Careers in Service

Community Outreach

Advocacy, grantmaking, and civic organizations in the United States, at some point, affect everyone's life. In every State, these types of organizations are working to better their communities by directly addressing issues of public concern through service, independent action, or civic engagement. These organizations span the political spectrum of ideas and encompass every aspect of human endeavor, from symphonies to little leagues, and from homeless shelters and day care centers to natural resource conservation advocates. These organizations often are collectively called "nonprofits," a name that is used to describe institutions and organizations that are neither government nor business. Other names often used include the not-for-profit sector, the third sector, the independent sector, the philanthropic sector, the voluntary sector, or the social sector. Outside the United States, these organizations often are called nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations.

These other names emphasize the characteristics that distinguish advocacy, grantmaking, and civic organizations from businesses and government. Unlike businesses, these organizations do not exist to make money for owners or investors, but that doesn't mean that they cannot charge fees or sell products that generate revenue, or that revenue must not exceed expenses. Instead, these groups are dedicated to a specific mission that enhances the social fabric of society. Unlike government, these organizations are not able to mandate changes through legislation or regulations enforceable by law. Instead, they work toward the mission of their organization by relying on a small group of paid staff and the voluntary service and financial support of large numbers of their members or the public. This industry includes four main segments: business, professional, labor, political, and similar organizations, civic and social organizations, social advocacy organizations, and grantmaking and giving services. Other areas in this field (which can also be government organizations) include: community food and housing, and emergency and other relief services, and vocational rehabilitation services.

Work Environment

Most workers spend the majority of their time in offices functioning in a team environment, often collaborating with volunteers. The work environment may differ depending on the size of the organization. For those who work in small organizations, the equipment is sometimes outdated and their workspace cramped. But, in larger, well-funded organizations, conditions are very similar to those in most business offices. The work environment generally is positive—workers know that their work helps people and improves their communities.

Training and Advancement

The types of jobs and skills required for advocacy, grantmaking, and civic organizations vary with the type and size of the organization. But all organizations need individuals with strong communication and fundraising skills, because they must constantly mobilize public support for their activities. Creativity and initiative are important as many workers are responsible for a wide range of activities, such as creating new events designed to communicate and sell an organization’s goals and objectives. There are many ways that a person can enter the advocacy, grantmaking, and civic organizations industry. One way to prepare for a job is to gain experience as a volunteer. Volunteering allows a
person to try out an organization to see if he or she likes it, to make good contacts in the industry, and to demonstrate a commitment to a cause.  

**Nonprofit organization examples:** American Red Cross, Goodwill Industries International, homeless shelters, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, American Diabetes Association, Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, The YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to name a few.  

**Job examples:** Crisis line specialist, community food bank operator, ESL tutors, volunteer coordinator, child care worker, community disaster presenter, and project director.

**Service-Learning** is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. An exciting, hands-on approach to education, service-learning is taking place in a wide variety of settings: schools, universities, and community-based and faith-based organizations throughout the country. The core concept driving this educational strategy is that by combining service objectives and learning objectives, along with the intent to show measurable change in both the recipient and the provider of the service, the result is a radically-effective transformative method of teaching students.  

In addition to service-learning experiences for students, there are jobs available to work in this environment. This typically encompasses programs that teach or are of service, in both **domestic** and **international** contexts. A sample of these programs includes:

**Domestic:**
- Teach for America: [http://www.teachforamerica.org/](http://www.teachforamerica.org/)
- The Corporation for National and Community Service: [http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/employment/index.asp](http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/employment/index.asp)
- JobCorps: [http://www.jobcorps.gov/employment.aspx](http://www.jobcorps.gov/employment.aspx)
- Idealist: Action Without Borders: [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)

**International:**
- Teaching positions with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DODDS): [http://www.dodea.edu/offices/hr/](http://www.dodea.edu/offices/hr/)
- World Teach: [http://www.worldteach.org/](http://www.worldteach.org/)

**Government and Public Service**

There are jobs in government in most occupational fields. All **government jobs** are posted through [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov).

For students interested in working in creating and analyzing policy, gaining leadership skills to pursue careers in **public service or office**, these areas typically require additional education. Most programs fall in to several categories:

- *Master's in International Affairs*
- *Master's in International Development*
- *Master's in Public Administration/Affairs*

Such programs have different names, however, each enables you to synthesize and transfer your college education, volunteer work, and professional experience into a meaningful career in government, nonprofit organizations and associations, the international arena, and the private sector.  

The Federal Career Intern Program is an excellent opportunity for students to explore this area or pursue a career in this field: [http://www.opm.gov/careerintern/](http://www.opm.gov/careerintern/).

**Helpful Links:**

U.S. Department of State: [http://careers.state.gov/work/opportunities](http://careers.state.gov/work/opportunities)
- Opportunity Knocks: [http://www.opportunityknocks.org](http://www.opportunityknocks.org)
- Jobs for Change: [http://jobs.change.org](http://jobs.change.org)
- Listing of area programs and projects: Department of Human Services: [http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/ocs.aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/ocs.aspx)

**References:**