

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Office of Career Services

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CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN FOUNDATIONS

Description of the Field

A foundation is a non-governmental, nonprofit organization with its own funds (usually from a single source, either an individual, family or corporation) and program managed by its own trustees and directors established to maintain or aid educational, social, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common welfare, primarily by making grants to other nonprofit organizations.

According to the Foundation Center, in 2005 there were nearly 80,000 grant-making foundations in the U.S. The total paid in grants amounted to over \$27 billion. The 2005 edition of the Foundation Directory lists 10,000 foundations that meet its financial criteria of at least \$2 million in assets or \$200,000 in annual giving. This represents less than one-fifth of all active grant-making foundations in the United States. Foundations are categorized as independent foundations, company-sponsored foundations, community foundations, and grant-making operating foundations. Operating foundations sponsor research, social welfare or other programs as determined by their governing bodies or charters. Most award few or no grants to outside organizations and are not listed in the Foundation Directory. Community foundations derive their funds from many donors rather than a single source. These are usually classified under the tax laws as public charities, and are therefore subject to different rules and regulations than either independent or company-sponsored foundations.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

Many foundation employees have had four or five jobs and have changed their occupational area at least once prior to entering the foundation world. The work of foundations involves reading proposals, visiting with prospective grantees, making judgments about awards, preparing detailed memoranda for governing boards and files, answering questions from prospective grantees, monitoring grants already in place and attending board meetings when asked. Some types of foundations have a significant fund-raising/development component, and the largest foundations have staff to manage their investments.

The duties of program officers in smaller foundations may resemble those of executive directors in larger foundations. Program officers make higher salaries as they gain more experience within foundations, while CEOs may command high salaries based on their experience prior to entering the foundation world. Entry-level salaries vary widely depending on job titles, which are not uniform. According to Giving USA, the annual report on philanthropy, CEOs earn a mean salary of \$80,000, depending on the size and budget of the foundation.

There are no standardized career paths. People enter the field as generalists from a variety of backgrounds. In order to advance in the field, they may work in a progression of positions within a particular foundation. These may include program assistant, program associate and program officer; others switch foundations for career advancement. Many foundations are small and fluid organizations.

Demand

Professional opportunities remain somewhat limited in the foundation field. Positions are not always openly advertised. Knowing someone on the staff or board, completing an internship or project with a foundation, working as a support person until a better job opens up, or connecting with a mentor (including professors and alumni) who may serve as a consultant to the foundation or on the board, are all helpful ways in which to break into the field. Volunteers or community activists who have been grantees of the foundation may become known to the foundation staff and connections made through fund raising, consulting or serving on a committee that reviews proposals can also provide a way into the foundation world.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

People who go into foundation work should be able to write clearly and succinctly. They should be comfortable with qualitative judgments, have a global perspective on ideas and issues, listen well, and have a measure of empathy. Creative thinking, critical analysis, and the ability to interact with professionals are also important. Overseas experience, fluency in a foreign language, and an advanced degree are helpful for work in the international foundation world. Increasingly, foundations are seeking strategic thinkers skilled in the art of negotiating who are able to put together public policy initiatives in partnership with other organizations.

Sample Group of Employers

- Annie E. Casey Foundation <http://www.aecf.org/>
- Arthur Vining Davis Foundations <http://www.avdfdn.org/>
- Carnegie Corporation of New York <http://carnegie.org/>
- Commonwealth Fund <http://www.cmwf.org/>
- Ford Foundation <http://www.fordfound.org/>
- George Gund Foundation <http://www.gundfdn.org/>
- Hewlett Foundation, William and Flora <http://www.hewlett.org/>
- Kellogg Foundation <http://www.WKKF.org>
- Kettering Foundation <http://www.kettering.org/>
- MacArthur Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. <http://www.macfound.org>
- Mellon Foundation, Andrew W. <http://www.mellon.org/>
- Mott Foundation, Charles Stewart <http://www.mott.org/>
- Open Society Institute-New York <http://www.soros.org/>
- Packard Foundation, David and Lucille <http://www.packard.org>
- Pew Charitable Trust <http://www.pewtrusts.com/>
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation <http://www.rwjf.org>
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund <http://www.rbf.org/>
- Rockefeller Foundation <http://www.rockfound.org/>
- Sloan Foundation, Alfred P. <http://www.sloan.org/>
- The Century Foundation <http://www.tcf.org/>

Future Challenges of the Profession

Foundations must struggle with greater demands on their resources as they are asked to take on many of the tasks formerly assumed by federal, state and local governments. As a result, foundations may need to consider creative ventures and risk-taking in cooperation or partnership with other foundations, government and nonprofit organizations.

Resources for Additional Information

Associations

- *Council on Foundations*. A nonprofit membership association of grant-making foundations and corporations with a mission to promote responsible and effective philanthropy by assisting existing and future grant-makers. 1828 L St. NW, Washington DC 20036. Phone: 202-466-6512. Email: infoserv@cof.org. Web address: <http://www.cof.org/>
- *Foundation Center*, 79 Fifth Ave., New York NY 10013 and 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington DC 20036. <http://foundationcenter.org/>

Internet Resources

- Association of Small Foundations <http://www.smallfoundations.org/careers>
- Foundations On-Line <http://www.foundations.org>
- HandsNet <http://www.handsnet.org>
- Independent Sector <http://www.independentsector.org/>
- Idealist Nonprofit FAQ <http://www.nonprofits.org>
- Philanthropy Careers <http://philanthropy.com/jobs/90/250/>

Publications

Chronicle of Philanthropy. Monthly news of the nonprofit world. <http://www.philanthropy.com/>

The Foundation Director, 2006 Edition, The Foundation Center. Found in most libraries (& online).

The Handbook on Private Foundations, Third Edition. Council on Foundations, 2005.

The International Foundation Directory 2004, (13th Edition), Europa Publications, 2004.