

NONPROFITS, NGO'S, AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

OVERVIEW

Are you interested in building a career that is focused on the public good? Are you driven by a passion for a particular social cause? If so, you may want to consider a career working for a nonprofit organization, an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) or a social enterprise. These three types of organizations are the most prevalent among the fast-growing industry that includes serving the public good at the core of their mission. But what exactly do these terms mean?

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS are the most widely known among those operating for the social good, which includes various groups or organizations that do not focus their work on making a profit or financial gain. Their income is derived mostly from individual and corporate donations, foundation grants, government contracts, and fees for services. Although some nonprofits may sell goods and services, all income goes toward the cost of providing other services to a community or some segment of the public. In addition to community-based, national, and international service organizations, other types of nonprofits include advocacy groups and professional and trade organizations.

An **NGO OR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION** is a specific type of nonprofit organization, first designated formally as such by the United Nations to differentiate between IGOs or inter-governmental organizations. NGOs are voluntary citizens' groups and can be focused locally, nationally, or internationally. Typically, NGOs focus on global issues in areas such as human rights, the environment, workforce development, housing, community and economic development, education, and health.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES, like nonprofits and NGOs, operate with the primary purpose of serving the public good. What distinguishes social enterprises from both nonprofits and for-profit businesses is their use of business models, principles, and methods both to drive profits and gains and to advance a social cause.

HOW GRADUATE SKILLS MATTER

A graduate curriculum is much more narrowly focused, intended to develop students' expertise in a specific area of study. In many cases, students' academic interests and expertise may correspond directly to the social issues about which nonprofits, NGOs, and social enterprises are concerned, such as education, poverty and inequality, and sustainability. Such correspondence is not necessary, however, since graduate training also develops some specific skills in students that can be applied in these organizational settings.

Nonprofits and NGOs deliver many of their services through structured programs. For example, a local nonprofit might provide literacy instruction to community members through one-on-one tutoring or class-based programs. An NGO might offer free immunizations through a community health education program. Organizations need competent staff to run all aspects of these programs, including developing metrics for evaluating impact and writing reports describing outcomes. Graduate students and postdocs obtain strong organizational skills that are necessary for managing programs by carrying out research projects and theses, or through work in student groups and organizations.



Nonprofits, NGOs, and social enterprises also value intellectual dexterity, critical thinking, creative problem-solving, written and oral communications, as well as characteristics such as resilience and cultural competency. Staff working at these types of organizations often wear multiple hats and must interact with various audiences, including the public; at NGOs and some social enterprises, this work is based outside of the United States and requires flexibility and adaptability. In addition, having hard skills such as analytic, social media, or computing skills can be an asset since every organization needs people to fill these roles.

RESUME BEST PRACTICES

There are two resume strategies that are especially effective for launching a career in nonprofits, NGOs, and social enterprises. First, the resume should tell a clear story about the candidate's skill sets as they relate to the position applied to within the organization. For example, if the organization seeks a person with strong organizational and communications skills, the resume should be organized with section headings that correspond to these skill sets. The experience listed in these sections should clearly demonstrate the candidate's role, and the extent and effectiveness with which the candidate executed the skills in question. A second strategy is to demonstrate a consistent commitment to doing work for the public good, both through paid and volunteer work experience. The resume might show either a lateral progression across various social causes or any progression within a specific cause, regardless of the specific roles the candidate held within those organizations.

COVER LETTER BEST PRACTICES

The cover letter gives you the chance to demonstrate your passion and commitment to the specific social cause on which the organization you apply to is focused, or to contributing to the public good more generally. Rather than use empty phrases—like “I am passionate about X” or “I want to save the world,” for examples—demonstrate your passion through real examples from your previous work. Tell a story about how rescuing a cat that had been injured in your neighborhood helped you understand the value of animal rescue centers like the one to which you are applying. Importantly, however, make such references brief, and tie them to the specific skills and expertise that you possess and that are essential to carrying out the important work of the organization. Be mindful, however, of not presenting yourself and your educational credentials as the thing the organization has been waiting for to come along and show it what it's been doing wrong. Be respectful of its expertise and its accomplishments, and show that you are aware of and impressed by all that it's already done. If the work is in another country, demonstrate knowledge about and respect for its culture, history, people, or politics.



UCHICAGO GRADUATE/POSTDOC CAREER GUIDES

WHAT CAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW?

- **VOLUNTEER:** nonprofit organizations recognize and appreciate demonstrated commitment to a cause. Hires often happen from within an organization, and full time staff members are often pulled directly from volunteer pools. It is advantageous to spend even an hour each week volunteering at an organization.
- **OFF-CAMPUS FEDERAL WORK STUDY:** the University Community Service Center offers off-campus federal work study positions to graduate students. These federally-funded part-time positions provide opportunities to get paid to work in organizations that are affiliated with the University of Chicago.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Be prepared to wear multiple hats, and to move laterally within an organization or an issue area. The benefit here is that you can accumulate a breadth of experience and new skills to add to your repertoire.
- Do continue to create a niche for yourself, such as a specific hard skill or substantive expertise, since depth of knowledge or expertise can help you to stand out in a field where lateral moves and multiple-role positions dominate.
- Get to know the local nonprofit community, to learn about which organizations are doing work in which issue areas and to plug into those networks.
- It's never too early (or too late) to start volunteering, interning, and networking with organizations doing work in area that interest you, whether they are nonprofits, NGOs, or social enterprises.
- Also consider other types of organizations focused on the public good, such as hybrids, impact investors, for-profit companies with a mission or social cause, and benefit corporations.

Links to web resources to learn more:

- <http://idealistcareers.org/nonprofit-speak-101>
- <http://guidestar.org>
- <http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/CS-NTWKS/NGO-ART.HTM>
- <http://www.ngobox.org>
- <https://www.se-alliance.org>
- <http://research.chicagobooth.edu/sei/>

Links to web resources to find positions:

- <http://idealist.org>
- http://www.bridgespan.org/Nonprofit_Jobs/Search_Jobs.aspx
- <https://www.snpo.org/nonprofitcareers/jobresults2.php>
- <https://netimpact.org/careers/explore-your-options/field-overviews>
- <http://svn.org/who-we-are/careers-and-fellowships>

SUPPORT AT GSA

- Schedule an appointment at grad.uchicago.edu/training_support



UCHICAGO GRADUATE/POSTDOC CAREER GUIDES

- Nonprofit “Summer Camp” happens annually. A weeklong series of events and discussions, Summer Camp introduces graduate students and postdocs to a range of careers.

