

Career Opportunities in Foundations

A foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit 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 non-profit organizations (Foundation Center).

According to the Center, in 2003 there were nearly 35,000 grant-making foundations in the U.S. The total paid in grants amounted to \$23.2 billion. The 2003 edition of the Foundation Directory lists more than 8,000 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 fundraising/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 \$80,800.

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 move from one foundation to another for career advancement. Many foundations are small and fluid organizations.

Qualifications Necessary/Application Procedures to Enter Field

Foundation work requires the ability to write clearly and succinctly, make 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 Employers

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

Demand and Future Challenges of Profession

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 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 fundraising, consulting or serving on a committee that reviews proposals can also provide a way into the foundation world.

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 non-profit organizations.

Resources For More Information

Associations/Websites

- Council on Foundations, www.cof.org
- Foundation Center, fdncenter.org
- Foundations On-Line, www.foundations.org
- HandsNet, www.handsnet.org
- Independent Sector, www.indepsec.org

- Internet Nonprofit Center, www.nonprofits.org
- Association of Small Foundations, <http://www.smallfoundations.org>
- Philanthropy Careers, <http://philanthropy.com/>

Directories

Foundation Directory, The Foundation Center (1997)

National Directory of Nonprofit Organizations (1997)

Publications

Chronicle of Philanthropy, www.philanthropy.com/

*Check libraries for regional and state grant-making organizations.