College of Liberal Arts, Spanish; University of Minnesota 1989

What are the Benefits of Working for a Non-Profit?

* Impactful Work: The work of most non-profits impacts a particular group of people or societal issue. Because employees at non-profits are working on issues and themes they care passionately about, having such an impact is very rewarding.

* Interesting and Exciting Work: Non-profits openly value the pursuit of meaningful work. Think of them as places where your deepest joy and the world’s deepest needs overlap. Many nonprofits openly support workers striving to affect social change. It is exciting and honorable work.
What are the Different Categories of Non-Profits?

When people think of non-profits, social service agencies often come to mind, but non-profit organizations can be categorized into 12 distinct fields. Within each field, a variety of employment opportunities exist, including administration, information technology, human services, and development/fundraising.

- Advocacy and Political Groups focus on influencing public policy through public education and political action (e.g. Greenpeace and Common Cause)
- Arts, Cultural, and Historical Organizations advocate for and promote the arts and create social change (e.g. museums and theaters)
- Business, Professional, and Trade Labor Organizations promote educational and political support activities to benefit their members (e.g. American Medical Association and the AFL-CIO)
- Community Development Organizations focus on strengthening communities (e.g. ACORN and local grassroots organizations)
- Foundations engage in philanthropic activities that fund many other non-profit organizations (McKnight Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation)
- Health Organizations deliver a wide variety of health care services (e.g. hospitals, long-term care facilities, and women’s clinics)
- Private Educational Organizations consist of private, non-profit elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational institutions
- Religious Organizations include a wide range of religious groups (e.g. churches, synagogues, mosques, and evangelical organizations)
- Scientific and Research Organizations conduct research and experiments that are then applied to the work of government agencies, businesses, and other non-profits (e.g. the Brookings Institution and the Search Institute)
- Social Service Agencies provide services to populations with specific needs such as the homeless, immigrants and refugees, senior citizens, and survivors of domestic violence (e.g. Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, People Serving People, Inc.)
- Utility Companies provide cooperative electrical generation and irrigation
- Youth Leadership and Development Organizations provide positive youth programming (e.g. the Boys and Girls Clubs and Camp Fire Boys and Girls)

(excerpts from Jobs and Careers with Non-profit Organizations)

What is the Job Outlook for Non-Profit Careers?

The non-profit sector is expanding. Currently there are more than 1 million organizations employing nearly 10 million Americans and paying more than $500 billion a year in salaries. As the government hands over more responsibilities to local organizations and the need for services continues to increase, the employment outlook is positive.

The non-profit sector in Minnesota is very strong. Non-profit employees currently comprise 8.3% of the Minnesota workforce or more than 200,000 workers which represents an increase of 6.8% since 1987. While salaries in the non-profit sector are lower than in the other two sectors, the wage gap is narrowing.

[Information from the Minnesota Council of Non-profits]

“Working for the YMCA allows me to put into practice servant leadership skills that have a broad community impact within a dynamic mission-based organization. There is nothing like feeling good about the impact you have on others—one person at a time.”

Peter G. Rodosovich
Executive Director, University YMCA
College of Liberal Arts, Political Science;
University of Minnesota 1982

Tips for a Successful Job Search

- **Volunteer or intern at a non-profit that fits your interests:** This will provide you with an opportunity to try out roles of a position, give you a foot in the door, and provide you with networking opportunities. You can earn academic credit by inquiring about service-learning courses, ID 3211 Internship Perspectives on Work or directed study from CCLC.

- **Professional Organizations, Conferences, Workshops, and Courses:** Find a professional organization you’re interested in and become a member. You can attend meetings, receive newsletters, serve on a committee, and attend workshops and conferences tailored to the non-profit sector and your interests—all while gaining skills, meeting people in the field, and networking with possible employers. Students interested this field may consider taking a course or workshop on grant writing, volunteer management, fundraising, marketing, human resources, public policy or board development to learn more about these issues involved with working in or running a non-profit organization. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and the Minnesota Council on Foundations regularly posts opportunities to attend workshops on these topics.
Is Work in the Non-Profit Field Right for You?

Working for a non-profit organization requires a high level of commitment, often resulting from small staff size, limited financial resources, and urgent community needs. It may or may not be an ideal fit for you. Here’s a list of some helpful qualities to have if you’re considering a career in the non-profit sector.

* Versatility and a Desire for Change and Variety: ability to handle numerous and varying job responsibilities
* Citizen Participation Skills: knowledge of or experience with the political process, whether through the legislative process, grassroots organizing, or advocacy
* Coalition Building: ability to organize people/organizations, including business and government entities, around a common set of goals
* Creativity, Innovativeness and Resourcefulness: ability to generate new ideas, programs, and services
* Critical Thinking Skills: ability to apply analytical skills; a broad, cross-cultural, historical perspective; decision-making and problem-solving skills
* Initiative: ability to see what needs doing and take action toward getting it accomplished
* Multicultural Competency: respect, appreciate, and seek out opportunities to engage in cross-cultural situations
* Public Contact: enjoy having contact with people and the community on a daily basis
* Teamwork Skills: enjoy working as a team member to reach common goals
* Business, Economics, and Accounting Skills: knowledge of business and finance is especially helpful for non-profit work, since non-profit personnel are often generalists and fundraising and fiscal management are important aspects of successful non-profits.

“Working in youth development every day I experience pain. I see young people wounded by abuse, fear, uncertainty, and desperation reaching out for something that their young minds cannot translate into words. That something I have learned is love - pure, unconditional, consistent, kind, affirming love. Without it, these kids will never reach their full potential. I feel blessed to be in a position to meet this urgent need.”

Marius Massie,
Assistant Coordinator, Youth Achievers, YWCA St. Paul
College of Liberal Arts, Individualized Degree Program;
University of Minnesota 1999
How Can the Career and Community Learning Center Help You Gain Experience in the Non-Profit Sector?

The Career and Community Learning Center offers a number of services that can help you contribute to Twin Cities communities, explore career interests, and find success in your job search.

* Workshops: Take a workshop on writing an effective resume, learning the best job search strategies, or interviewing effectively.

* Courses for Credit: Enroll in ID 1201 Career Exploration; ID 3211 Internship: Perspectives on Work; or ID 3201 Strategic Career Planning.

* Internships: Visit the CLA Link website: http://clalink.cla.umn.edu to search hundreds of available internships. An internship will give you valuable and marketable work experience in a field of your interest.

* Community Empowerment Through Learning and Leadership (CELL): Learn about local community volunteer opportunities during a CELL advising session. This student-led group will help train, support, reflect and celebrate your involvement in the community when you become a member of CELL.

* Combine Community Involvement with Learning for Academic Credit: The Career and Community Learning Center compiles a list of service-learning classes that require or allow students to participate in community work related to course goals and objectives.

* Scholarships, Fellowships and Grants: The Career and Community Learning Center compiles a listing of funding opportunities connected to community work so students can gain experience in the non-profit field. CLA students in unpaid internships can also apply for a CLA Internship Grant.

* AmeriCorps: CCLC has information on AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps*VISTA and AmeriCorps*NCCC programs that allow students to work on issues of community development.

* Metro Urban Studies Term (MUST) and City Arts: CCLC administers these programs for University of Minnesota students. These Twin Cities programs are worth 16 semester credits and integrate field study, an internship, and seminars which explore strategies for addressing inequality.

“Working in the non-profits has offered me more than just good feelings about what I am doing. Non-profits have offered me challenging and rewarding opportunities that will forever change the way I look at the world. I feel so fortunate for the knowledge and insight I gain every day from my work, and I know it is that knowledge and insight that will keep me motivated in my career for years to come.”

Maggie Lockner,
City of Chicago Workforce Development
– Welfare-to-Work Program
Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota 1999

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