

# COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## Office of Career Services

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## OVERVIEW

### WetFeet Insider Guide – Careers in Non-Profits and Government Agencies

#### *The Industries*

##### *Non-Profits*

“Nonprofit organizations are businesses designed to make change, and not in the monetary sense. Granted 501(c)3, or tax-exempt, status by the government, these organizations focus on a wide variety of causes, including everything from the Africa Fund, which promotes human rights, education, and people-to-people exchanges with African countries, to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.”

“Nonprofits derive their operating revenue from foundations, government grants, membership dues, and fees for services they provide. They typically attract people who are passionate about solving social problems. The big upside of working in this sector is that you can make a positive impact on behalf of your organization’s cause; the downside is that most jobs in the nonprofit sector don’t pay very well.”

##### *Government*

“Some 20 million people work for government—agencies and departments that on a federal, state, or local level handle issues as diverse as highway construction and the protection of wilderness areas, public health programs and subsidies to tobacco farmers, the space program, and fireworks displays on the Fourth of July. Governments collect taxes and use them to fund programs.”

“Governments employ armies of civil servants, bureaucrats, lawyers, and specialists of all kinds to implement their policies and staff their programs. These include people who analyze policy and draft legislation for U.S. senators, people who issue building permits at town hall, and everyone in between.”

Governments provide excellent benefits; however, the pay is lower than the private sector. In addition, many government jobs are politicized.

Both non-profits and governments have opportunities abroad. Habitat for Humanity as well as the U.S. State Department are two organizations with a strong presence overseas.

Gaining a position with a non-profit or government agency can be very competitive. Often, people volunteer or intern to get their foot in the door.

#### *The Organizations*

##### *Top 15 Nonprofits*

American Cancer Society

American Red Cross

Boys & Girls Club of America

Boy Scouts of America

Catholic Charities USA

Gifts in Kind International

Goodwill Industries International

The Nature Conservancy

Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Salvation Army  
Shriners Hospitals for Children  
United Jewish Communities  
YMCAs in the United States  
YWCA of the USA

*Top 15 Foundations*

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (NY)  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (WA)  
The California Endowment (CA)  
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation (CA)  
The Ford Foundation (NY)  
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (CA)  
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (IL)  
J. Paul Getty Trust (CA)  
Lilly Endowment (IN)  
The Pew Charitable Trusts (PA)  
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (NJ)  
The Rockefeller Foundation (NY)  
The Starr Foundation (NY)  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (CA)  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation (MI)

*Key Government Agencies*

Central Intelligence Agency  
Department of Justice  
Department of State  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Federal Bureau of Investigations  
Government Accountability Office  
National Security Administration  
The United Nations  
United States Aid for International Development

***On the Job***

*Common Titles in Non-profits*

Executive Director  
Program Director  
Director of Development and Fund-Raising  
Director of Finance and Operations  
Manager of Information Systems  
Communications Assistant/Director  
Program Assistant  
Event Coordinator  
Director of Volunteers

*Common Titles in Government*

Capitol Hill  
Legislative Aid  
Press Secretary

Development

Program Officer

Diplomacy

Foreign Service Officer

Economics

Budget Analyst

Assistant Director

Environment

Environmental Protection Specialist

Security

Intelligence Analyst

Electronic Technician

***The Workplace***

The non-profit work environment is “un-corporate” in nature. The work is integrated with the mission of the non-profit. People work about 50 hours per week and often, the hours are flexible due to the more casual work environment. Sometimes people experience “burn out” because they have put so much time and energy into their jobs. As mentioned, low compensation is a drawback. Even people with advanced degrees will probably make at least a third less than in a comparable for-profit position.

In government, the work environment is a little more formal, especially in Washington, D.C. Several government agencies require competitive exams in order to be hired such as the State Department. Work hours tend to be more traditional and are usually between 40 and 45 hours per week. Most government positions are under the general scale ranking that dictates pay. For example, a person with a master’s degree will usually enter the scale as a GS-9. People working for Congresspersons are not on this scale, however. Additional perks include functions with powerful people, flexible time schedules, and a student loan repayment program.

*For more information, please refer to WetFeet’s Insider Guide to Careers in Non-profits and Government Agencies available at the Office of Career Services Front Desk.*