



DEVEX CAREER ADVICE AND INSIGHTS

A GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PRO'S GUIDE TO CAREER PIVOTS

SEPTEMBER 2025

INTRODUCTION

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPTIONS

From transferring skills to making new connections and everything in between, what a global development professional needs to know to navigate their social impact career.

At a time when several development and aid organizations have slowed or stopped hiring due to the USAID crisis, many professionals may feel that they have limited employment options. But according to sector and career experts, those impacted do have other avenues.

This is why we've put together this comprehensive guide to career pivots and transitions, which draws from the collective wisdom of coaches, recruiters, and seasoned professionals. It will equip you with the knowledge to overcome the most prevalent challenges professionals are facing in a challenging recruitment landscape and help you decide on the best next steps.

What you'll learn:

- The best professional options – both within and outside development.
- Tips for translating your experience and highlighting transferable skills.
- How to make fruitful professional connections in spaces old and new.
- The pros and cons of shifting to consulting careers.
- Emerging areas offering new job opportunities, and much more.

ICYMI: DOWNLOAD OUR RECENT CAREER GUIDES

- [Your guide to global development's top local employers](#)
- [A global development pro's guide to AI](#)
- [Assessing the Trump effect on UN agencies](#)

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This guide contains two main sections, one with advice on emerging spaces and skills offering new work opportunities, and the other containing expert guidance on how to execute a pivot to these areas.

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OVERVIEW

WHAT OPTIONS DO DEVELOPMENT PROS HAVE?



At a time when many development and aid organizations are putting a freeze on hiring, it can feel, to those who have either lost their jobs due to the USAID crisis or other professionals struggling to land jobs in a crowded market, that they have limited options.

“I think a lot of us are just finding it overwhelming to know where to start,” said Laura Wigglesworth, a talent acquisition specialist who worked at CARE until it, too, was impacted by the United States’ withdrawal of aid and development funding.

While looking for a position within the sector is

certainly still an option, development career experts told Devex that those impacted do have other avenues. From retiring to retraining to pivoting to the private sector, experts laid out several avenues development professionals can explore.

Consulting work. Staying in the sector and offering skills on a consultancy basis is one way of earning during this period of uncertainty. “Probably anyone who works in this space has the skills to add value as a consultant,” said Sarah Steller, director of Keylime, a marketplace that matches international development organizations with consultants.

WISE WORDS ON TODAY'S DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE



This is the time when we hope people won't just cede the space and surrender their passion and their purpose, but retool, reimagine, ideate, and be part of building the future of this sector, because there is going to be a future of it.

— Kyle Dietrich, founder, Grounded Idealist



The challenge is that with so many people looking for work, the market is “hyper competitive,” said Steller. Candidates should therefore consider what their niche might be and learn about the market for their services before they dive in.

Change sectors. There are many fields to which the skills of former USAID staff can transfer. Some are related to development, including philanthropy, think tanks, or nonprofits focused on local issues. Others might be entirely new territory, such as the private sector or technology.

“A lot of folks [have] expressed an interest in moving to the private sector,” said Jeremy Schifeling, a career development speaker and author. While that could mean focusing on sustainability or corporate social responsibility in conglomerates, it could also mean exploring unrelated passion projects.

Educate yourself. Time away could provide an opportunity to train in a new area or skill. “If you

“*A lot of people who are interested in development work don’t naturally think about the private sector, but there are a lot of private companies doing great work.*”

— **Steven Radelet, professor of practice, Georgetown University**

have built an entire career around wanting to serve others in need, it would be crazy to say I have to throw that away permanently, so it’s how do I weather the storm and continue to build up my accomplishments, and my credentials?” Schifeling said.

Local roles. So far, the localization movement has been largely talk, according to Tushar Talukdar, Bond’s locally led adviser. Before its dismantling, USAID reported that just over 11% of eligible funding went to local organizations in 2024. But, in his opinion, one thing is changing: The model of working overseas to gain experience in a low- or middle-income country context is a thing of the past.

“There is this romanticism about Global South experiences ... that needs to be avoided,” he said. There are opportunities to address issues in your own communities, such as homelessness and racism, in order to gain insights into human behavior, causes, and systemic gaps.

WHERE TO PIVOT

EMERGING SPACES TO CONSIDER



There is no getting around the fact that “this is perhaps the most challenging time for the international development job market,” says Bart Édes, professor at McGill University. Here are a few roles and social impact sectors that may be in demand either soon or down the road, according to experts we’ve spoken to. Keep them in mind as you recalibrate your development career path.



CLIMATE

“There is a lot of money going into climate tech, climate resources [and] climate innovation,” says social entrepreneur Craig Zelizer. From engineering to marketing, there should be many new roles “where the skills could be transferable,” he adds.



FOUNDATIONS/PHILANTHROPY

Foundations and philanthropic organizations should help fill the funding void left by deep government cuts. Coach Stephanie Mansueto says to look “to some of the larger foundations as they start to try to move some of their endowments.”



BUSINESS DEV/PARTNERSHIPS

“A lot of partnerships and engagement positions are becoming really valuable, especially as we see more private sector trying to generate funding to work in social impact for their initiatives,” Mansueto says.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

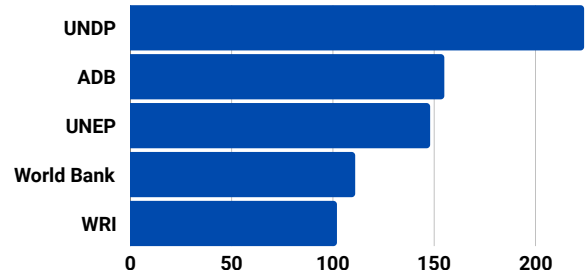
“Tech is increasingly infused into the development sector and changing how development work is done,” Édes says. “Money [is] being invested into, “the good, bad, and unknown of AI,” Zelizer adds.

WHERE TO PIVOT

WHO'S HIRING IN THE CLIMATE SECTOR?



TOP HIRING ORGANIZATIONS FOR CLIMATE ROLES

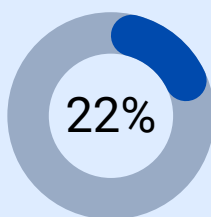


Most climate jobs posted on Dexex by organization from Jan. 24 to April 11, 2025.

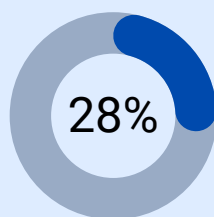
To help assess the state of **the development job market since Jan. 24**, when the U.S. aid freeze was first announced, Devex has been analyzing its job board posting data. Examining the climate sector, we found some encouraging news: climate-focused **job postings increased by over 9.5%** during the first three months following the aid cuts, compared to the same period last year.

Of the **1,612 job postings analyzed**, World Resources Institute (WRI) was the most active non-multilateral recruiting organization. Mid-level opportunities, limited-term consultancies, and internships were the most common job types offered by the independent research institute. Large multilaterals like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UN agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) were also main drivers of climate-related opportunities. [READ MORE](#)

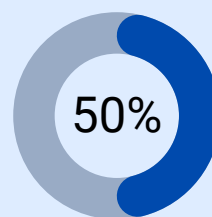
JOB TYPES: CLIMATE ROLES SINCE JAN. 24, 2025



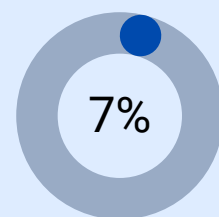
FULL-TIME STAFF



LONG-TERM CONSULTING



SHORT-TERM CONTRACT



INTERNSHIPS

Based on 1,612 climate jobs advertised on Dexex from Jan. 24 to April 11, 2025.

WHERE TO PIVOT

AI UPSKILLING IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK



“

Technical skills and people skills are interdependent and greatly increase the prospects of succeeding in the development workforce. This will remain true as generative AI becomes more ubiquitous.

— **Bart Édes, professor of practice, McGill University**

With AI skills becoming more important for a growing number of development professionals, here’s how to gain foundational experience.



FOUNDATIONAL COURSES

Open AI, Anthropic, and Google offer free courses on AI, from basic to advanced, Levesque said, adding that “Maven is a great spot for advanced technical instruction.” There’s also “a multitude of governance and AI professors out there who can talk about the privacy and ethics issues,” on sites like Coursera.



ETHICS AND PRIVACY

“Understand the risks around misuse, surveillance, misinformation, and automation of harm—because AI isn’t neutral,” Levesque said. This is not only crucial for personal use, but “there is a desperate need for advocates to ensure AI is deployed fairly, and there are very few people who understand it enough.”



EXPERIMENTATION

“Pick one workflow you already own, whether that’s reporting, data analysis, grant writing, community listening, and test how AI could support it,” Okonjo said. Just be mindful of its limitations, ethical considerations, or existing organizational policies before integrating AI learnings into live projects.

RECOMMENDED AI-LEARNING RESOURCES

TOOLS

- [ChatGPT](#)
- [Claude.ai](#)
- [Sesame AI](#)
- [Midjourney](#)
- [Sora](#)

FREE COURSES

- [DeepLearning.AI’s “AI for Everyone”](#)
- [Destination AI Training Initiative](#)
- [Google’s Introduction to Generative AI](#)
- [Apolitical’s AI Fundamentals for Public Servants](#)

COURSE WEBSITES

- [Open AI Academy](#)
- [MIT OpenCourseWare](#)
- [Udacity](#)
- [LinkedIn Learning](#)
- [Coursera](#)

HOW TO PIVOT

A SUCCESSFUL SHIFT TO CONSULTING



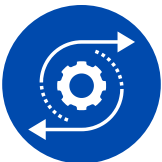
“
If you are a consultant, and you've typically been providing grant writing skills, [think of how] that can be transferable to strategic planning or other things

— Kelsi Kriitmaa, social impact coach

As organizations potentially shift more work from full-time roles to consulting positions, diversity and flexibility may emerge as key attributes.

**VARY YOUR CLIENTELE**

Consultants “can become comfortable and very much dependent on one organization, and this shows that we need to diversify,” consultant Loksan Harley says. “This is about ... positioning yourself more as an expert and not just a contractor, not just a project taker, but also a project maker.”

**WATCH FOR HYBRID ROLES**

Kriitmaa expects there will be more development jobs characterized as “fractional” and “part-time.” Therefore, “one of the things you should be looking for is not just the skill set or the role or the title, but looking for the type of work [itself],” she says.

**KNOW WHAT'S TRANSFERABLE**

When looking to transition from a USAID project to others, “a lot of the skills there are highly transferable,” including “program management, compliance, [and] stakeholder engagement,” says Jarrett. But “understanding the different donor languages” is crucial as well.

**WATCH: HOW DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS CAN STAY COMPETITIVE**

Development consulting experts Loksan Harley and Kelsi Kriitmaa on how networking and diversifying your skills can help you stand out from a crowded field of consulting talent.

[WATCH THE EVENT](#)

HOW TO PIVOT

NETWORK YOUR WAY TO CONSULTING GIGS

While many job opportunities for consultants are posted publicly, there are also several roles that are not advertised externally. This is why networking is crucial to finding consulting work.



CONNECT AS A PROFESSIONAL

One key to networking as a consultant is to be “visible, not as a candidate, but as a professional ... that's the best way to demonstrate that I can be a resource,” says Roberto Amorosino, former senior HR specialist at the World Bank. [READ MORE.](#)



STAY IN THE KNOW

Being on top of the latest sector happenings will help you feel more confident and prepared during your conversations. Know “what's happening in the development world as a whole, on top of trends,” Amorosino says. [READ MORE.](#)



TALK TO EACH OTHER

“I think there's actually a lot that you can gain by talking to someone who has a very similar profile to you,” says Susanne Barsoum, CEO at Keylime International. This is especially important if you are new to consulting. [READ MORE.](#)



FOLLOW-UP

Whether it's over LinkedIn or video chat, “the most important thing to do right away is to agree on how to keep the conversation going,” Amorosino says. It can be as simple as asking if it would be fine to keep in touch. [READ MORE.](#)



WATCH: YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING ANSWERED

Development consulting experts Kelsi Kriitmaa and Jami Johnson Darkoh fielded the most burning questions from our audience of consultants during a recent Devex digital event.

[WATCH THE EVENT](#)

HOW TO PIVOT

NETWORKING TIPS FOR TRANSITIONERS



“
The point isn't really to do networking, in my opinion, it's really to become part of a network.

— Simone Anzböck, international coach

How exactly do you put yourself out there when you feel like you're starting from scratch? International coach Simone Anzböck offers guidance.

**ASK FOR INTRODUCTIONS**

Lean on your existing network to spur new connection opportunities, Anzböck says, and the simplest and most effective way to do this is to ask them who they know in whichever area you're exploring. “Tell people about what you want [to] find more clarity,” she says.

**ALIGN EFFORTS WITH GOALS**

“If you expand your network with things you enjoy, you're more likely ... to talk to people,” Anzböck says. For example, it's not worth forcing yourself to attend an event just to check off a box on your networking to-do list. Find events that excite you when you see what is on the agenda.

**START A PROJECT**

A key to successful networking is having a reason to talk to someone you want to connect with. If something doesn't immediately come to mind, why not create something? LinkedIn provides everyone with a platform with potential to get relevant eyes on your content.

**WATCH: HOW TO CHANGE CAREERS IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

In a rapidly changing work environment, many development professionals are looking at shifting to a new career. International career coach Simone Anzböck offers guidance on how to navigate this daunting prospect. [WATCH EVENT](#)

HOW TO PIVOT

CONVEYING YOUR TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS

Zaid A. Zaid, head of U.S. public policy at Cloudflare and a former senior attorney adviser to the general counsel at USAID, on how to apply your previous wins to a new role or sector.

Zaid: When thinking about your skills and how they're transferable, that's something that can be really hard. It was hard for me after the Obama administration ended, and I was looking for a job. I had to really think about what my skills were, what I had to offer.

I had to think, if I had to give somebody an elevator pitch, what would I say? I mean, essentially, my job was to get shit done, but that's not something you can put on a resume. So, you have to figure out how to put that down on paper so that people understand that you are someone who, when thrown into a situation, can figure out how to make it work.

You also have to think very broadly and comprehensively about your skills and how they might be transferable, and think outside the box. Think about how or where you can take what you've learned over the course of your career to someplace different, someplace you maybe have never thought about working before.

Consider creating a briefing book for yourself. What are your wins? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What are some of the things you've done over the course of your career that are hard to remember that you worked on?



Thinking about all the different things you've done over your career is a good place to start. Write them down and do a draft Q&A so that you're ready to answer questions.

Zaid A. Zaid
Head of U.S. public policy, Cloudflare

WISE WORDS ON TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS



You will have many transferable skills, but what do you actually want to do? This is a chance to step back and think about your purpose, what you want to achieve. ... So use this as an opportunity to also step back and think about where you'd like to be in a few years time.

— Louise James, managing director, [Accenture Development Partnerships](#)

HOW TO PIVOT

WORKSHOP: FINDING YOUR FIT



“
Think about a scientist doing a literature review before their experiments. We are going into this with an open mind, trying to learn.

— Spencer Campbell, career coach

During a March 2025 Devex careers event, coaches Spencer Campbell and Dan Freehling presented their “hunt like a hero, apply like a scientist” model. Here are three key elements.



IDENTIFY POTENTIAL FITS

The first step is to match types of jobs with types of organizations. The goal is to identify some examples of “what might be a fruitful path for you to pursue,” by matching a few organization types with specific roles.



VALIDATE WITH NETWORKING

The next step is to determine which potential fits might be worth pursuing, and this is where networking comes in. For each one, they recommend talking to people “who are in and around that world,” Freehling says.



REFINE AND APPLY

Finally, you “use all of this information in context to refine our materials and make targeted applications,” Campbell says. “Then we are attentive to what happens, analyze our results, and ... go back on this loop again and again.

MORE CAREER WORKSHOPS FOR TRANSITIONERS

[Portfolio careers](#) | [An AI-assisted job search](#) | [Job interview preparation](#)



WATCH: HUNT LIKE A HERO, APPLY LIKE A SCIENTIST

Campbell and Freehling’s model is based on what they’ve learned while supporting hundreds of job seekers. In this digital event, they explain each step of the process and why it helped many find the right role. [WATCH EVENT](#)



Are you a development job candidate looking to stand out to recruiters?

Our in-house recruitment specialists are currently compiling talent pools based on specific global development skill sets, including communications and food systems experts, and many more.

Candidates can [update their Devex profiles](#) to be considered, and employers can [learn more here](#).

We hope you found this guide helpful. For more insights aimed toward global development professionals, [visit our Career Center](#).

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