

Career Paths in the Nonprofit Sector

Overview: Often students are overwhelmed by the breadth and variety of career options in the nonprofit sector. The purpose of this workshop is to inform participants of the many paths through which they can not only secure a career in the nonprofit industry, but make a living through a lifelong commitment to socially responsible work.

Level: Beginner

Type: Discussion based workshop

For the trainer: This workshop is a good supplement to another workshop, “What is the Nonprofit Sector?” which introduces participants to some important concepts related to nonprofit careers. “Career Paths in the Nonprofit Sector” allows participants to reflect on specific career paths within the sector and consider their own career goals. If you have time, another appropriate supplement might be “Creating a Resume,” which is an intermediate level workshop that builds on the content in “What is the Nonprofit Sector?”

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Participants will learn of the various employment paths in the nonprofit sector
- Participants will begin thinking of their own career path goals

Materials:

- Flip chart
- Markers
- Copies of Career Paths and Career Path Names

How to Prepare:

Review the trainer guide and become comfortable with all information and activities.

For the trainer: You may want to develop your own list of Career Paths, rather than use the one included here. Modifications may include: using Career Paths of local professionals or alums, or focusing on a specific type of career (for example, if presenting to business students, you may want to highlight careers that require business skills, like accounting, fundraising, management, or public relations). To develop your own list, you can conduct web research or contact your schools alumni department. You may want to contact people over the phone or via email to fill in gaps in your research and request permission to use their name and career path in your workshop.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

Total suggested time for this session is 40 minutes

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| 1. Introduction | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2. Career Path Profiles | suggested time 15 minutes |
| 3. Group Discussion | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 4. Individual Career Maps | suggested time 10 minutes |

For the trainer: Pacing and timing are very important in any workshop. The “suggested time” in this workshop gives you a guideline that will help you get through all of the material and end on time. It is very important to respect the time of your workshop participants and end when you say that you will end. This shows respect and a good grasp of the material; you can always offer to answer questions afterward if there is additional interest in the workshop content!

For the trainer: When leading this workshop, keep people, content, and logistics in mind.

People: This is probably the key determining factor in making any modifications to a workshop. You should make modifications based on the experience level of participants (adjusting up or down) and your experience level as facilitator. As you gain more experience, you can prepare less and you can have a more flexible format that assesses participants’ experience with the material and responds appropriately, rather than relying on the trainer’s guide.

Content: It may help to consider a few things as you deliver and/or modify sessions:

- Review and determine the “teachable” content that you hope to convey, i.e. ideas (overarching themes), skills (concrete takeaways), approaches (methods and/or styles), facts (statistics and/or other data).
- You may want to consider the variety of ways and modes in which you can deliver content, such as lecture, simulation, interactive activities, discovery (deduction), group inquiry, group discussion, and/or analysis. (For more information on different adult learning styles, see the material at the end of the IOC Institute binder.)

Logistics: Sometimes the adaptations and “last-minute” changes you need to make will be driven by logistics, like space, time, and even supplies:

- *Time:* If you have to make alterations, you should concentrate on: focusing in on the most important “teachable” ideas or processes; leaving a few helpful “takeaways” (like key insights or good handouts); opening the door for continued conversation (email, discussion groups, etc.); and leaving participants hungry and ready to continue the process on their own.
- *Space:* Awkward seating, temperatures, or even architecture (like poles in the middle of the room) may require you to make quick changes. Be flexible, and do your best to deal with unexpected twists.
- *Supplies:* Try to have a back-up plan when supplies or other details leave you in the lurch. For example, having a PowerPoint presentation on transparencies or paper in case the AV doesn’t work is a good idea. However, don’t let problems with supplies ruin your session! A sheet of flipchart paper and markers is often more than enough to provide focus for an interactive discussion and activity that participants find truly engaging.

1 Introduction

Suggested time: 5 minutes


State that the purpose of this exercise is to show the variety of backgrounds from which people enter the nonprofit sector. While academic backgrounds and previous job experience are definitely helpful, they will learn that people come into this work from every angle imaginable.

Explain to the group that the object of this exercise is to see the variety of career paths in the non-profit sector—some people follow a "straight line" towards a specific interest, while others work on many different issues over a career, or enter the sector after a career in the business world or elsewhere.

In short, there really is no typical "career path," but that you *can* make a career out of doing good in the world.

2 Career Path Profiles

Suggested time: 15 minutes

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- Distribute one copy of the Profiles, and one copy of the Names list to each participant.
 - Ask participants to **work independently for 5 minutes** and guess which names match up with which profile.

Then have participants form groups of 3-4, and to brainstorm for another 10 minutes about which name they think matches up with which profile, elaborating a bit also as to how the group came to each conclusion.

Share the answers with the group.

For the trainer: Activities should be approached as a hands-on way to encourage workshop participants to learn. As a trainer, you must make sure to include everyone in the room during activities. If your group needs convincing to participate in the activities, be transparent – explain that often the best learning happens when there is a personal application and active engagement. Adults are likely to learn more effectively when the learning tasks are seen as relevant, meaningful, interesting, and useful. Activities help bring workshop content to life, so make the most of them!!

3 Group Discussion

Discuss the differences/similarities in the answers that each group arrived at and how participants made their decisions.

Talking Points/Discussion Questions:

While methods of entry into the nonprofit sector may vary, there IS a career path in this field of work. You can both make a living in the nonprofit sector and spend a lifetime doing it.


What makes each person's individual career path interesting?

What was surprising about the career paths?

Discuss with participants that they do not have to stress too much about their first job post graduation; it will not determine the rest of their career path.

For the trainer: Working bullet-pointed material into your presentation is a bit tricky. As the trainer, you should be familiar enough with the principles outlined in bullet points that you can engage workshop participants in conversation about the material, rather than simply reading off the page. As you become more comfortable with the material, you should also feel free to include some of your personal experiences and ask participants to add in their own, as well.

4 Individual Career Maps

 Explain that though it's pointless to try to predict future career opportunities and life events, participants can consider their own career goals and create a Career Map that can be used to evaluate opportunities as they arise.

Using markers and blank paper, participants should draw a road or "path," and add the following details either with drawings or words (you may want to refer to the notecard activity from "What is the Nonprofit Sector" if you also conducted that workshop):

1. Three places you might like to live
2. Three social issues you may address during your career
3. Three talents/skills/characteristics you will utilize in your career
4. Three job titles you may like to have

Have participants share their Career Maps with a partner.

Close with the following thought:

When you arrive at turning points in your life (first job, mid-career switch, moving to a new city, etc.), use the following questions as a guide to important career decisions:

1. Am I doing something I'm passionate about?
2. Am I using my skills and talents?
3. Am I making the world a better place by my own standards?