Career Opportunities in FOUNDATIONS

Description of the field
A foundation is a nongovernmental entity that is established as a nonprofit corporation or a charitable trust, with a principal purpose of making grants to unrelated organizations, institutions, or individuals for scientific, educational, cultural, religious, or other charitable purposes.

This broad definition of foundation encompasses two foundation types: private foundations and grant-making public charities. A private foundation derives its money from a family, an individual, or a corporation. An example of a private foundation is the Ford Foundation. In contrast, a grant-making public charity (sometimes referred to as a "public foundation") derives its support from diverse sources, which may include foundations, individuals, and government agencies (e.g. Public Welfare Foundation).

According to the Foundation Center, the United States is the largest source of foundations giving. In 2013, there were 87,142 grant-making foundations in the United States; this was a 31 percent increase from 10 years earlier. Transnational nongovernmental organizations such as CARE, Oxfam, Medecins Sans Frontieres, and Save the Children, each with annual budgets exceeding $500 million, distribute more development aid than the entire United Nations system.


Career Paths
Career paths in foundations might not be as standardized as those in other fields; however, over the past decade, the majority of the large foundations have undergone significant restructuring to systematize their programs and portfolios, as well as rationalize their career paths to make career options in foundations more attractive to international professionals and particularly to mid-career professionals who might be interesting in a career change.

Qualifications needed to enter the field may vary depending on the position and/or position level that is advertised. In general, people who go into foundation work must be able to write clearly and succinctly. They should be comfortable with making 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.

+ Other helpful qualifications include overseas experience, fluency in a foreign language, and an advanced degree.

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+ Professional opportunities in the foundation field are not limited; however, these opportunities are not always and/or generally openly advertised, and are often tied to funding availability. Recruitment practices tend to remain opaque, with many foundations preferring to hire referred-only candidates.

+ These constraints make entering and/or transferring into the foundation field relatively complex and laborious. Knowing someone on the staff or board, completing an internship or project with a foundation, or connecting with a mentor (including professors and alumni) who may serve as a consultant to the foundation or on the board, are all helpful 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, while connections made through fundraising, consulting, or serving on a committee that reviews proposals can also provide a way into the foundation world.

For those who intend to enter the foundation career path at the beginning of their careers and/or prior to having acquired significant work experience, they should consider the option of starting as a program associate. Eventually, one can make a switch to either the management career track or the technical/specialist career track. Small foundations might have a more fluid organizational structure and the career paths of their employees might be equally fluid, with less well-defined boundaries between career tracks, job descriptions, titles, and tasks.

Management Track

The ‘management track’ refers to career opportunities in foundations pertaining to the management of the foundations’ portfolios programs. Suitable candidates for these positions have had several relevant jobs (generally between three and five), and have changed their occupational area at least once before entering the foundation field.

The management track is generally split into various sub-tracks:

- **CEO Level**

- **Director/Executive Director Level** - jobs involve leading the planning and operational aspects of the foundations, including oversight of strategic and financial planning and reporting, portfolio management, process improvement and supervision, and attending board meetings. Qualifications for these positions generally include: ability to build, develop, and implement large-scale, complex grant making and programs from the ground-up; strong analytical skills and the ability to think strategically and programmatically; demonstrated ability to work with flexibility, efficiency, and diplomacy both individually and as part of a complex team effort.

- **Program Officers Level** - jobs involve duties that may resemble those of the directors’ level, however, these duties are part of the day-to-day operations conducted to run the foundations. Requirements for these type of positions generally include: 6-8 years of professional experience in program development, design, and management, consulting, strategic development or other related field; self-starter and flexibility to work in fast paced and changing environment; and ability to travel.

- **Communications Office/Strategist** - jobs involve helping drive the social media and online marketing strategy for foundation, generally with an emphasis on substantial increased engagement within the social media sphere. Qualifications for these types of jobs include: experience in and understanding of the media business, including digital and traditional media; ability to establish and sustain relationships with media leaders; ability to identify and explore the
latest developments and innovations in the media space; and ability to work on multiple projects simultaneously in a demanding and fast-paced environment.

**Business Development Track**

Foundations, and in particular large ones, have a dedicated career track that focus exclusively on fundraising and business development. Candidates for these types of jobs should be familiar with identifying critical priorities for foundation work with individual companies or across individual or multiple stakeholders, providing advice and guidance to grantees, and ability to build long-term relationships to ensure the financial sustainability of foundation programs and initiatives.

**Technical/Specialist Track**

Positions in the technical/specialist track vary depending on the sector and specialty for which foundations are advertising openings. Professional experience acquired before the application to a particular foundation job needs to be immediately relevant to the technical field to which the candidate is applying.

**Salaries**

Salaries in the foundation field vary widely depending on job levels, titles, and type and size of the foundations. Publicly available information regarding salary structures and scales remain scarce. However, over the past five years, large foundations like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Aga Khan Development Network, and Ford Foundation have made an effort to increase transparency regarding salary scales and structures in their organizations, as well as in the general foundation field.

Foundations provide fringe benefits in addition to the base salary; fringe benefits vary depending on the size of the foundation, and eligibility for them is dependent on the employment status. Fringe benefits for local hires are based on the local labor laws of that country. International staff are eligible for the basic benefits related to medical, dental, and life insurance, international SOS insurance, assignment travel, home leave, and vacation days.

**Sample Employers**

- Aga Khan Development Network – [akdn.org](http://akdn.org)
- Alfred P. Sloan Foundation – [sloan.org](http://sloan.org)
- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation – [mellon.org](http://mellon.org)
- Annie E. Casey Foundation – [aecf.org](http://aecf.org)
- Arthur Vining Davis Foundations – [avdf.org](http://avdf.org)
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – [gatesfoundation.org](http://gatesfoundation.org)
- Bread for the World – [bread.org](http://bread.org)
- Carl M. Freeman Foundation – [carlfreemanfoundation.org](http://carlfreemanfoundation.org)
- Carnegie Corporation of New York – [carnegie.org](http://carnegie.org)
- The Century Foundation – [tcf.org](http://tcf.org)
- Clinton Foundation – [clintonfoundation.org](http://clintonfoundation.org)
- Commonwealth Fund – [commonwealthfund.org](http://commonwealthfund.org)

**FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE PROFESSION**

+ As foundations are asked to take on many of the tasks formerly assumed by federal, state, and local governments, they are likely to struggle with the greater demands on their resources. This is particularly true for the development field, where the nature of development assistance is changing rapidly, with new delivery mechanisms and new players becoming important parts of the aid system. Official funding is increasingly being channeled through specialized agencies and/or not-for-profit organizations dedicated to particular targets, instead of through traditional agencies.

+ A raft of new players has emerged from the private sector, which include foundations, NGOs and other nonprofits, as well as individual philanthropists. As a result, foundations may need to consider creative ventures and risk-taking in cooperation or partnership with other foundations, government, and nonprofit organizations. In addition, the focus of private donors must shift to programs that can be replicated and enlarged.

+ Traditional donors have long claimed that they can ‘scale up’ programs more effectively than private-aid suppliers, but this is because they have been entrusted with far more resources. The availability of resources would be less of a constraint for private-aid givers if they could demonstrate their
ability to reduce poverty and improve public services for the poor. Often, private aid programs mix several objectives – providing fair wages, minimizing environmental impacts, changing mindsets – in a way that reflects the preferences (and zeal) of their founders. This may be admirable, but it often produces short-term projects. The history of private global philanthropy is filled with plenty of ‘success stories’ with little follow-up.

+ Private donors need to intensify efforts to better gauge their own effectiveness. Information, coordination, and planning are becoming harder as more players deliver aid. In well-functioning markets, trade associations and other bodies monitor market conditions, set standards, and define regulations that force a certain degree of transparency.

+ Private-aid givers need to do more to provide good statistical data on their activities so as to permit others to identify key gaps and overlaps. That is the minimum level of accountability they owe the countries in which they operate, and the poor they claim to serve.

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Resources for Additional Information

**Associations**

- Exponent Philanthropy – A membership organization for donors, trustees, and employees of consultants of foundations with a mission to enhance the power of small foundations – exponentphilanthropy.org
- Council on Foundations – A nonprofit membership association of grant-making foundations and corporations with a mission to promote responsible and effective philanthropy by assisting existing and future grant-maker – cof.org
- The Foundation Center – Foundation Center maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. and, increasingly, global grantmakers and their grants — a robust, accessible knowledge bank for the sector – foundationcenter.org

**Internet Resources**

- Exponent Philanthropy – exponentphilanthropy.org
- The Chronicle of Philanthropy – philanthropy.com
- Foundation Directory Online – foundationcenter.org
- HandsNet – handsnet.org
- Independent Sector – independentsector.org
- Idealist Nonprofit – idealist.org
- National Council of Nonprofit Organizations – councilofnonprofits.org
- NonProfit Jobs – nonprofit-jobs.org
- Nonprofit Oyster – nonprofitoyster.com
- Nonprofit Professionals Advisory Group – nonprofitprofessionals.com
- The NonProfit Times – thenonprofittimes.com
- Opportunity Knocks – opportunityknocks.org
- Orion Grassroots Network – jobs.orionmagazine.org
- Philanthropy News Digest – philanthropynewsdigest.org
- PNP Staffing Group – pnppstaffinggroup.com
Publications

- Exponent Philanthropy – A membership organization for donors, trustees, and employees of consultants of foundations with a mission to enhance the power of small foundations – exponentphilanthropy.org
- Council on Foundations – A nonprofit membership association of grant-making foundations and corporations with a mission to promote responsible and effective philanthropy by assisting existing and future grant-maker – cof.org
- The Foundation Center – Foundation Center maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. and, increasingly, global grant makers and their grants — a robust, accessible knowledge bank for the sector – foundationcenter.org
- The Foundation Directory, The Foundation Center – fconline.foundationcenter.org