Exploring Nonprofit & Service Careers

What does it mean to have a career in a nonprofit organization?

Nonprofits are organizations whose revenues match their operating costs. They are often aligned with social interest initiatives and serve clientele in diverse ways — as an employee, you could be in the office acting as a consultant or abroad teaching English as a second language.

Is a career in the nonprofit sector right for you? Wondering what it takes? Know you want to help people for a living but unsure how to go about it? Learn more through web and print resources and conversations with alumni and career counselors.

Step 1: Research & Prepare

Develop your understanding of the public service and nonprofit sector by using these UCS web and print resources, and by initiating conversations with alumni and recruiters. Additionally, seek real-world experience through internships, externships, and fellowships.

Print Resources (available for check out in the UCS Library):

- The Harvard Business School Guide to Careers in the Nonprofit Sector
- Careers in Community Development
- The Nonprofit Career Guide: How to Land a Job that Makes a Difference
- From Making a Living to Making a Difference
- Careers in Fundraising
- The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World
- Careers for Good Samaritans and Other Humanitarian Types
- Fund-Raising Careers
- Careers in the Nonprofit Sector
- We Make Change
Web Resources:

Within UCS:
- Create a *MyUCS account* and enjoy subscriptions to online resources, like Internships-USA and The International Educator. Access *MyUCS* through the UCS website https://www.career.virginia.edu/myUCS/login.php?path=/MyUCS.
- UCS Events Calendar: https://www.career.virginia.edu/calendar/

Outside UCS:
- UVa Learning in Action: www.virginia.edu/publicservice/

![LEARNING IN ACTION](image)

Learning in Action is the "front door" to public service at the University. Use the website to connect with academic community engagement and co-curricular service opportunities in a number of ways.
- Common Good Careers: www.commongoodcareers.org
- Foundation Center Job Database: http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/jobs/
- Idealist.org: http://www.idealist.org/
- Quintessential Careers: http://www.quintcareers.com/
- The New Service: http://thenewservice.org/
- Serve.gov: http://www.serve.gov/
- Visit the Center for Public Interest Careers at Harvard College (CPIC) at http://www.cpic.fas.harvard.edu/. Download the available resource guides.
- Explore the websites of organizations of interest. Many nonprofits post job openings on their websites as well as instructions on how to apply.

People Resources:

Some smaller nonprofits may not conduct on-Grounds interviews, but a significant number will attend career fairs. In most cases, getting a job in this sector takes a lot of *personal initiative* and a commitment to *networking*.

Use University Career Assistance Network (UCAN) through HoosOnline hoosonline.imodules.com to network with alumni working in the public service and nonprofit sector. You may want to request informational interviews. Consider asking alumni what a typical day is like, what their favorite part of the job is, what entry-level positions entail, etc. To learn more about how to use the alumni database, schedule a meeting with a UCS staff member or read the handout “Networking and Informational Interviewing” http://www.career.virginia.edu/students/handouts/networking.pdf.
Attend the **Government & Nonprofit Career Expo** hosted by Georgetown University every February. For more details, including employer attendees, view the calendar on the UCS website. Also, look out for **Job & Internship Fairs** each semester, hosted by UCS. [Idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org) also hosts career fairs, but they function as exhibitions rather than recruitment events. Nevertheless, attend the fairs or review the lists of registered employers to learn more about the participating nonprofits.

Join the **Young Nonprofit Professional Network (YNPN)** in any number of cities, in order to connect with nonprofits in that region.

**Experience:**

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers* describes volunteering as an invaluable step in making the transition into the nonprofit sector. Volunteering *broadens your networks*, provides an opportunity to *lead*, and demonstrates your *commitment* to a cause (73). You may volunteer on Grounds through *Madison House* and other philanthropic University or community organizations. Madison House has programs in the areas of youth mentorship, education, financial assistance, migrant and Latino aid, home improvement, suicide prevention, and elderly care. For information about specific programs, visit [http://scs.student.virginia.edu/~madison/](http://scs.student.virginia.edu/~madison/).

As with any career field, students who pursue internships will not only have a competitive edge, but also will have the opportunity to clarify their specific career interests. If the internships you are considering are unpaid, take advantage of funding available to students through the **Parents Committee Internship Grants** and the **Center for Undergraduate Excellence**.

- **The Parents Committee** at the University of Virginia offers $3,000 grants to 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate students who have secured unpaid, public service internships. Visit the UCS website for more details.

- **The Center for Undergraduate Excellence** advises students on undergraduate research opportunities as well as scholarships and fellowships. For more information, please visit the Center in the Harrison Institute and Small Collections Library.

**Academics:**

Enroll in relevant classes. Idealist recommends that students choose classes in the humanities or in any area of study encouraging growth in communication and leadership skills (92). Here at UVa, consider majors and/or minors that will help you build those skills and learn relevant content. Potential programs of interest include: Global Development Studies; Political Philosophy, Policy & Law; Government; Leadership (at the McIntire School of Commerce); and the programs at the Frank Batten School of Leadership & Public Policy.

**Step 2: Prepare & Apply**
Assess your qualifications and demonstrate them on your resume where applicable. What are nonprofits looking for in strong applicants? Here are a few considerations:

- Strong academic record
- Leadership abilities
- Communication skills
- Experience with and ability to handle rigor
- An understanding of how nonprofits work
- Internship experience
- Strong commitment
- Analytical skills
- Passion for the organization’s cause

For helpful hints on formatting your experience and education on your resume and a list of strong, action-oriented verbs to highlight your skills, see the UCS resume writing handout: http://www.career.virginia.edu/students/resources/handouts/writing_resumes.pdf. Resumes and cover letters can be reviewed at UCS. Call the UCS main line at 924-8900 for the most current appointment and drop-in advising schedules.

Not finding anything on big online job boards? Use print, web, and people resources in MyUCS to uncover available opportunities in your area(s) of interest, or work with a career counselor to identify better strategies for your internship or job search. To ensure you are applying to an active job opening, check out the organization’s website and/or contact them directly. Follow the online instructions on how to apply.

**Step 3: Interview**

Once you have submitted your resume, let UCS help you prepare for interviews!
- Check out the UCS Events Calendar to find the dates and times for interviewing programs like the annual Fall Focus: Behavioral Mock Interviews program.
- Contact UCS to schedule a mock interview with a staff member. Remember to fill out the “Mock Interviewing Worksheet” before the meeting. http://www.career.virginia.edu/students/handouts/mock_interview_worksheet.pdf

**Tips**

1. Be prepared to address the following:
   - Walk me through your resume.
   - How does your coursework and past experience relate to this position? To the organization as a whole?
   - What do you know about our organization’s platform? Why is our cause important to you?
   - How will you be an asset to our team?
With what other organizations are you interviewing? Are you applying to positions outside of the nonprofit sector?

What qualities do you think are important in this industry?

2. Avoid being overly idealistic. Although passion is important, it cannot substitute for academic rigor or experience.

3. When applying for a position, set goals about how you want to grow in that role and express those goals to the employer. Unlike for-profit businesses, a clear, linear path to promotion may not exist in nonprofit or service organizations. Communicate an interest in learning and personal growth.

4. Keep in mind nonprofits demand the same degree of professionalism as for-profit businesses and that every interaction you have with professional in the industry will be assessing your communication, interpersonal, and professional skills as they consider who will best represent their causes.

Best wishes as you explore a career in the public service and nonprofit sectors!

If you would like assistance in your job search and career exploration:

- Call 924-8900 to schedule an appointment with a career advisor.
- Visit UCS on the web at http://www.career.virginia.edu