Description of the field

Development consulting firms are for-profit agencies, which enter into contracts to support and supply expertise to international development projects coordinated by larger agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and The World Bank. According to James Fay, Ph.D., in Guide to Careers in World Affairs, "Over 4,000 international consulting firms are registered with The World Bank. USAID maintains records on 1,000 U.S. consulting firms." Regardless of their firms' sizes, development consultants generally address two broad areas: technical services, such as agriculture and engineering; and social services, which include such areas as education and healthcare. For example, some development consulting organizations may manage projects geared toward financing small businesses; others teach and train indigenous people in nutrition and healthcare, agricultural and livestock methods, and community planning.

Career Paths

In the field of development consulting, positions for research, administrative or associate project assistants, interns, or procurement specialists, as well as project monitors will offer the greatest opportunity for entry. After one or two years, larger organizations allow for movement into research associate and program assistant positions. Other firms regard recruitment managers or directors, directors of Offices of Human Resources, or junior development staff as middle-level positions. With five to ten years of experience and a Master's degree, development consultants typically hold positions at the officer level for financial, evaluation, and project positions. There are typically no senior-level positions for generalists, and specialists require a Ph.D. or MBA/MPA/MPH.

As this work often is contracted through the government, expect starting salaries to be modest to low, typically in the high 30s. The range goes up to approximately to low $40’s to $82,000 or more after one to two years.

Because most organizations in the field have a hierarchical management structure, if you are not experienced (see qualifications), be prepared to work your way up from an entry-level administrative position. Stay in the system; everyone starts with grunt work, but entry-level positions can be
grown into technical ones. "Get your foot in the door, and make yourself indispensable," says Rachel Peterson, recruitment manager of Development Alternatives, Inc.

The first-year development consulting employee can expect to be conducting research or writing and editing reports/proposals. Expect to spend two to three years writing proposals; however, there may be opportunities for short-term field assignments after one's first year.

Overseas assignments are possible with significant prior overseas experience. Consultants typically have more than 10 years of experience in a specific technical area or are Ph.Ds. with overseas research experience. After five years, long-term assignments abroad are possible.

Sample Employers

- ABT Associates INC. – abtassociates.com
- Agrer – agrer.com
- Altair Asesores – altairasesores.es?lan=en
- AMEX International – amexdc.com
- Arden Price – arden-price.com/home
- Aries Group – ariesgroupinc.com
- Arthur D. Little, Inc. – adlittle.com
- Atos Origin – atos.net
- Bannock Consulting – eldis.org
- Booz Allen Hamilton – boozallen.com
- Cambridge Consulting Corporation – cambridgeconsultants.com
- Camris International – camris.com [formerly Clapp & Mayne]
- Casals & Associates – casals.com
- Carana Corporation – carana.com
- CDM – thecdmgroup.com
- Center for International Private Enterprise – cipe.org
- Checci and Company Consulting, Inc. – chechicconsulting.com
- Chemonics International Consulting – chemonics.com
- Coopers and Lybrand – icaew.com
- Cowater International – cowater.com
- Creative Associates Int. – creativeassociatesinternational.com
- Dalberg – dalberg.com
- Deloitte & Touche – deloitte.com
- Development Alternatives Inc. – dai.com
- Development Associates – devassociates.com
- Devtech Systems – devtechsys.com
- ECIArica Consulting – za.linkedin.com/in/eciafrica
- Economic Consulting Associates – eca-uk.com
- Emerging Market Economics Limited – emergingmarketsltd.com
- Enterplan – policyinnovations.org
- GFA Management of GFA Luso – gfa-group.de
- GIZ International Services – giz.de/international-services/en
- HUB Consulting – hub.consulting/
Nonprofit Organizations that do Development Consulting

- ACDI-VOCA – acdivoca.org
- Blumont (International Relief and Development) – blumont.org
- CHF International – globalcommunities.org
- Enterprise Works – researchpark.illinois.edu/enterpriseworks
- Institute for Public-Private Partnerships – ip3.org
- MEDA – Microfinance – meda.org
- RTI International – rti.org
- Strategies for International Development – sidworld.org
- SNV Netherlands Development Organization – snv.org
- Technoserve – technoserve.org
- United Purpose – united-purpose.org