Introduction

Ross Career Services (RCS) created the Career Path series to assist students with the career search process. Each Career Path handout examines a common business functional area in which Stephen M. Ross School of Business graduates pursue jobs each year. The first four steps of RCS’s recommended career search process are detailed for each specific business field.

Nonprofit Sector Overview

Nonprofit careers are very diverse, involving anything from working at a museum or foundation to a political campaign or advocacy group. If you are seeking a career outside of mainstream corporate America, then explore the following as soon as possible:

- Research and find out what types of organizations appeal to you most.
- Decide how your skills would best serve those organizations.
- Build your skills and knowledge through informational interviews, club activities, classes, volunteer work and case competitions.
- Develop a network of contacts. Only 10-15% of jobs in non-profit organizations are advertised, and networking allows you to connect with professionals on a more personal level. Furthermore, individuals from all sectors are involved with nonprofits as board members, donors and volunteers.
- Determine your minimum salary requirements. While nonprofit organizations are offering more competitive compensation packages, they typically pay below the Ross average starting salary.
- Learn about nonprofit and public sector loan forgiveness programs.

To find leads in this field, utilize RCS and reach out to Ross alumni working in the nonprofit sector. Your search may also involve venturing outside the business school, exploring resources such as the University’s central Career Center, the Nonprofit and Public Management Center, and the Nonprofit Resource Library at Ann Arbor’s Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW) Center.

Steps for Developing a Career in the Nonprofit Sector

Career Search Step #1: Conduct Self-Assessment

Before embarking on a nonprofit career you should understand what is important to you personally and professionally. Nonprofit work is very rewarding for individuals who are interested in supporting the “greater good” on issues ranging from the environment to educational programs. Nonprofit professionals typically prioritize a sense of inner satisfaction over external rewards such as salary and rapid promotions. The nonprofit sector is an excellent career choice for those who want to apply general or specialized business skills while making a difference in society. The MBA CareerLeader assessment may help you better understand your interests in this area. CareerLeader is a web-based, business career self-assessment tool purchased by RCS for use during your career search. Spend some time reviewing your scores across each core activity to determine what types of work energize and excite you. If your score for an activity is “High” or “Very High,” this indicates a good fit with your interests. A “Personal High” suggests that you have a “significantly stronger” interest in an activity and should seek out this type of work as you begin exploring careers.
Kresge Library also offers excellent resources for self-assessment on the Nonprofit Wiki, including the Be Bold assessment journal and Idealist’s Self and Career Assessment. UM’s Career Center offers several assessment tools, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory, for a small fee. Bridgestar, a nonprofit website created by the Bridgespan Group, also offers practical assessment advice and tools.

Career Search Step #2: Investigate Possible Career Opportunities

Because career opportunities cut across all functional areas of business (marketing, operations, finance, and strategy), it is important for you to assess which area you prefer. At smaller nonprofits or startups, you will likely “wear multiple hats” and touch multiple functions. There are also vast differences among nonprofit organizations. In 2009, Guidestar.org reported that 1.8 million nonprofits exist in the United States alone. In order to narrow your target list, you should research the mission, geographic service area, client base/grantees, staffing and budget of organizations that interest you. A good place to start is RCS’s Exploring Nonprofit Careers: Industry Resources and Alumni Profiles which includes sectors and subsectors within the nonprofit industry, as well as example organizations and a spotlight on selected Ross alumni who have chosen careers within the nonprofit sector.

Job postings are also useful in finding out more about the types of nonprofit jobs available. Regularly review nonprofit-focused websites, such as idealist.org and commongoodcareers.com. Also, spend some time on the Ross iM pact Database. This database allows students to search specifically within the nonprofit industry by function and location. It also lists job postings from the MBA Nonprofit Connection, an organization dedicated to bringing MBA skills and energy to the nonprofit sector. Net Impact and the Nonprofit and Public Management Center also send out nonprofit job postings on a regular basis. See the bibliography below for a selected list of nonprofit resources.

Career Search Step #3: Research and Identify Immediate Post-Graduate Employers

Once you have narrowed your list of target organizations, your next step is to begin learning more in-depth information about these organizations and issues relevant to the subsector. It’s time to get active: don’t limit yourself to research only; experiential learning will help you to understand what the organizational landscape truly looks like.

- **Befriend a Kresge Librarian.** Your research into nonprofit organizations should start at Kresge Library. You will find several useful books and directories with short descriptions of nonprofit organizations. Kresge Library’s Nonprofit Wiki also contains invaluable information about the nonprofit sector. The Nonprofit Wiki includes library and external resources culled by the Kresge Library, as well as user-generated content on fundraising, financing, branding and strategic planning in the nonprofit sector.

- **Go Government.** For students interested in working for government agencies and programs, Ross offers LHC688 or BE688: Public Policy Education for Executives, the Washington Campus. Ross is one of sixteen business schools nationwide that provide its MBA students with the opportunity to earn three credits by attending an intensive, one-week course in Washington, D.C. Through lectures, panel discussions, computer simulations and guided site visits, students are given first-hand exposure to the decision-making processes in federal government and an understanding of how they impact business.

- **Take Advantage of your Multidisciplinary Action Project.** The most distinguishing feature of the Ross MBA curriculum is the Multidisciplinary Action Project, known as MAP. MAP is a hands-on opportunity for students to apply classroom lessons to real business situations. During the seven week program, students travel to sponsoring companies to take on real business challenges. Past MAP sponsors have included domestic and international nonprofit opportunities, such as Make-A-
Wish Foundation of America, Michigan Future, Acumen Fund, CARE Central America, Hagar Soya, and Academy for Educational Development.

- **Explore Global (and Local) Projects.** The second-year complement to MAP is Global Projects (Strategy 659), a 14-week winter course that allows student teams to undertake specific projects for real-world sponsors. Several similar courses exist. In previous years, students have traveled to Istanbul as a part of the course "Bridging in a Globalizing World: Turkey and the European Union" (BA 685). This course has a different theme and is located in a different country every year based on student interest. Another course, “Social Entrepreneurship: Business Tools for Enhanced Social Impact” (BA 675), explores important trends in the private and social sectors by assigning student teams to tackle entrepreneurial projects at local nonprofit organizations. Although not every course is offered every quarter, Ross offers detailed course descriptions for all of its offerings. The Nonprofit and Public Management Center also highlights nonprofit-related courses offered by several of UM’s graduate schools.

- **Intern at a Nonprofit.** Ross has several programs that support internships in the nonprofit sector. Explore the Domestic Corps program sponsored by the Nonprofit & Public Management Center for domestic nonprofit internships and the William Davidson Institute for international development internships. Net Impact also provides access to internships; ask a club officer or visit the organization’s national website for more information. Business for Social Responsibility, a partner of Net Impact, has links to the for-profit and nonprofit world. When considering nonprofit summer positions obtained from contacts outside of the business school, be sure to clarify what your responsibilities will be during your internship. This will help to ensure that you are developing the skills you desire or learning about a position in which you are interested.

- **Learn about Nonprofit Trends.** Understanding how nonprofit trends affect your organization will give you an advantage in networking and interviewing. There are several recent trends of which to be aware. For example, nonprofits are becoming more business-savvy and initiating revenue-generating ventures related to their missions. Learn more about social entrepreneurship at The Social Enterprise Alliance and Community Wealth Ventures, a national online database that tracks business ventures run by nonprofit organizations. Businesses are also becoming more involved in the community, creating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. You should be aware of developments in CSR not only because of potential career opportunities within the corporate sector, but also because your target organization may become the beneficiary of CSR programming through corporate partnerships or sponsorships. One famous example of a corporate-nonprofit partnership is Whirlpool and Habitat for Humanity. In 1999, Whirlpool partnered with Habitat for Humanity, donating a refrigerator and cooktop range to every Habitat home built in North America. Many nonprofit organizations are also gaining widespread (and free) coverage through social media. Follow your target organizations on Twitter and read blogs that are relevant to your nonprofit subsector. If you would like a more efficient means of following your favorite organizations online, Google Reader is a website management tool that sends updated content to the reader via RSS feeds. Google Reader also offers features that allow users to organize and share news items with the click of a button.

**Career Search Step #4: Develop a Career Search Strategy**

After becoming well-acquainted with your nonprofit subsector and selected organizations, it’s time to start crafting your recruiting strategy. Keep in mind that although some larger nonprofit employers recruit on-campus, the search for a job in the nonprofit sector may also require an extensive off-campus search. To maximize your search efforts, you’ll have to:

- **Network.** Many of your classmates and Ross alumni have experience working in the nonprofit sector; search the iMPact database to start building your network. Consider dual-degree classmates
who might be able to offer additional insight. University faculty and staff are also excellent resources, as they interact with nonprofits in a variety of capacities. Ask for industry contacts from organizations where you have volunteered. Conduct informational interviews with organizations that interest you. Attend events sponsored by the Nonprofit and Public Management Center and other Ross institutes to interact with others interested in your field and to meet speakers. Net Impact National also holds an annual conference for students and nonprofits every fall. Volunteer at a local nonprofit directly or take on a leadership position in a Ross student club. Many Ross clubs hold conferences on an annual basis, featuring panel discussions and company presentations, which require extensive contact with industry representatives. This form of contact is ideal as you begin building your network. Not only do you have an excuse to call-cold call alumni at dream organizations, but also these alumni have the opportunity to see your professionalism and organizational skills in action. Most importantly, prepare a brief introduction that summarizes your story and develop an online version through professional profiles on LinkedIn and Facebook.

- **Build Skills and Experience.** Volunteer experiences and club participation will also expand your knowledge of the industry. Perform research for a professor or consult pro bono for a local nonprofit. Consider becoming a Board Fellow through the Nonprofit and Public Management Center. The Board Fellowship Program matches students with nonprofit organizations in Southeast Michigan, enabling students to become non-voting members of the Board of Directors for one to two years. Transferable skills and knowledge can be enhanced through the Community Consulting Club, the Emerging Markets Club, the Ross Education Club, Net Impact and the Energy Club (for a full list of SGA-sponsored organizations, see Ross Student Organizations). Nonprofit-related case competitions are also an excellent opportunity to perform organizational or industry analyses. BCG typically holds a nonprofit case competition in the fall, while the Ross Net Impact chapter hosts case competitions in conjunction with its annual forum.

- **Market Yourself.** Although the recruiting season at Ross is typically later for nonprofit organizations, starting in January and February, it is never too early to perfect your resume or interview stories. Networking is such a crucial component of the off-campus search that you should be prepared to send resumes to contacts as early as October. RCS sponsors a number of workshops that will help you to market yourself. Its nonprofit staff career consultants and peer coaches also offer general counseling, resume and cover letter guidance, and mock interviews. Counseling hours are updated every day, and walk-ins are available during weekdays. The UM Career Center offers workshops, career counseling and advice on finding internships and full-time positions. Also, take advantage of club resume reviews and education sessions. Most importantly, conduct informational interviews with fellow classmates, alumni and industry representatives to discover what nonprofits look for in candidates and how to highlight your transferable skills and experiences. Is the organization a small start-up company that seeks independent, entrepreneurial employees who can handle a diversity of tasks? Or is the organization larger and more bureaucratic, which would require employees with a persistent voice, persuasive personality and change management experience? A strong candidate not only crafts his or her resume around leadership and teamwork experiences, but also communication, team-building, multi-tasking, creative problem solving, flexibility and passion. Find out what your target organizations are looking for and represent your skill set accordingly.

- **Financial Assistance.** Check out the Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP), which provides financial assistance to graduates who pursue careers in nonprofit and public sector organizations by paying a portion of their student loans. Applications are due annually by November 1st to the Ross Office of Financial Aid. For questions regarding financial assistance, consult with a financial aid advisor at Ross.
Bibliography of Information Resources

- MBA CareerLeader™ and BBA CareerLeader™ profiles found on Career tab on iM pact
- Nonprofit Enterprise at Work: Helping Nonprofits Succeed
- Kresge Library Resources
- Nonprofit Wiki
- CareerSearch
- WetFeet’s Green Careers and Careers in Nonprofit and Government Agencies online (also in print, see below)

Kresge Library Books

Kresge Library Directories
- Associations Unlimited published by Gale Research Co., Detroit. Many different types of nonprofit organizations are listed in this publication.
- Foundation Directory Online published by The Foundation Center, Washington.
- Guidestar, a national database of nonprofit organizations.
- Congressional Quarterly’s Washington Information Directory. Kresge Reference Library, 4th Floor (F192.S.W3245). A large number of nonprofit organizations have headquarters or offices in DC.

Websites
- The Chronicle of Philanthropy
- Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
- Nonprofit Management and Leadership
- The Nonprofit Quarterly
- The Nonprofit Times
- Nonprofit World
- Community Career Center
- The Foundation Center- Job Corner
- The Idealist
- Common good Careers
- Opportunity Knocks
- Nonprofit Career Network
- Bridgespan

Institutes
- The Nonprofit and Public Management Center (NPM) provides resources for professional students, including connecting MBA graduates to career and job opportunity resources. Participation in NPM’s programs and activities are open to graduate students at the Ross School of Business, Ford School of Public Policy, and School of Social Work. For more information, visit the NPM website or email nonprofit@umich.edu.
- The William Davidson Institute (WDI) is a non-profit, research and educational institute at the Ross School of Business. The Institute’s mission is to create, aggregate, and disseminate intellectual capital on business and policy issues in transition & emerging market economies. For more information, visit the WDI website.