

Nonprofit Job Seeking Tips

The Job Search

It's mostly about networking. For better or worse, finding the best job for you often comes down to knowing the right people. Maintain relationships from past jobs, internships and volunteer experiences. Ask friends and relatives about people they know who volunteer, work for nonprofits, or serve on nonprofit boards. Connect with, and maintain relationships with alumni from your school working in fields that interest you. Don't wait until second semester senior year to start your networking— this should be a continual process.

Contact people that work for nonprofits and ask them for an **informational interview**. This term will sound daunting to some, but essentially means asking to have a 15-30 minute conversation - over the phone or in person – about what people do with their organizations. Possible questions you can ask include: What were you doing before this job? Why did you end up doing this kind of work? What does your organization do? What is your role in the organization? What do you enjoy most about your job and what do you find most challenging? What advice would you give someone that is considering this field? Always ask who else they know that you should contact. Find out what they look for in the hiring process and consider how to gain the skills and experience you might need.

Don't worry about bothering people; the worst they can do is not get back to you. More often than not, you'll find people are eager to share their experiences and help you get a start in this line of work. Guaranteed someone else did the same for them.

Volunteer. Getting “on the inside” of an organization you like and respect can be the best way to work your way into an actual job. Let people see just how great you are through the volunteer work you do for them. Stay involved with an organization for a significant stretch of time to prove your passion and dedication to the cause. Organizations often hire past or present volunteers and interns.

Consider where you want to live after graduation. Do you want to be in a big city or a small town? Do you want to go abroad? Particularly when you are open to many possible career paths, narrowing your search by figuring out a few places where you most want to live can make the job search process a little more manageable.

Applying for Jobs

Don't limit yourself to actual job openings that are posted. Many organizations (and companies for that matter) will find a place for someone they really want on staff, whether there is an actual job opening or not. If the organization you most want to work with does not have any job openings, do not give up on them. Volunteer, schedule an informational interview with the Executive Director or someone on staff whose interests and background are a close match with yours, and stay in touch.

Keep your job-related correspondence separate from your personal email account—don't ask employers to write you back at silly email addresses such as fuzzynavel@yahoo.com

Send resumes by email and remember to include your name in the filename you use to save the document.

Keep your resume to one page and avoid stating your “Objective.” The employer should assume that your objective is to get the job they are offering!

Personalize the cover letters and resumes you send out. A few thoughtful, personal letters will go much further than sending the same materials to 100 organizations.

When You Get in the Door – The Interview

Research the organization and who you will be talking to (read bios if they are posted on the website). Ask to meet with a variety of people on staff if possible to get a broad perspective on the organization.

Be conscious of the specific job for which you are applying. What tools, skills, etc. will the position require? Is there software, language, etc. that you would need to use?

Pamper yourself. Give yourself enough time on the day of the interview to arrive calm and collected.

Bring an extra copy of your resume the day of the interview.

Inquire about the culture of the organization, and dress and present yourself appropriately (fitting into the organization is just as important as being qualified for the position).

Articulate why you want to work with their organization.

Think of answers to commonly asked questions and use your prepared responses to highlight the things you want them to know about you. Examples of commonly asked questions in nonprofit interviews include:

- Tell us about a leadership experience you have had.
- Tell us about your strengths and weaknesses.
- What experiences have you had with this community/cause/service?

Have questions prepared about the organization and the job itself. What are their greatest challenges? Where do they see the organization in five years? How can they see your role in the organization evolving over time?

Follow up with a brief thank you note (sending an email is fine). If you meet with more than one person, don't send them all the same note.

Before You Accept a Job

Ask yourself some of the following questions before you accept a job in the nonprofit sector:

- Do I feel passionate about the mission of this organization and the work I will be doing?
- Will this job give me the opportunity to learn new skills and ideas?
- Are there opportunities for growth and increased leadership roles within this organization?
- Do I have a clear sense of what other opportunities might be available to me?
- Will I be happy living near where this organization is located?
- How long can I see myself staying in this job?
- How does this job fit in with my larger career objectives and personal goals?

Compiled by Action Without Borders-Idealist.org
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