RECRUITING AND RETAINING

# The Next Generation of Nonprofit Sector Leadership

a study of the (missed) connections among nonprofit organizations, college seniors, and offices of career services

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SHELLY CRYER

January 2004

THE INITIATIVE FOR NONPROFIT SECTOR CAREERS
170 Claremont Avenue #15
New York, NY 10027
212/665-0588 scryer@erols.com

NYU Wagner
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

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Shelly Cryer
Project Director

Research Assistants
Cathy Crimmins, Melissa Witham

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Partner Organization
Coro Center for Civic Leadership, Pittsburgh, PA

Advisory Committee
Mark Anthony, Director of Career Services
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Jaimie Birge, Director
Pennsylvania Campus Compact

Diana Bucco, Director
Coro Center for Civic Leadership

Yvonne Campos, President
Campos Market Research, Inc.

Kate Dewey, Principal
Dewey and Kaye, Inc.

Yvonne Hennigan*, Executive Director
Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education

Kevin Kearns, Associate Professor
University of Pittsburgh

Dan Kessler, Co-Director, Campus Programs
Idealist.org / Action Without Borders

Tereneh Mosley*, Director, Talent Attraction
Pittsburgh Regional Alliance

Marianne Tramelli, President
Eastern Association of Colleges and Administrators (EACE)

Focus Group Moderators
Sylvia J. Barsion, President
SJB Research Consulting, Inc., New York, NY

Kate Dewey, Principal
Dewey & Kaye, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA

Offices of Career Services Survey Partner
Idealist.org / Action Without Borders, New York, NY

Coro Center for Civic Leadership Fellows
Sara Chieffo, Jacob Israelow, David Skillman

Report Design
Liz Quan

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# foreword

THERE REMAINS LITTLE DEBATE about the vital role the nonprofit sector plays in strengthening civil society and upholding democracy.

Anyone who has followed an international treaty conference or the aftermath of a war knows – the nonprofit sector is a major player in world affairs. And anyone who has visited a museum or put a child in nursery school has experienced first-hand – the nonprofit sector enriches even the smallest of communities.

It addresses problems we've struggled with for centuries – violence, famine, natural disasters. But it is also dynamic and evolving, and takes on issues and opportunities we couldn't have dreamed of even a decade ago.

It speaks for the people when the government is absent … or mistaken.

It protects our oceans and forests, and the creatures that live in them. It produces and preserves art. It builds homes. It feeds. It explores and it educates. It upholds laws and defends basic rights. It thinks, it writes, and it teaches how to read. It ministers. It heals.

It steps in to offer assistance when a tragedy is of such epic proportion that it shakes a nation. And, just as willingly, it extends a hand when only one person is in need.

Of course, "it" – this diverse and dynamic nonprofit sector – is nothing if not its people. In the United States, it is 11 million paid workers and the equivalent of 5.7 million full-time volunteers, committed to their communities and engaged in their work. For these people, the sector is the conduit for their energy and good will. It gives meaning to their lives as it allows them to help strengthen the lives of others.

But for too many young people interested in nonprofit sector work, the conduit to get them there is missing. On college campuses, graduating students are not finding the resources they need to connect to the public service careers they desire. And at small and mid-size nonprofit organizations in particular, already over-taxed staff are struggling to find ways to recruit and retain the most talented workforce possible.

Just when the nonprofit sector is beginning to lose to retirement its founding generation of leaders, it is being forced to make do with ever-more limited resources and increased competition. How vital, then, that its human resources – the next generation of nonprofit sector leaders – are the most capable and committed people possible. This study hopes to make a small contribution towards helping those who have heard the call to serve find an easy way to heed it.

Shelly Cryer
January 2004

# introduction

AS WITH EVERY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR, 2004 promises to be a time when Americans take careful stock of the institutions and ideals that make up our country. We'll take a hard look at the government and consider the extent to which our leaders delivered on the promises made four years earlier. We'll weigh the effects of the war in Iraq, the national economy, and our personal bank accounts. We'll consider the direction our nation is headed and if we like what we see. And then, we will vote.

Many of the people asking these questions and voting for the first time will be part of the Millennial Generation. The first wave of Millennials graduated from high school in 2000 (and may have just turned 18 before the last presidential election). The generation already totals 80 million – making it almost one-third larger than the Baby Boomers. And it's still growing.[1]

Politicians want to know how these young people will vote. Marketing executives want to figure out what they will want to buy. And in the Spring of 2004, as the first Millennials graduate from college and enter the workforce full-time, parents and employers and the generations that they will be entrusted to care for will be wondering … What will they do with their lives?

While all sectors of society are vested in the choices these Millennials will make, for the nonprofit sector the stakes are particularly high. The Millennials will graduate just as nonprofit organizations are beginning to see their Baby Boom leaders retire. And they will enter the workforce and start accumulating potential philanthropic dollars just as nonprofit organizations begin to feel the full effects of the stock market decline and economic recession that shepherded in the start of the millennium.

To survive and flourish, the nonprofit sector needs the Millennial Generation's top graduates – for its new crop of front-line workers, for its next generation of leadership, and for the millions of volunteer hours and private charitable dollars upon which it depends.

THE FORBES FUNDS IN PITTSBURGH, PA commissioned this applied research project to explore the recruitment and retention of young professionals to the nonprofit sector.

The study's objectives were to document the attitudes and behaviors of young professionals towards the nonprofit sector; analyze barriers that might inhibit talented workers from pursuing nonprofit sector careers; and identify and assess options to overcome those barriers.

The project was undertaken with support from the R.K. Mellon Foundation and in partnership with the Coro Center for Civic Leadership. It is one of a number of recent studies funded by The Forbes Funds that focus on talent attraction and retention in the Pittsburgh, PA region. Other regional studies include:

- Carolyn Ban's study of the hiring and retention of professional staff to human service organizations;
- Sara Chieffo, Jacob Israelow, and David Skillman's conversations with 60 young professionals about their thoughts on nonprofit sector work;

- Carol De Vita and Eric Twombly's exploration of the financial health and future prospects for the nonprofit human service sector;

- Susan Hansen, Leonard Huggins, and Carolyn Ban's comparative analysis of the motivations and career choices of young professionals working in the nonprofit versus for-profit sectors; and

- Kevin Kearns' survey of 1,600 nonprofit organizations to learn more about the role of faith-based human service organizations and any special management capacity-building needs they may have.

These studies are referenced in this report and are either currently available on-line at The Forbes Funds' website, or will be shortly.

For its research phase, this project was housed at the Center for Health and Public Service Research (CHPSR) at New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT is to cultivate the most talented next generation of nonprofit sector leadership and facilitate this generation's entry into the nonprofit sector workforce. The research during the project's first phase focused on three populations: individuals responsible for human resources at nonprofit organizations, college seniors, and directors of offices of career services at four-year colleges. The project's objectives were:

- to investigate the challenges nonprofit organizations face in recruiting and retaining talented younger workers and identify opportunities for overcoming those challenges;

- to better understand the career choices of college seniors, their attitudes towards work in the nonprofit sector, and the resources they use for job hunting and advice; and

- to evaluate the capacity of college career centers to serve students interested in nonprofit sector careers, and determine the best ways to build that capacity.

At the launch of this initiative, some of the core hypotheses were that (1) small and mid-sized organizations (in particular) could be more successful in recruiting talent if they worked more closely with their regional colleges; (2) many college seniors who might be interested in nonprofit sector careers lacked (accurate) information and resources to pursue them; and (3) college career centers are geared more towards channeling graduates into corporate America and have limited knowledge of and connections to nonprofit sector employers.

While the research questions (and findings, we hoped) were national in scope, support from The Forbes Funds and Coro Center for Civic Leadership brought with it access to excellent resources and data sets in the Pittsburgh, PA region. The region is home to an extremely diverse group of colleges and universities that represent well the breadth of schools nationwide. Its nonprofit sector is a vital part of the city's social fabric and economic base. In addition, local and national demographers and economists have devoted significant energy recently to exploring a range of workforce and youth population issues in the region – although nonprofit sector workforce issues have been understudied. As such, the Pittsburgh, PA region presented a useful case study for much of the work.

The study design incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. These included:

- Focus groups with human resources directors and executive directors at nonprofit organizations, college seniors, and career counselors (in the Pittsburgh, PA region);
- A print survey of nonprofit organizations (in the Pittsburgh, PA region)[2];
- A national telephone survey of college seniors[3]; and
- A national print and online survey of directors of offices of career services at four-year colleges nationwide.

Findings from these research efforts – as well as conclusions and recommendations specific to each of the target populations – are presented in the following three sections devoted to nonprofit organizations, college seniors, and college offices of career services.

# nonprofit organizations

"In a small organization, when there is a vacancy, your time goes in part to filling the void caused by that vacancy. You don't have time to allocate to finding a replacement. You're stretched a little thin." – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

# nonprofit organizations

## OVERVIEW

This section explores the junior staff recruitment and retention challenges nonprofit organizations face. For background, we review recent data on the sector's size and some of its most pressing workforce issues, along with information specific to organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA region. Our qualitative data are drawn from three focus groups with senior staff members from small, mid-sized, and large nonprofit organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA region. Participants discussed a range of recruitment and retention issues, with an emphasis on "next generation" employees. We then review quantitative data from a mail survey of Pittsburgh, PA-area nonprofit organizations. In particular, we concentrate on a handful of questions that focused on the extent to which organizations connect with colleges and universities to recruit interns and full-time staff. We conclude with recommendations specific to the nonprofit sector on recruiting and retaining young talent.

## BACKGROUND

### The nonprofit sector

Lester Salamon's newest study[4] characterizes the nonprofit sector as the "resilient sector." In spite of the extraordinary fiscal, competitive, technological, and human resources challenges it has confronted during the past 20 years, it has entered the new millennium holding a sizeable share of the economy, growing fast, marketing itself well, developing new resources and partnerships, and building its own infrastructure.

The sector is comprised of 1.8 million registered organizations, and countless more that either because of their religious mission or small size (gross receipts less than $25,000) are not required to file with the government. The sector has annual revenues of $1 trillion and assets of $2 trillion, and accounts for 5 to 10% of the nation's gross domestic product. In 2000, individuals, foundations, and corporations gave $203 billion to charity.[5] In 1998, the sector employed 11 million paid workers (7% of the country's workforce, or 1 out of every 13 paid employees) and the equivalent of 5.7 million full-time volunteers.[6] Women account for 71% of nonprofit sector employees.[7]

As large as the sector is, the vast majority of it is comprised of small organizations: in 1998, 73% of nonprofits reported expenses less than $500,000.[8] These are organizations with small staffs and limited resources – something to keep in mind when considering their human resources capacity issues. (On the other hand, the majority of nonprofit sector workers work in large organizations.)

The nonprofit sector is growing. Between 1977 and 1997, the nonprofit sector's revenues grew at nearly twice the rate of the country's economy. The number of nonprofit organizations forming grew at 115% (approximately 23,000 per year) – half again as fast as the growth rate of for-profit businesses.[9]

## the nonprofit sector in pittsburgh, pa

PENNSYLVANIA RANKS FOURTH in the national list of states with the most charitable organizations[10], and 13% of its organizations are in Allegheny County, PA. Nonprofit organizations accounted for 15% of state and local revenues in 1998, or approximately $4.7 billion. They employ more than 600,000 individuals in the state and, through volunteering, the equivalent of more than 400,000 full-time unpaid workers.[11]

Research from Carol De Vita and Eric Twombly of The Urban Institute indicates that as of 2000, there were 2,657 nonprofit organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA metropolitan area, with revenues totaling $12.9 billion.[12] (This figure does not include religious and small organizations not required to file with the IRS.) By size, De Vita finds that, "the Pittsburgh nonprofit sector is roughly on par with the nonprofit sectors in Cleveland and Baltimore – metro areas of similar population size."[13]

### Nonprofit sector recruitment and retention issues

Recruiting and retaining talent is an issue for all employers, in all sectors. In a 2000 national KnowledgePoint survey, 79% of responding human resources (HR) professionals said recruiting was one of their "top two" workforce issues. Other leading issues included retention and compensation.[14]

In the nonprofit sector, where human and financial resources are stretched particularly thin, workforce issues are especially pressing. Researchers Hinden and Hull, for example, estimate that at any given time, 10 to 12% of nonprofit organizations are managing an executive transition. And the situation is becoming significantly worse:

> The rate of transitions is expected to climb by 15% or more in the next five to seven years as the baby-boomer generation – many of whom founded organizations 20 and 30 years ago – reaches retirement age.[15]

A report recently released by the United Way of New York City estimated that 45% of current executive directors of New York City nonprofit organizations will retire in five years (and 92% of executive directors say their senior managers need more training).[16] (In Pittsburgh, PA, the data indicate peak turnover will come a few years later.[17]) Visionary nonprofit organizations are paying attention to the talent wars not only for today's front-line workers but because they know these "new recruits" will be tomorrow's sector leaders.

Vacancy rates appear to be an issue at all levels of staff. A 2002 CompassPoint study of nonprofit organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area found that 8% of paid staff positions are vacant and 30% have been vacant for four months or more. (An 8% vacancy rate means that an organization

with a staff of 13 can expect to have one position vacant at any given time.) Of vacant positions, 24% were management positions, but 47% were non-program (administrative, development, finance, and technology) staff. Smaller organizations (which dominate the sector and are likely to suffer more from short staffing) have higher vacancy rates.[18] They also tend to pay less.[19]

Lower salaries are taken almost as a "given" for recruitment and retention challenges in the nonprofit sector. "It is very difficult to dispute the fact that professional employees in nonprofits earn less than in for-profit institutions," writes Carolyn Ban.[20] In a 2002 survey of nonprofit sector employees, *The Content of Their Character*, Paul Light found that just about one-quarter (23%) of respondents were unsatisfied with their salaries.[21] Future research might compare these findings to salary satisfaction and related issues among for-profit sector employees.

However, data are mixed on the extent – and even existence – of the for-profit/nonprofit salary divide. In some specific fields such as accounting, evidence does seem to indicate that the nonprofit sector pays lower than an equivalent position at a for-profit firm. And certainly public interest law positions pay dramatically less than private firms. However, a 2002 study by Christopher Ruhm and Carey Borkoski found that:

> Persons working for nonprofits receive approximately the same pay as they would if employed in equivalent positions by profit-seeking firms. This is true even though nonprofit employees earn an average of 11% less than their counterparts with similar observed attributes. The reason for the lower earnings is that nonprofit jobs require fewer hours and are concentrated in a small number of industries that tend to offer relatively low pay but are likely to be desirable places in which to work.[22]

(These low-paying nonprofit sub-sectors include education and human services.) Future research might explore whether perceived salary differentials between nonprofit and for-profit sector jobs among young job seekers match actual salary differentials.

Burnout is another significant recruitment and retention challenge. Paul Light's recent survey of human services workers, *The Health of the Human Services Workforce*, indicates that this sub-sector's workforce challenges are particularly acute: 81% of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that it is easy to burn out in the work they do, 75% called their work "frustrating," and 70% said they had too much work. One-third of recent recruits to human services work said they plan to leave in less than two years.[23]

In exchange for the burnout and (at least perceived) low salaries, nonprofit organizations offer something in return. They often can provide meaningful work and institutional missions that workers in so many different studies indicate are more important than salary. In Light's human services study, 87% of respondents said that the opportunity to help specific populations was a very important consideration in taking their current job. Other very important considerations cited by respondents included being able to serve their community (65%), opportunity to do challenging work (61%), and flexible hours (49%).[24]

Many organizations consider flexibility, training, and an attractive organizational culture their key benefits. However, it is not clear that these opportunities are more available in the nonprofit sector. For-profit employers are competing for talent as well, and they, too, offer increasingly creative benefits packages. For example, a 2002 survey of major US employers found that 94% offer some form of child care assistance, 74% offer flexible work options, and 80% offer professional development opportunities.[25] The nonprofit sector might need to be cautious when touting its edge in flexible benefits.

## recruitment and retention issues in pittsburgh, pa

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA'S current population is the same size it was in 1940 and leaders from all sectors are deeply concerned about the future workforce and economic base of the region. Like national trends, the Pittsburgh, PA region has fewer people aged 20 to 34 years. Growing regions tend to be both importers and exporters of talent and Pittsburgh, PA does not have the problem, as thought, of losing people. Rather, it is not attracting people.[26] The region actually retains students at rates comparable to similar regions: 40 to 57%.[27]

As numerous studies show, the region is most appealing to people concerned with family, cost of living, and education. In studies undertaken by Carnegie Mellon University researchers, recent graduates from Pittsburgh, PA area universities said that job quality was a motivating factor when choosing among various options. Low starting salaries and better opportunities were a leading reason to leave the area.[28] While this research focuses on technology and computer industry employment, national surveys and focus group research suggest that these factors are perceived to be even greater issues vis-à-vis nonprofit sector employment.

But like national data, these Carnegie Mellon University studies found that the nature of work is critical: "From the perspective of employers responding to our survey, the nature of work has the greatest impact on the recruitment of workers. Workers will accept outstanding jobs in companies with good culture and reputation, and will avoid those that do not provide sufficient opportunities."[29] The study showed that manufacturing and information technology firms tend to be small (69% of establishments in the region have fewer than 20 employees) and "lack experience and sophistication in their recruiting activities. Most companies rely on employee referrals and personal networks."[30] The implications for the small and mid-size organizations that make up the sector are clear.

**Human resources (HR) capacity and strategies**

Small and mid-sized nonprofit organizations tend not to have dedicated HR staff. A CompassPoint study found that only 13% of nonprofit organizations in San Francisco had a dedicated staff member handling HR. At 47% of the organizations, these duties were handled by the executive director.[31] In her Pittsburgh, PA area study, Carolyn Ban found that no nonprofit organizations in the region with fewer than 40 employees had a dedicated human resources professional on staff.[32]

The executive directors and other senior staff members who tend to handle human resources employ a range of recruitment strategies. For example, in Ban's focus groups and individual interviews, 80% of participants said they advertised in newspapers and 73% employed word-of-mouth techniques. Other strategies included using professional associations (26%), internal postings (20%), Internet (20%), email networks (16%), and consultants (13%). As Ban points out, nonprofit organizations' leading recruitment techniques (aside from newspaper advertisements, which can be expensive) are low cost, low tech, and predominantly local in scope.[33]

While the programs are labor-intensive, data indicate that internships are excellent tools for recruiting young talent. Employers in a recent National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) survey reported that they recruit approximately 32% of their new college hires from internship programs. While government and nonprofit sector employers were less likely to have interns than for-profit companies, their interns were more likely to become full-time employees.[34]

These findings are consistent with Hansen *et al.*'s study of young professionals that found that 24% of nonprofit sector employees had a job that resulted from an internship while in college, versus only 20% of for-profit employees who said so.[35] They also complement Chieffo *et al.*'s focus group research with young professionals. In one group, well over two-thirds of participants working in the nonprofit sector had found their first nonprofit sector job through an internship. These researchers conclude that internships are successful "entry points" into nonprofit sector employment.[36]

## FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

To better understand how individuals responsible for hiring practices at nonprofit organizations recruit and retain talent – especially for junior-level positions – researchers held three focus groups with executive directors, human resources directors, and other staff responsible for human resources at nonprofit organizations. Thirty individuals – representing small, mid-size, and large organizations working on a wide range of issues – participated. Details on the methods and data sources used for these focus groups appear in Appendix A (*see p. 70*).

### Summary of findings

The focus groups revealed a cohort of nonprofit sector leaders profoundly committed to their organizations and passionate about their missions, but deeply worried about recruiting, training, and retaining the skilled, committed, and diverse workers they need. Salaries, stress, and burn-out are serious workforce development challenges for these leaders, but they believe their organizations offer in return flexibility, a positive work environment, and the chance to feel good about one's work.

Core themes and perspectives that emerged from these conversations with nonprofit organization leaders include:

- Participants – especially from smaller organizations – felt overwhelmed by the time required to review resumes, interview candidates, and reference-check applicants.

- While it depends in part on the economy, participants generally considered the quality and diversity of applicants for junior-level positions inadequate.

- Salaries were seen as the number one obstacle to attracting and retaining talent; the organization's mission, culture, and "flexibility" were leading benefits.

- Participants – especially from human service organizations – expressed frustration with training staff and having them leave for higher paying jobs; however, they recognize that training "potential" is a good way to increase their candidate pools.

- Without any prompting, participants in all groups stressed a real drive to find adaptable, flexible, and mission-driven employees.

- Participants in all groups emphasized the "family" spirit of their organizations and saw it as a selling point in recruitment. They also cared deeply if they could determine if new employees would fit into this family culture.

- While participants used a full range of recruitment strategies, networking yielded the best results.

- Recruitment networks did not tend to include college campuses: only 30 percent of participants used career centers, and assessments were quite mixed.

- Employers avoided college career centers because they believed their positions were too specialized and required more experience, they did not have the capacity to reach out to colleges, and/or because colleges did not respond professionally to their inquiries.

- Participants had overwhelmingly favorable experiences with interns and saw internships as an excellent strategy for developing their full-time employment pools.

**General assessment of human resources operations**

Human resources (HR) duties were handled by a single staff member (with possible input from colleagues, board members, or outside contractors) by 25 of the 30 focus group participants (all those from small and mid-sized organizations, and 6 of the 11 from large organizations). For 60% of the organizations, executive directors handled HR, and they dedicated anywhere from "almost none" to "almost 50 percent" of their time to the function, dividing themselves almost equally into the two extreme categories. There was some indication that service organizations spent more time on HR than others.

Only one of the 10 participants from small and none of the participants from mid-size organizations had any formal training in human resources. But even a participant from a large organization (with a $2.4 million budget and 24 full-time staff) said her human resources training was "baptism by fire." A participant managing operations for a $3 million organization with 68 full-time staff quickly agreed.

Participants in all groups spoke of the time involved and challenges faced in recruiting, interviewing, and reference-checking applicants. However, while many themes ran through all three groups, only respondents from small organizations stressed that their hiring practices were, at the most, only "somewhat standardized" (with flexibility built into the process). One participant said, "We don't have a standardized process at all."

All respondents representing small organizations said their hiring processes did not fully meet their needs and took "far longer than it should have taken." One respondent suggested an organization's small size might exacerbate the time required:

> In a small organization, when there is a vacancy, your time goes in part to filling the void caused by that vacancy. You don't have time to allocate to finding a replacement. You're stretched a little thin.

One participant called her hiring process "burdensome," another quipped "haphazard," and a third said, "Luck is a big factor for us." Another concurred, saying successful recruitment depends largely on "being at the right place at the right time."

Participants from small and mid-size organizations largely indicated that "the resources just aren't there to do it properly." They lack the training, expertise, staff support, and resources to operate professional hiring practices. When pressed on the size of HR budgets, respondents were rather vague, although the majority indicated they had no budget. One respondent called it "a nominal amount, about a couple hundred dollars." Another said that she views an extended vacancy as unspent funds:

> In some ways, the position has been open for a month. That salary hasn't been used that month, so we use it to do searches. That's how we do it.

These attitudes and assessments suggesting that the entire process was flawed, too time-consuming, and under-resourced were not as pronounced in the group with representatives from large organizations (although even a participant from a large organization addressed resources, saying, "We have no one to check for references.").

**The quality and diversity of the applicant pool**

When asked broadly about the quality of applications received when recruiting, respondents generally characterized it as "inadequate," indicating they received significant numbers of resumes from individuals without the minimum skills and experience required. Many (for example, four respondents from large organizations) also stressed challenges in attracting diverse applicants.

One respondent said, "[Diversity] has been an issue everywhere I've worked for 25 years." However, he found that once an organization establishes a reputation for having a diverse staff, it has a snowball effect. He said:

> Something within the organizational dynamic changed … [and] at some point, all of the candidates we needed began to surface, and we began to hire people for case management positions that we hadn't been able to, and retain them. So now we have 12 out of 33 staff are minorities in the course of one year.

Two other participants reinforced this idea. One said, "Through word of mouth, people advertise for you." Another said:

> We've had really great success, and I'm very happy … you now see our African-American staff tell their friends that "This is a good place to work. You'll like it." And we are getting most of the staff, probably 50 to 60 percent African-Americans, all the way up to supervisor. And I really think word of mouth in the community has made a real difference.

Many of the participants distinguished between entry-level positions and mid-level management positions requiring more skills (although one respondent disagreed, saying, "I don't think there's that big of a distinction for us. We're so small that we don't have those levels within our organization of staffing."). For those who did distinguish, they indicated that the mid-level positions were more difficult to fill.

Many respondents said they had "specialized positions" that made searches much more difficult and, they believed, prevented them from recruiting on campuses. One said, "What we hire is so specialized that the actual pool of applicants is fairly small."

A few respondents suggested that the economy affected the quality of their applicant pool. One participant said recruitment challenges "fluctuate directly with economy." When the economy is strong, already unrealistic salary expectations are even higher. Another participant said:

> The last time I hired was for an office manager. I found that what I was coming up against was that the economy at that point was pretty good, so applicants had expectations that couldn't be met in the kind of organization we have. So I would get good people who wanted to be paid more, or I would get under-qualified people who wanted to be paid more. I tried temp agencies, but I thought they were completely off the mark in terms of what was needed. They didn't understand the requirements and the demands of a nonprofit environment for flexibility and all-around skills.

When the economy is weak, on the other hand, nonprofit organizations might encounter new possibilities. A participant said:

> I just hired [someone] who is incredible. And I had the experience you had with getting a pile of overqualified resumes. But I took a chance and picked the most qualified people. It's a bad economy. I'm going to call these people and tell them the cap on the salary, and just weed them out right away – who's willing to work for this amount of money? The woman we ended up hiring is from the private sector, has all of the professional development and training that we would have had to spend on somebody else on an entry level. The negotiation point with her … was flexibility with her schedule … So that flexibility landed us an amazing [person].

Independent of economic factors, at least six respondents said that they and their organizations realized that to build a skilled workforce, they needed to identify "potential" and train staff. This concept is discussed in greater detail in the section on internships, below.

## Factors affecting the nonprofit sector employment pool

### THE OPPORTUNITIES: "FAMILY," "FLEXIBILITY," AND "FUN"

While focus group participants communicated challenges with their jobs, human resources responsibilities, salaries, and the sector as a whole, a profound respect for the sector – "I think the whole nonprofit arena is tremendously appealing," said one participant – and passion for their own organizations and missions came through in all of the groups. One respondent said:

> I would say generally, for nonprofits, we are the group of people in our community who really do the warrior work and bring the quality of life standards up for this community. In any community … you find us. So I would say to any person, "If that's what your calling is, to work in an environment where you're really making a difference in a community, come to the nonprofit sector."

When asked if their organizations were appealing places to work, participants became especially animated. Many spoke with enthusiasm of their organizations' "family" dynamics, missions, and professional opportunities as great selling points. One respondent said, "I think our plus is that daily we have success stories. We are constantly changing lives with the services that we provide." Other representative comments include:

> [There is a] real clear sense of people's commitment to the mission, and I think that that's the thing that holds people to it, given the negative in the salary.

> I think because we're a learning organization, which is part of our mission, the people who are attracted to the organization are attracted to that mission, and are able to find the opportunity to continue developing themselves in the association, with the organization. I think that's the big draw. Our volunteer faculty are paying to be there.

> I think it's a great first job experience for a lot of people to see how an organization can be run as a family, but still provide the services. And when they leave – which they will – they can take that experience and go to the next job, either in the for-profit or nonprofit world, and reflect that "It was a good time. Even if I worked sometimes 60 hours a week, it was a good job."

"Flexibility" was mentioned just as frequently as "mission" and "family" as a significant nonprofit sector benefit. One member from a small organization said, "We offer flexible schedules to non-supervisory staff" and five other respondents in that group did as well. Even large organizations are accommodating:

> Flexibility. If you asked my staff right now [about benefits], they would say flexibility – they have 40 hours a week, but they can work at home, they can come in the evening, during the day if they want to do something with their child. As long as they're available when families need them. They've always said one of our greatest things is our flexibility.

In addition, four respondents representing small organizations offered professional development opportunities. One said, "We would be open-minded to anything that a motivated member of the staff brings as a reasonable request. We would try to make it happen."

The majority of participants said that they offered some attractive benefits packages (for example, all 10 small group participants offer health benefits, and three extend these benefits to family members; no participants said they offered no benefits, although a great disparity existed among the packages described). In particular, two respondents from large organizations said that although their salaries are low, their benefits are strong. One said:

> One of our starting salaries is 12 to $14,000. I don't think anybody is over 20 in that department and we have 40 full-time teachers. But we offer vacation and daycare, which adds another 5 – $6,000 to your salary … We have an Employee Assistance Program – our benefits are really good for people such as myself: working moms, second-job moms. Our paid time-off structure means four weeks vacation. So our salaries aren't comparable at all, but our benefits are good. And the health center ... That's how we get some of our young people.

Notably, two participants mentioned the challenge presented by dramatic increases in benefits costs (a 28% increase for one and a 40% increase for another).

Others mentioned such perks as parking, training, "a kitchen in our board room," staff development, "a lot of fun," tuition reimbursement, free classes, free lunch, "a really supportive place to work," and diversity. One participant said, "You're in an atmosphere where everybody seems to walk around pretty happy."

#### THE OBSTACLES: "COUNTING PAPERCLIPS"

All respondents cited salary as the run-away leader in obstacles to recruiting and retaining talent. "I don't think what we pay competes with what we need for the position," is just one quote of many reinforcing this theme. At the most acute, one participant said, "the pay levels in mental health in Allegheny County are abysmal. It's below the living wage in most cases, so it doesn't attract a lot of talented people." Another said:

> In the nonprofit world, where you're counting paper clips … people do it because … they really love their cause. And … that's been a process for them. For people coming in, they don't yet love their cause or their jobs yet.

One participant said, "I think what's difficult with young people is just general expectations when they come out of school about what work's going to be like and what salaries are going to be like. 'I have a degree. I should get $40K a year'." But another participant countered:

> And in some ways they're right. One day I broke down what you could actually afford to do on our starting salary, which at the time was $19,572 … It was going to cost them 25 to 30% more just for the basics of life than they were actually making. Which meant that all of our entry-level people were either still living with roommates or still living at home. And these are college-degreed, professional adults ... So, I think you need to come to work at a nonprofit because of passion and you're not in it for the money. But we still have to be realistic – they can't change their expectations. So we can either meet them, or fail because we haven't met them.

The majority of participants said they assess their salaries against those of other nonprofit organizations using the *2002 Wage and Benefit Survey of Southwestern Pennsylvania Nonprofit Organizations* conducted by the United Way of Allegheny County and The Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management at Robert Morris University. But although all participants from mid-size organizations (for example) said their salaries are not competitive with what their employees would receive at for-profits, participants only could cite anecdotal information to prove this.

Other obstacles to the recruitment and retention of talent include long hours, demands for multi-tasking, low prestige, and burnout. One participant from a mid-size service organization said:

> The population we're serving is … not considered an attractive population to work with … it takes a very Mother Theresa kind of attitude to want to go into that line of work.

Another commented:

> It's a burnout situation. And I find, for all the reasons people have told me they've left the organization, they just have a full plate. It's just too much. I don't even know if we paid more salary or gave more benefits if it would make them stay. I think we just need more staff, and there's a budget conflict with that.

A number of participants spoke of the expectations young employees have in terms of salaries, but a few also mentioned advancement issues as a deterrent to nonprofit sector employment. One said:

> A lot of the students that we hired out of college may have been excellent in school, they were high-achieving academically. And then they come to our setting, and they find themselves working among a lot of other people who were that way too. They expect the same sort of rapid advancement, and we don't have major career ladders in our smaller organizations. So I think the second point I would look at would be the career ladders for people.

In sum, participants stressed that to come to the nonprofit sector and to stay, you have to love your job, and see your job function as a fluid and flexible experience. One participant said her experience that day was a case-in-point: "This morning I ended up cooking for 355 people unexpectedly. So you have to want to do that kind of work. If you do, I think you will be fulfilled and you will be happy. If you're just looking to take a paycheck home – no."

**Turnover: "the revolving-door piece"**

While participants indicated that identifying and training "potential" was a solution to perceived weaknesses in their applicant pools, many associated the opportunity of training with the obstacle of turnover. One participant from a small organization said:

> We spend a lot of time bringing people in that were probably a little below skill level, training them, and having them leave for better-paying jobs. This is particularly true of the African-American staff. And that's been part of the revolving door piece for us.

The group murmured agreement to her remark. Another said, "We're a good learning – we're a training ground." And a third participant said that a departure was most often to a for-profit and higher-paying job:

> That's a huge issue for us … once we train and certify everyone, the reality is they can hop into the private sector and do the exact same type of work. Now, they won't have the mission, they won't be working for a population that won't otherwise be able to afford those services, but that is always a risk that we run. We spend $2,000 on one certification, and a month later they could go to a small business and do the same thing for more money.

The participant said that this turnover and "jumping" issue makes it more critical that she determines an applicant's commitment to the mission during the interviewing process, "in order to mitigate the risks we have of certifying that person and them jumping into the private sector."

Another participant said, however, that she loses younger staff not to higher salaries, but rather to graduate schools:

> Right now mine are leaving to go back to school. Three quarters of my staff are under 30. I have a really young staff. Many of them took their jobs straight out of college. They work for a couple of years. I'm losing two of them in August, and two more in the next six to nine months, because one is going to a PhD program, and one's doing a Master's Degree program. There's no way to compete with that.

One participant said she addressed turnover by creating new opportunities:

> Up until a year or two ago, we lost our middle-level to County, because they'd be on the list and then their names would finally come up. Because our jobs mirrored theirs. But we've since changed our job descriptions. We've added some tiers in there, so there's some opportunity, and it has reduced it by over half.

Two participants, however, said that some employees stay too long. These comments were met with insider laughter.

**The "gut-level" search for adaptability and flexibility in employees**

The overwhelming majority of participants spoke of the challenges and time involved with interviewing, reference checking, and assessing job candidates. They spoke not just of the drive to determine applicants' skills (and if they will transfer), but also of "flexibility," "team spirit," and "willingness to be collaborative." These terms and issues were repeated throughout the sessions and in all of the groups, although the following representative quotes are from mid-size organization participants:

> Everyone pays so much attention to the job description. But we're nonprofit. We always have that little disclaimer "… and as needed in other areas." One of the questions is, "Here's a job description, but if I ask you to do such-and-such, will you throw that in my face and say, 'Well, that's not in my job description'?"

> The problem is that the nature of the job isn't what they think it is … So a large part of the process for me is trying to ascertain what it is not – what's behind the resume. And it really is more subjective about character and personality and chemistry and talent and flexibility. The rest of it I can train.

> [We're looking for people with an] understanding on a gut level what it means to work at a small nonprofit, where you have to be a flexible team player. You really can't put the job in a box.

Managers see adaptability, flexibility, and the ability "to keep the plates spinning" as vital qualities that allow staff members to fit into the "culture" and "family" of their organizations and, in turn, help them further their missions.

**The search for "family members" and commitment to mission**

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants, regardless of the size of their organizations, spoke of their drive to find new "family members" who would feel passionate about the organization's mission. A respondent from a small organization (with five staff members) stressed the fact that his organizational culture is one of "being part of a family." And a participant from a large organization (with 140 full-time employees and upwards of 850 part-time employees) said "coming into our organization, it's like walking into a family."

Interestingly, this emphasis on "family" arose both in the context of recruitment and interviewing challenges (that is, finding individuals who will "fit"), and as one of the great benefits of working in the participants' organizations. It is important to note that this is the perception of nonprofit sector leadership. It would be worth exploring whether entry-level and mid-level nonprofit sector employees share this sentiment. It would also be of interest to determine how these perceptions compare to for-profit sector leaders' emphasis on "family" and "team spirit."

Many respondents stressed that they had trouble determining during an interview how well a candidate would fit into the organization's culture. A few quotes reinforce this theme:

> There are really two jobs I'm looking for. One is the functions within the job description, but the other is supporting the culture of the organization. And what I need that person to be able to do is interact and function within our culture.
>
> They can wear a lot of hats. They must have the ability to multi-task. What we find is that there are some very concrete skill sets that we're looking for, and then the ability to function within those skill sets, within the culture of the organization.
>
> What they're really looking for and what's going to attract somebody to stay in a nonprofit job and do well in a nonprofit job – they have to love the job. They have to have a passion for it … It's really trying to understand what's inside their soul, and trying to do that in the recruitment process through interviewing takes a lot of time.
>
> We like to hire young people that we've had experience with in our program … It's not that we're discriminating within the family … It's not a small family. But it's a universe and we don't have to teach people what it means. They get it.

One participant said there's additional pressure because, "it's very hard to get rid of people today. So for me anyway, I'm very careful because I don't want to make a mistake and then have to deal with that." This concept was discussed mostly in the context of participants' efforts to stay apprised of HR policies and practices.

**Search strategies**

Focus group participants discussed the full range of recruitment strategies, from word-of-mouth to paid advertising and participating in job fairs.

All but six participants had used paid advertising in various local daily newspapers, as well as ProArts, *Pittsburgh Business Times*, *New Pittsburgh Courier*, and organizational newsletters. One participant mentioned one outreach effort with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Another participant said she found paid advertising "the least effective," and another added "and expensive." All but six participants also used job listing websites and/or "e-lists." Specific sites mentioned included the local and regional sites Sustainable Pittsburgh's Sustainable Dream Jobs, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Free-Net, and Team Pennsylvania CareerLink; and the national and international sites JobLine and Idealist.

Only a very few participants used headhunters or other agencies. But the hands-down most successful recruitment strategy for participants from all organizations was networking. One participant said:

> A number of things that have been mentioned: from websites to advertising to contacting the schools. But probably the best way we get an employee is knowing someone and word-of-mouth. It's also recognizing the taskforce within. There's already a network that's established of people who are aware of the agency and the position. It's very odd sometimes, in that when someone leaves, we often have someone ready to start the next day. It may be an intern, or it may be someone in the community who seems to hear that the job is available before we even post it.

However, nonprofit organizations' recruitment networks – as discussed in the three focus groups – do not include colleges and universities in any significant way, nor do they extend beyond the Pittsburgh, PA region. Given the data from the national survey of career services professionals, it seems likely that this college networking "disconnect" exists throughout the United States.

**Campus recruitment**

Only 30% of focus group participants used college career centers to recruit: four from small organizations, two from mid-size organizations and only three from large organizations. One participant from a large organization mentioned the extent to which staff members teach classes and the dramatic effect this has in recruiting students to her organization. Overall, experiences were mixed, both in terms of the students they've recruited and the career center staff they worked with.

On students, one participant said, "I have found real go-getters who are ready to jump in, really take the ball and run with it. They have the mindset and the heart." Another characterized his experience as "excellent," saying:

> There are a good number of students who are looking at the range of opportunities – private versus nonprofit sector – particularly those in public administration schools. And they are dying to land jobs that are mission-oriented and working with public policy.

As such, this participant focused his recruitment outreach towards colleges and universities with public administration schools.

Respondents said that targeting programs and schools was important (as certain programs have "a tie to mission") but that the results often depend on one's contacts and the depth of their relationships with individuals. When the relationships are good, they appear to be very good. One said, "We've always had a good response," and another called it "beneficial":

> Our recruiter has very good relationships, on a personal basis, with these career services officials. They've gotten to know us. They know what we do. They know the kind of person that we're looking for. They let us know early when there's going to be events. They get us on campus and in front of students. They get us access to classes that are about to graduate. We've found that they've been a lot of help.

But more respondents commented on inconsistent responses from career centers. One said, "I haven't met with great response." Others characterized their outreach efforts as "up and down," "fair," and, "It's catch as catch can … the degree of professionalism in each individual department varies significantly." One participant from a mid-size organization said, "It's been my sense that the college placement offices do not take the nonprofit sector seriously as a place to place their students." Another said, "They're not looking off the mainstream path for careers for people." One respondent expressed real frustration with her efforts to reach out to colleges:

> It's too much work to figure out where to go at the university to create a relationship … It takes too much time … it's really decentralized. So to find, first, the primary point of contact requires some time. And then, second, once you get there it's a crap shoot on whether or not you'll get a good response.

Other participants acknowledged that they have not made the time. One participant from a mid-size organization said developing relationships with colleges is "critically important" but that it is "very hard to be proactive" because he lacks time. Even a participant from a large organization said, "Networking with the placement offices of the schools – I think it's unfortunate that we don't do that more often, because there's no one really who can take charge of something like that." Others actually avoided campus recruitment because of a perception that college applicants won't have the necessary experience: "it's really rare for us to find somebody through those kinds of things that has the right experience" and "there wasn't enough return." Someone else said:

> I can get a fresh-out-of-college kid all day long. My problem is I need more of the more experienced people. That's really the challenge for us. The others seem to be available.

Another participant returned to how "specialized" his organization's positions were: "We specialize too. We need people who have a little experience in education. We have specialized positions." And others again distinguished between junior and mid-level positions. Some representative comments include:

> Typically when we're in the market for a new employee, it is not an entry-level position. I'm looking for someone to come in and make an immediate impact with as little of my time as possible, frankly. Someone who is not necessarily seasoned, but someone who has work experience in the marketplace.

> A lot of the candidates I've interviewed that come from the local universities come with the professional background in terms of the education, but not enough practical experience … that's not always there for somebody that's a recent grad. Unless it's someone who had an undergraduate degree, took some years off, and has some time in field work or did an internship somewhere.

> Part of the challenge that we find is that we've made a commitment to hiring younger people. But – because they're not from the family, they're just younger people – they need a lot of support and a lot of help. So in terms of finding good candidates, we're finding that they don't come in with a lot of the basic stuff that we would expect … the orientation to work.

Other participants connected salary obstacles specifically to college-based candidates: "Nobody can really make ends meet plus pay their student loans back." Another said recent graduate school graduates' "salary expectations … are so out of proportion to where we are."

Three of 10 participants from small organizations and four of 11 participants from large organizations had participated in job fairs, but others said they simply didn't have the time. Comments included: "it's time-intensive and staff-intensive to run those job fair booths. But that's where we got the best turnout."; "It was kind of eventful. You meet a lot of the kids, and they're curious and asking."; and "I don't think we have really felt the actual net result of that."

A participant from a large organization who received a great response from a career fair said it showed her that she should hold them in-house. Of the campus career fair, she said:

> We did … our first one ever. We weren't quite sure what to expect, but we interviewed on that day over 180 candidates and probably 200+ applied that couldn't stay. And the two things we learned from it: we don't need to show up at somebody else's, because we have the facility and space to accommodate that many, and it could be very specific. You look at that when you're going to one at Heinz Field with all different employers, they're really going down to see what employers can offer that is better than yours. But when it's yours, you've got that audience.

Another participant from a large organization spoke very specifically of the questions she asks of a college before she participates in a job fair, to be sure that the school's degree programs are a match and their marketing of the fair will make it worth her organization's time.

**Developing talented workers through internships**

All but two focus group participants used college students as interns or volunteers. Twelve participants said they have hired interns into full-time positions. The discussion was enthusiastic and overwhelmingly positive. Representative comments include:

> Interns bring a fresh perspective since they're not part of the organizational culture. They can come in and sometimes ask questions or make suggestions that a staff person may not make.

> Overall I've found them to be fantastic, usually a little naïve.
>
> Their attitudes. They're young, fresh, energetic. They want to learn. They want to give. But like I said – they're usually surprised.
>
> They are integral to our overall output and productivity. We work them hard and treat them like staff.
>
> The interns have been able to take the bull by the horns, and it's been really great for us.

Another respondent said internships provide an excellent marketing tool: "It's a great way to get your name out there. Recognition. 'It's a great place to work, the people are wonderful.'"

A participant from a mid-size organization reinforced the idea that interns expand their full-time employment pool:

> We identify most of our clinicians through all of our work with interns and internships. We find that they come woefully unprepared, and some of that is because of our special population. But if we have them a year or a year and a half in intern positions, then that's our place for sifting out who we like, who's really powerful, who fits where we're headed … that's probably where the majority of our staff comes from.

And one participant from a large organization said of her internship program:

> We're trying to build it up actually, because we're looking at it as a way to increase our ability to recruit also for entry-level positions. So we're trying to develop our internships to get it more concrete, and use it as a recruiting tool.

Another respondent said internships provide an opportunity to calibrate his organization's expectations of junior-level staff:

> I think the real issue is a sense of the working world … and particularly, knowing what it means to work in a nonprofit. One of the advantages of having the internships – it has provided an interesting calibration in my own mind as to what I can expect of someone coming out of college. What are my expectations? You've had a couple of good interns and you say, "Okay. I know those folks are out there. So I should be able to expect that."

Complaints with internships focused on capacity issues. One participant said, "I don't have computers and some of the other technology that they need access to to do some of the work that I would want them to do. I don't have the technology." Another said she had trouble finding interns "who can identify their own job" and not require too much management, and a third mentioned the challenge of finding short-term work. Others also expressed limited supervision capacity as an obstacle to working successfully with interns. Even participants from large organizations addressed capacity issues – they use them "if we have somebody who can supervise them." Another was hindered by regulations preventing interns from working in certain functions.

## SURVEY RESEARCH

Kevin Kearns of the University of Pittsburgh recently conducted a survey of 1,600 nonprofit organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA area. The research focused on the role and management capacity-building needs of faith-based human service organizations.



Kearns agreed to incorporate into the survey some questions focused specifically on the

recruitment and retention of young professionals to the nonprofit sector, and organizations' experiences hiring from college campuses in the region. Details on the methods and data sources used for this survey appear in Appendix A (*see p. 70*).

Key findings from the survey relevant to the recruitment and retention of young professionals to the Pittsburgh, PA region's nonprofit sector include:

- While not as critical as fundraising, staffing is a major concern for nonprofit organizations in the region. More than 60% of respondents considered it very or somewhat difficult to retain direct service personnel and volunteers. Just about one-half said the same of clerical support and middle managers.

- Lower salaries are associated with greater difficulty retaining staff.

- Approximately two-thirds of nonprofit organizations in the region use college interns, but only one-third of organizations had participated in a career fair or recruited from regional colleges when they had a full-time entry-level position open.

- Use of interns is significantly correlated to the likelihood that an organization will recruit for full-time staff from a college campus.

- Fewer than one-third of respondents believed they could be more successful in recruiting staff talent if they had better relationships with placement officers or career service centers at the region's colleges. A larger percentage did not think this would help (and more than one-quarter didn't know).

**Staff retention challenges**

While organizations ranked fundraising as their top priority vis-à-vis strengthening their ability to achieve their missions, staffing issues were a major concern for all (the #4 priority for secular nonprofit organizations, and the #3 priority for faith-based nonprofit organizations).

Nearly two-thirds of organizations (64%) said it was very or somewhat difficult to retain direct service personnel, 61% said this of volunteers, 50% said this of clerical and other support personnel, 47% said this of board members, 46% said this of middle managers and supervisors, and 38% said this of top (paid leadership) staff. Staffing is, indeed, a concern.

Researchers investigated whether salary levels were correlated to staff retention challenges. Organizations were asked to rate the salaries of their organizations' paid employees as either lower, about the same, or higher than other organizations' salaries. The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) assessed their salaries as comparable to or lower than those paid at similar organizations; and 80% rated their benefit packages the same way.[37]

With the exception of direct service professionals, organizations that rated their salaries lower than other organizations consistently communicated greater difficulty retaining staff, while organizations that paid salaries comparable to or higher than other organizations felt more strongly that they had no difficulty retaining staff. Retention of direct service professionals was a challenge at all salary levels. In fact, data demonstrate a counterintuitive finding that organizations paying higher salaries were the most likely to characterize retaining direct service personnel as very difficult (*see Table 1*). This may be connected to particularly challenging services delivered by these higher salary-paying organizations.

**Relationships with college campuses: internships, career fairs, and recruitment**

While the majority of organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA region use student interns, their

**TABLE 1** Difficulty in retaining direct service personnel at lower vs. higher salary-paying organizations

| | lower salaries | comparable salaries | higher salaries |
|---|---|---|---|
| very difficult | 15% | 19% | 23% |
| somewhat difficult | 54% | 42% | 35% |
| not difficult at all | 31% | 39% | 42% |
| overall | 100% | 100% | 100% |

N=256 Source: Kearns survey.

connections to college campuses seem to stop there. Approximately two-thirds of area nonprofit organizations (64%) said they had employed a student intern at some point in the past three years. However, only just more than one-third (36%) had participated in a career fair. And fewer than one-third of organizations (32%) said that the last time they had an entry-level vacancy they recruited for it from one or more of the region's colleges.

Organizations that had participated in career fairs were asked to identify at which institutions. The most frequently cited career fairs were at universities with the largest student bodies: the University of Pittsburgh (where 26 organizations had participated in a career fair), Carnegie Mellon University (16), and Duquesne University (12).

Other colleges where organizations had attended career fairs included the Community College of Allegheny County (5 organizations), Chatham College (5), Carlow College (3), Pennsylvania State University (2), Robert Morris University (1), and Slippery Rock University (1).

Organizations that had recruited full-time staff from a college campus were asked to identify from which colleges they had done so. The University of Pittsburgh (mentioned by 68 organizations), Duquesne University (40), and Carnegie Mellon University (32) again were the most frequently cited. Recruitment of full-time staff was also conducted at Carlow College (by 17 organizations), Community College of Allegheny County (17), Robert Morris University (15), Chatham College (9), Slippery Rock University (7), Pennsylvania State University (6), and Waynesburg College (3). Not surprisingly, university size is directly correlated to the number of nonprofit organizations that interact with them on career-related programs.

Organizations that used interns were significantly more likely to recruit for entry-level jobs on college campuses than organizations that did not use interns (*see Table 2*).

**TABLE 2** Organizations' use of interns and recruitment of full-time employees from college campuses

| | do not use student interns | use student interns |
|---|---|---|
| do not recruit from colleges | 75% | 52% |
| do recruit from colleges | 16% | 41% |
| don't know | 9% | 7% |
| overall | 100% | 100% |

N=374 Source: Kearns survey.

Organizations that use interns may build stronger, more personal relationships with regional colleges. Some executive director focus group participants expressed frustration with their ability to

develop meaningful contacts on campuses for recruitment and hiring purposes. Organizations with internship programs in place may already have deeper campus connections, which may in turn facilitate hiring initiatives. In addition, organizations that have used interns may have more positive (and first-hand) opinions of the skills and abilities recent college graduates could offer, through their observation of work done by interns. Indeed, this perspective was communicated by HR and executive directors in the focus groups.

Just about one-third of respondents (33%) felt that they could be more successful in recruiting staff if they had better relationships with placement officers or career service centers at local colleges. A larger percentage of respondents (38%) thought that better relationships would not help their recruitment efforts. A significant percentage (30%) didn't know if this would help. This may reflect organizations' beliefs – frequently mentioned in the focus groups – that recent college graduates do not have the skills their organizations need (particularly for their hardest to retain employees, direct service providers).

**Human resources staffing and college connections**

Only approximately 12% of organizations had a professional human resources (HR) specialist on staff. For the majority of organizations (53%), the executive director handled HR responsibilities. For 16% of organizations, a middle manager or clerical support person handled HR along with other responsibilities.

Organizations with dedicated human resources personnel were more likely to have participated in career fairs than organizations where recruitment was run by executive directors, middle managers, or other staff members with mixed responsibilities (*see Table 3*).

**TABLE 3** **Organizations' participation in career fairs based on person handling human resources**

| | did not participate | did participate | don't know | overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **hr professional** | 20% | 71% | 9% | 100% |
| **executive director** | 68% | 30% | 2% | 100% |
| **middle manager** | 53% | 45% | 2% | 100% |
| **clerical** | 55% | 36% | 9% | 100% |
| **other** | 72% | 26% | 2% | 100% |
| **don't know** | 67% | 33% | 0% | 100% |

N=357 Source: Kearns survey.

Again, this may reflect the capacity issue that so many organizations mention when discussing recruitment efforts.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

In order to attract and retain the most talented and committed next generation of leadership, nonprofit organizations must start with a careful assessment of the structure and responsibilities of various job functions, their work environments, and salaries and benefits packages. Organizations must understand where they can be more competitive … and what factors are out of their hands. Perhaps they can increase salaries and benefits, offer more flexible work schedules, strengthen the organizational culture, provide more professional development opportunities, and create new job opportunities. It's unlikely, however, that they can do much about where they are located (if geography is a factor) or compete for an employee who has decided to go back to graduate school, for example.

Recommendations for the recruitment and retention of talented young workers for nonprofit organizations include:

- Make the job as challenging and rewarding as possible, and give new recruits the tools they need to succeed.
- Review salaries and bring them as close to market rates as possible.
- Be creative with other benefits.
- Professionalize HR activities and collaborate with other organizations.
- Use the Internet to recruit.
- Build internship programs and participate in Federal Work-Study programs.
- Develop relationships with faculty members at area colleges.
- Connect with offices of career services at area colleges.

**Make the job challenging and rewarding. Give recruits the tools they need to succeed.**
While nonprofit organizations are often considered "flat" and offer little room for advancement, with creativity, managers still can nurture talented staff. An organization's leadership might regularly review job descriptions and think carefully about how responsibilities might be expanded, and develop and dedicate available resources to professional development opportunities. The opportunities that an organization does offer its employees should be marketed to new recruits.

In addition, nonprofit sector leadership should be able to talk with employees about (and help nurture) viable career paths – both in their own organizations and the field at large. Leaders might need to show staff that nonprofit sector advancement often follows "spiral" paths (moving across organizations) rather than more traditional "ladder" paths.

Talented recruits also want to know that they will have the resources necessary to perform their responsibilities and be able to succeed. As just one example, the next generation of workers are virtually 100% wired – they expect a minimum level of technology and certain basic communications tools in a professional work environment. As one nonprofit leader said, "It's been tough for me to recruit the best people out there once I tell them we have no email or viable internal communications system." Organizations may need to assess and strengthen their internal capacities and technological environments to attract talent (and in the process may, of course, find great programmatic and administrative benefits as well).

**Review salaries and bring them as close to market rates as possible.**
Data suggest that new recruits might need to adjust their salary expectations, but nonprofit organizations also need to pay salaries that are as close to market rates as they can manage. Nonprofit organizations might conduct an audit of salaries and use both regional and national data to understand exactly how their salaries compare to similar nonprofit and for-profit agencies. Leadership might engage funders and board members in realistic salary discussions and set development goals to raise the funds necessary to bring salaries closer to market rates. As Chieffo *et al.* concluded, young workers need at least a "livable" salary, if not a competitive one.[38]

**Be creative with other benefits.**
Organizations should consider assessing their benefits just as they do their salaries. The extraordinary rise in health insurance costs is affecting many nonprofit organizations and this may be an area where maintaining existing packages (rather than expanding them) is considered a victory. However, organizations might consider the range of other benefits they could offer. Flexible work schedules, telecommuting, job sharing, tuition remission, and classes, for example, are often coveted incentives for the new workforce.

**Professionalize HR activities and collaborate with other organizations.**
Regardless of who handles HR duties, nonprofit organizations need to recognize the time, training, and resources required for successful human resources management. Organizations might assess their past vacancy rates and future growth goals, and plan and budget for recruitment. Smaller organizations will have more trouble with such planning (and will never be able to devote the estimated $4,522 a company spends on average to hire a new employee[39]). But no organization should consider the "unspent salaries" of vacant positions as their recruitment budgets.

Workforce maintenance and development require resources, and even small organizations might try to maintain slush funds for unanticipated recruitment needs. In addition, organizations should try not to let vacancies drag on – this is not a money-saving strategy. In fact, vacancies drain resources, reduce efficiency, and increase the burnout threat for existing staff.

Many smaller organizations with limited capacities have found success in collaborating with other organizations in the HR arena. For example, organizations might consider sharing among themselves the cost of an HR professional. Or, they might team up in order to participate in regional career fairs, rotating among themselves a staff member who can represent all of the organizations in the group.

**When appropriate, use the Internet to recruit.**
While in-person and telephone networking is still critical to finding candidates (and frequently yields much better results than costly newspaper advertisements), technology can enable non-profit organizations to reach a more appropriate and diverse applicant pool, and one that extends beyond the region. Organizations might think strategically about issue-specific, targeted websites appropriate for posting job descriptions (that won't lead to an unmanageable deluge of resumes).

Organizations should invest in the time required to write clear and accurate job descriptions and post the announcements on their own web sites first. They might consider listing the salary and benefits in all postings – this can help weed out inappropriate candidates on the front-end, and save time.

**Build internship programs and participate in Federal Work-Study programs.**
Internship programs allow employers to develop a tested applicant pool for paid positions that become available within their organizations. They allow young people to learn about an organization and develop the passion for its mission that nonprofit sector employers say is so necessary when searching for new recruits. While internship programs require staff time and other organizational capacities, studies continue to reinforce the fact that the benefits to the organization are overwhelmingly positive. Although many students will accept unpaid internships, organizations should make every effort to professionalize these programs and pay for labor received, even if only through nominal stipends.

Federal Work-Study (FWS) programs are an untapped but golden resource available to many nonprofit organizations and public agencies. The programs enable eligible agencies to hire college students on financial aid and with an FWS allocation, with significant subsidies from the government. The federal government has always recommended that colleges allow FWS students to work off-campus in community service positions. Currently, schools are required to spend 7% of their total allocation on such positions.

Schools may require off-campus employers to contribute up to 25% of the wages (although some schools fully subsidize them) and there may be some restrictions on the type of work a student can perform. Typically, organizations are expected to provide a detailed job description, necessary

training and supervision, and monthly time slips for the appropriate office at the sponsoring college. FWS programs are managed by different departments on different campuses – organizations interested in participating might start at a college's office of financial aid or career services.

**Develop relationships with faculty members at area colleges.**
Faculty members are a vital resource to college seniors seeking career advice. They also represent powerful connections to colleges and universities for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations should identify appropriate faculty members and college department heads, explore speaking engagements, and collaborate on campus programs. Professors of public policy and nonprofit management frequently look for team projects and case studies for their students – nonprofit organizations' program directors might make their organizations available to them. Organizations are likely to find very real programmatic (and often fundraising) benefits in these relationships, as well as set the stage for future recruitment partnerships.

**Connect with offices of career services.**
Recent college graduates can bring tremendous talent to organizations and fear of turnover should not be the reason an organization chooses not to train them. Offices of career services (OCS) can help identify skilled young workers who have appropriate academic and work experience, and these offices are often hungry for deeper relationships with nonprofit organizations in their regions. If capacity is limited, organizations might identify just a few schools that offer programs relevant to their missions and, to begin with, work with only those career centers.

Offices of career services appreciate knowing about all of an organization's open positions, not just entry-level ones. OCS directors often don't know about the better paying positions in the nonprofit sector (or even believe they exist). By letting OCS know about jobs that might be more appropriate for graduate students or the more experienced alumni they work with, an organization will deepen its relationship with the office.

It can be beneficial to attend career fairs even if an organization feels strapped for time and resources, or may not have a position currently open. While it's best to attend when positions are available, organizations can participate to build awareness and lay the groundwork for future recruitment needs. As mentioned earlier, partnering with other nonprofit organizations for joint representation reduces the time and financial burdens of career fair participation for any one organization.

# college seniors

"I think that having work that matters is incredibly important. You're helping people and that sort of thing. Initially, I'm not going to be doing that. My initial work is going to be to make the money so hopefully I can do that later on." – COLLEGE SENIOR

# college seniors

## OVERVIEW

This research project focused specifically on traditional college seniors as its target population of potential "new recruits" to the nonprofit sector. For background, we review recent literature that analyzes this Millennial Generation of people born in 1982 and later. Our study's qualitative data are drawn from three focus groups with seniors from Pittsburgh, PA area colleges and universities. Participants discussed their thoughts on public service; perceptions of nonprofit, government, and for-profit sector careers and employees; and experiences with various career counseling resources. We then review quantitative data from a national telephone survey of college seniors that explored similar questions. We conclude with preliminary recommendations for college seniors interested in nonprofit sector careers.

## BACKGROUND

Demographers Neil Howe and William Strauss believe the Millennial Generation – the young adults who begin graduating from college in 2004 – are markedly different from the Gen X'ers who preceded them. They write, "Millennials love group work, cooperative activities like volunteer service, and participation in something larger than the individual."[40]

When contemplating Millennials, Howe and Strauss stress that researchers and practitioners must also consider this new generation's "helicopter parents, always hovering – ultra protective, unwilling to let go."[41] The parents will be key players in their children's interactions with career services and career decisions more broadly, and the stakes will be high:

> The first job after college will represent, to the Millennials and their parents, the initial payoff for all the planning, stress, and shared ambition that will have gone in to these students' first 22 years. Brace once again for the "helicopter parent" … this means that college career counselors will have more people looking over their shoulders, and feel more pressure to achieve results than ever before. Because expectations will have been so high for so long, the odds will seem stacked against the job placement process.[42]

With their parents, Millennials have "co-purchased" brands, colleges, and now careers.

Although a few years older than true Millennials, a 2001 Harris Poll of college seniors on more than 100 campuses nationwide offers an important snapshot of the next generation of workers:

- Sixty percent of seniors planned to enter the workforce immediately (up by 13% from 1997), 34% said they will continue their education (down by 8%), and 14% will take time off to travel or relax (up by 7%). Teaching was the leading career plan (for 18% of respondents), followed closely by business or marketing (14%), and engineering (8%).

■ The first job is an important one: 63% believed it is very likely that it will be in their career field.

■ Once again, data support the notion that the type of work, not its pay, motivates young people. Nearly two-thirds of college seniors (63%) said that doing work that allows them to have an impact on the world was very important (and 97% said it was very or somewhat important). Other very important qualities included: doing work that requires creativity (57%), inspiring colleagues (52%), flexible working hours (43%), and having a lot of responsibility (40%). Earning a high salary came in ninth, with only 15% of college seniors saying this was very important.

■ However, college seniors are also concerned about loans and debt: 44% said that they worry a lot about reducing financial debt.

■ Seniors have realistic salary expectations: one-third expected their first salary to be $20,001 to $30,000, and just more than one-quarter (27%) believed it would be $30,001 to $40,000.

■ College seniors are wired: 100% said they are connected to the Internet and 80% said they use it often as their source for news and information (significantly higher than radio, television, newspapers, or magazines).

■ College seniors use the Internet for job searching: for example, more than one-half (54%) had visited the monster.com website.[43]

Based on these findings, it is evident that college seniors care about finding meaningful, creative work with flexibility and responsibility. They say they are less interested in salaries, although they do worry about student loans and other debt. And they appear to have relatively realistic salary expectations.

**Gender differences**

Significant gender differences vis-à-vis public service and career perspectives exist within this population of young adults. A 2002 survey of young adults age 15 to 25 conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates found, for example, that college-educated women are more active in community leadership than men: 73% of college women joined an organization that is not political and 53% volunteered in the community, compared to 47% and 35%, respectively, among college men.[44]

Jerry Jacobs's survey of members of the class of 1999 found that "female college students expect to earn far less than their male classmates." When they're 30, the average male college senior expected to be earning $61,852, and the average female student $44,609 (a gender gap in earnings of .721 that is consistent with national data).[45] While both men and women in Jacob's survey ranked having an interesting job as their most important career decision, he found that:

> Men continue to express a greater interest in earning a high income (along with preference for more leisure), while women report a greater commitment to helping people. There were no gender differences attached to opportunities to advance, job security, working independently, having responsibility, contact with people, or having a respected position.

More than one-half of male respondents (51%) said a high income was important, versus only 40% of women.

These gender disparities in earnings expectations merit attention. Women comprise 71% of all paid employees in the nonprofit sector (as compared to their 46% share of employment in all sectors of the economy).46 (In addition, the sector has a higher proportion of African Americans and a smaller proportion of Hispanics than other sectors.) And yet, numerous studies show that women face particularly acute salary discrimination in nonprofit organizations (an issue raised a number of times by our focus group participants). While this issue is critical and relevant to the recruitment and retention of young professionals to the nonprofit sector, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

**Student debt**

College costs are rising fast and students are graduating from college with escalating levels of debt. A recent study by the Nellie Mae Corporation[47] found that the average undergraduate student loan debt was $18,900, up 66% since 1997 (students attending private four-year colleges borrowed on average $21,200 and those attending public colleges $17,100). Graduate school loans added an additional $31,700 of debt, on average. The study found that the typical borrower devotes 8% of monthly income to debt repayment. Although interest rates remain low, wage growth has also stalled, and borrowers say they feel increasingly burdened by their debt. One-quarter of respondents in the Nellie Mae study characterize themselves as having significant debt problems.

Economists and demographers are beginning to explore whether higher debt among younger workers leads to delays in buying homes and starting families. Likewise, employers – especially nonprofit sector and government employers – are beginning to explore the connection between student debt and career choices. The Nellie Mae study found that only 17% of borrowers said student loans did not have a significant impact on their career plans. As economist Heather Boushey writes:

> At no point in recent history have we required young people to shoulder so much of the burden of their post-secondary education through a lien on their future wages. At the same time, young people need a college degree more than ever to enable them to find a job at a decent wage. Whether or not that wage will cover their living expenses and their loan burdens is, however, another question. For many, rising loan burdens will mean abandoning their first career choice or graduate school in favor of a more financial stability.[48]

Other important recent studies have addressed the rising costs of graduate education and its affect on career choices. For example, NYU School of Law professor Lewis Kornhauser is currently working on a longitudinal study of law school debt (which is currently a median of more than $84,000) and career choices. Preliminary results indicate that debt inhibited 66% of law school students from considering a public interest or government job, despite significant interest in these positions.[49]

The nonprofit sector must ensure that talented young workers committed to public service do not abandon their career aspirations because of student debt. The young professionals who choose the nonprofit sector must be able to pay off their loans in a reasonable time period. The issue

warrants attention from nonprofit sector researchers, the leadership making salary decisions within organizations, and members of the philanthropic community dedicated to strengthening the sector and its workforce.

## FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

To gather information on how young people make career decisions and think about the nonprofit sector, researchers held three focus groups with seniors from four-year colleges and universities in the Pittsburgh, PA area. The discussions focused on students' attitudes towards public service; perceptions of nonprofit, government, and for-profit jobs; and experiences with internships, volunteering, and nonprofit sector employer recruitment and job placement activities on college campuses. Details on the methods and data sources used for these focus groups appear in Appendix B (*see p. 71*).

Some of the significant findings that emerged from these conversations with college seniors include:

- The pressure to repay college loans led many students to rank salary as one of their most important factors when pursuing their first full-time jobs. The mission of the organization, flexibility, and opportunities for advancement were other very critical factors.

- Nearly one-half of students want to take "time off" after graduation. For them, this means traveling and gaining work experience before returning to graduate school.

- Those students who volunteered or held internships at nonprofit organizations had a clearer perception of how these organizations operate, and their experiences strongly influenced their feelings about the sector, both favorably and unfavorably.

- Both "for a change" and because they believed that there are more job opportunities elsewhere, the vast majority of students planned to leave the Pittsburgh, PA region.

- Students primarily view jobs in two categories: for-profit companies and "everything else," including nonprofit organizations and the government. They do not consciously seek work in one sector or another. Rather, they measure potential employers and careers based on the nature of the work and other factors.

- While participants described a stereotypical nonprofit sector employee much more favorably than a for-profit company or government employee, the majority of participants were targeting the for-profit sector for employment.

- Students perceive careers services offices mainly as places to review job listings and receive resume, cover letter, and interviewing tips. They felt that other career-related services were inadequate or simply unavailable through these offices.

- Students turn to academic faculty before career services counselors or parents for advice about employment.

- Almost all participants had attended career fairs, but they generally agreed that fairs offered little to advance their job searches. Many students said the companies at the fairs frequently were not hiring.

### All I want: meaningful work and money

The nature of work and money were the leading job qualities sought by focus group participants. When discussing the nature of work, almost all participants were concerned about room for

advancement and opportunity, the majority spoke of flexibility, and significant numbers spoke of the desire to find work that helps people.

While paying back student loans was extraordinarily important to all students (and is discussed in greater detail below), students spent more time and energy talking about the importance of "having work that matters." One said:

> The money is important, but it's not as important as doing what I really want, because I don't want to be miserable and go to work every day like, "I hate this but I'm making this much money, but I still hate it."

Participants said they are looking for "interesting" work and "jobs that are related to what I want to do." Many stressed the need to gain experience before graduate school. One participant said, "I'm planning on going to grad school eventually, so I'm looking for a stepping stone job doing research somewhere that will improve my credentials." Another said, "I'm tired of the academic thing right now. I definitely want to get some working experience before I think about going to school or law school or whatever it may be after this."

Others said they would look specifically at the mission of an organization. Students said they wanted to find "an organization that I want to work with, that I want to grow with" and "an organization that helps people." One said, "I need a job where I know I am making a difference. I know that every day I wake up, that I want to do this." However, one participant said, "I don't want an organization that is necessarily out to help people but I don't want to be in an organization that's hurting people. That's more of a focus for me."

In addition, some students said they cared about the pace and challenge of the work environment. One participant said it was important to have "a dynamic work environment that's not like everyday you come in, sit down, and plug in stuff." In another group, a student said, "I'd like to have a job that I enjoy, not something that is mundane, like 'same old, same old' every day." A handful of participants said jobs with travel would help keep them engaged. One said, "For me, I tend to get a little bored with doing things over and over again. So I think traveling would spice up the job a little bit, pull up some more opportunities."

A number of participants desired a diverse work environment. For example, one student stressed she wanted "to deal with people from other cultures on a daily basis." Another emphasized freedom, saying, "[I don't] want a boss breathing down my neck." Freedom was linked to flexibility for many. When asked towards the close of one group which sector students would consider working in, one student returned to this concept:

> I want whatever is going to give me the most flexibility, because there are other things that are more important to me than career. Although career is up there, family is also up there too. So something that's going to give me flexibility to do that.

Paying back student loans was a major concern for all ten participants in each of two groups, and the majority of participants in the third group. The majority of participants were highly motivated to make early career decisions with money in mind to pay off debt and get to a certain financial level. One student commented:

> I just want to be able to pay my bills … It's not like "I want to make money." I want to be able to pay my loans.

Another participant indicated that his early career decisions were informed by salary, but he hoped his later ones wouldn't be:

> I think that having work that matters is incredibly important. You're helping people and that sort of thing. Initially, I'm not going to be doing that. My initial work is going to be to make the money so hopefully I can do that later on.

These data contrast somewhat to findings from a survey of college seniors conducted by Paul Light (discussed on p. 44). Light found that "the nature of the job, not the size of the paycheck, is still the most important consideration in making a decision about where to work."[50] While focus group participants spoke passionately about the nature of work – and a number of particularly important attributes within that framework – there was perhaps more uniformity in the critical role loan repayment would play in their work choices.

**Plans for the near future: "time off" and "travel"**

Students in each group spoke mostly in generalities when describing their future plans. Many said they wanted "time off" – which actually tended to mean working (and sometimes travel), as they wanted "time off" from school. "It's to rest my mind," said one participant of the concept. Another said:

> I have to pay off some money on my loans, but also I just need a break. My senior year has been so hectic. I'm doing two different internships. We have so many things going on. I don't want to go from school to school. I want to have a break. And I want to get some experience.

Other participants reinforced this need for experience. One student said, "a lot of the jobs that I'm seeking require a minimum of two years experience, sometimes a minimum of five years." These students were eager to land a position to build the credentials they understood they needed to pursue their career goals.

Only approximately one-third of the participants felt very clear about their next moves or already had job offers. More than one-half of the students (16 of the 26) planned to go to graduate school in the near future, which perhaps contributed to their lack of concern about first jobs after graduation. However, those students who anticipated they would pursue advanced degrees were often unclear about what they would study. One student said:

> For me it's important to work for a few years before I go back for a Master's. Because I need to figure out exactly what I want out of my Master's, and I don't even know what program I'm interested in right now.

Half of the participants expressed a desire to travel, either as part of their work (as mentioned above) or as a change from the life of studying. One participant said:

> I think that travel gives you so many more opportunities, not just for career advancement but for personal fulfillment. There are so many other countries out there that need programs, that need people, and I think that – whether you work for a nonprofit, a government, or a for-profit organization – anything you can bring to another culture will not only enhance them but enhance you. That's why I personally want to travel with my career.

**The influence of volunteering and interning on career choices**

The majority of focus group participants in each group had volunteered or interned while in college: 20 students (77%) had volunteered and 13 (50%) had interned at a nonprofit organization.

Many of the participants who responded the most quickly to volunteering questions began their answers with, "It's required where I go to school." The participants were split on whether volunteering should be mandatory or optional. Those who supported the idea felt that young people often couldn't appreciate the value of it, but in the long run would be happy that they had been "forced" do it. Others felt that, by definition, a person should want to volunteer.

Paul Light's college senior survey found that seniors who had volunteered in the nonprofit or public service sectors were "much more interested in taking a job in public service than those who had not." In fact, Light notes that, "85 percent of seniors who had volunteered, interned or worked in government said they had very or somewhat seriously considered a public service job."[51] Similarly, a number of focus group participants who had first-hand nonprofit experience felt more motivated to seek employment where they could "make a difference." One student said, "I think that because I've worked in nonprofits for all my internships, that is where I want to be." Another said:

> I volunteered for a court program … I loved doing it so that's what made me want to get into something where I know I am going to help somebody … and just to be able to see the look on somebody's face and know that you're having an impact on their life and you're helping them. That just made me feel really, really good.

For one participant, an internship had led directly to a full-time position.

Volunteer and internship experiences, however, made some students increasingly wary of the "low pay" (and, again, the student loan burden). One noted:

> For me, having worked at nonprofits and volunteered at nonprofits and seeing how much they make, I know that's not where I want to end up first … The director of the nonprofit makes a pretty good amount, but everyone else … very, very, very small amounts of money. Especially coming right out of law school, I'm going to have $100,000 in loans and they want me to start paying them back immediately.

For another participant, her experiences had already led to burnout in the sector: "I used to work with children. I worked with children for three years. I'm childrened out now."

**Pittsburgh, PA perspectives: the urge for going**

Only a handful of the participants (six of 26) said they plan to stay and work in the Pittsburgh, PA area after graduation, with many more saying that they would like to relocate to New York, Chicago, or Washington, DC. However, in one group, seven of 10 participants said they would stay if they thought there were opportunities.

A general attitude emerged that it is "difficult to find a job" and there is a "lack of opportunity" in Pittsburgh, PA. Students said their friends in other regions secure more job interviews and actual offers. One said, "I'm trying to stay here and it is difficult to find a job in Pittsburgh. There are plenty of opportunities in places like DC." And one participant said that guidance counselors and advisors tell students that "the jobs that we're being educated for are not here." Another student summed up her frustration by saying, "There's nothing wrong with Pittsburgh. All my family is here. Everything is here for me … except for a job."

The discussions revealed that while many of the participants voiced concern that there are not enough "good jobs" in the Pittsburgh, PA area, few had looked themselves and experienced rejection or lack of opportunity first-hand. One person commented, "It's the job market. It's horrible." But another countered, "But it's horrible everywhere." In another group, a participant said, "Pittsburgh always seems to get hit harder by recession."

A number of students who said they wanted to leave the area said they also were motivated by a desire "for change," as they were from Pittsburgh, PA originally or felt that had spent enough time in school in the region. One said, "I just want to go somewhere else for a while. I wouldn't be against coming back."

**Defining public service**

When asked what "public service" meant, participants in two groups immediately answered "policemen and firemen," followed quickly by "government." One said, "When I think of public service, I think when you're working for the government, you're working for the country, so you're serving the public." Another said:

> I think government as a whole, not just the military, is a big public service. Because none of us know half the things the government does. I didn't even know that they helped with exports and all this stuff they do for businesses. Exporting to increase company's profits.

And another said, "my grandfather always talked about being a civil servant and public service. That's what it meant in my mind."

In another group, a male student said:

> I think in public service there's civil service, which is a part of public service, but public service goes beyond a civil service position, which could be social workers, police and firemen, armed forces. And any time I think of public service, I think of somebody that's trading on the income value of the job for more job satisfaction, or non-monetary benefits of working. Somebody who wants to get more out of their job than the dollar.

A number of students mentioned public utilities. One said:

> I'm not sure what the definition of public service actually is. But I sort of think about anything that the public depends on. Like either for profit or not. Like even a power company is for profit, but they just can't turn themselves off if it's not making money. So because they're doing a public service they have a responsibility.

Voting, contributing money to charity, and volunteering were not freely associated with public service. When asked directly by the moderator, students debated the associations but were vague in their responses and at least did not think these activities fell obviously under the rubric of public service.

One student said of public service, "I think nonprofit. Any type of organization that helps to better or service the public." Another student said, "I think of … public officials. That was one of the first things that came to my mind." But when asked if running for public office was public service, the majority of respondents said no. One said:

> I look at it as personal gain. I see a negative connotation with it. I look at it more as competition, not necessarily serving the public, but "I want to do this for me, I want to be in this office, I want to have this status."

In Paul Light's recent survey of college seniors (discussed on p. 44), respondents described their understanding of the meaning of "public service." Interestingly, 58% felt working for a nonprofit organization was completely a form of public service, versus 28% saying the same about working for government. But, consistent with focus group data, no one mentioned running for office or

other forms of political work as public service.[52] The responses were consistent across gender, age, political affiliation, and those with high levels of debt and none at all.[53]

**Perceptions of the government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors**

| | |
|---|---|
| "Which sector provides the most stability?" | "Government!" |
| "Which sector offers the most money?" | "Corporate!" |
| "Which sector does the most good for people?" | "Nonprofit!" |

In background telephone interviews in advance of the focus groups, approximately one-quarter of students (23%) said they were most likely to work first in the for-profit sector, the same number indicated government (23%), three (12%) were undecided between government and nonprofit, 10 (39%) said nonprofit, and one was completely undecided. Seven students (27%) ranked government as their last choice, seven (27%) ranked for-profits last, and three (12%) ranked nonprofits last. When asked later in the background interview: "Are you very interested in nonprofit sector careers?," 16 students (62%) responded affirmatively.

During the actual focus groups, participants generally agreed that they viewed their future employment opportunities as falling into one of two categories: the for-profit/corporate sector and "everything else." One student explained that this was because she was more interested in the issue-area of the work, not the type of organization conducting it. (This is consistent with the way career services directors spoke about how they approach careers – focusing more on the work rather than the sector.) When pressed, however, all participants had definite perceptions of the three sectors and those who work in them.

#### GOVERNMENT

While a number of students acknowledged the influence of government contracts and that many nonprofits are subsidized by the government (e.g., "Well, in terms of what I'm looking for, I just think it's whether the government owns the organization or not. I guess I don't really understand a lot about the differences."), those who distinguished between government jobs and other sectors did so, almost entirely, to exclude it. One participant said:

> I don't know, I kind of like having government separate because I really don't want to work for the government … I am sure there are some nonprofits that are funded by the government, but that's not government. And I think it's nice to put that little difference in there.

Another said:

> Anything that has to do with government has to do with politics, and anything that has to do with politics has to do with money or control. So, if you have a government position, your job is based on politics and whether or not someone thinks what you're doing is worthwhile. And that could change next year or in a few years … I'm kind of bitter on government.

A few participants, however, pointed out that there's great diversity within government, and, "it depends on what branch of the government you're talking about." One student said, "I can see some government agencies where I picture what a nonprofit agency to be. More laid back and you're working for a different cause." Another participant said:

> I worked at [a federal agency], and I was shocked that it was a government agency. Just because it was pretty liberal, I thought. Granted it was a public information office, but there were a lot of younger workers there, although there was one middle aged man at the head, of course.

Another concurred:

> I was shocked that there were so many different government jobs. Especially when I was in DC, I realized there were just so many different places to get into the government that I just never thought of. Because without knowing it, being in Pittsburgh, I'm not open to that, I equate state government with politics … There are a lot of different places where you can get in, in the government, and not even know it.

However, participants were quick to point out some strengths of working in government. One said, "You get all these great benefits. I see it as being more stable. Like if the economy goes bad, corporations will lay people off, but the government seems a little bit more stable." Another concurred, saying, "Government is going to go on."

But the price you pay for such a job is "it's very structured and rigid," said one participant. Another said, "I don't think I'll ever work for the government, because I've seen the conformity that goes on." And a third said:

> You kind of lose a little bit more of your freedom. If you're higher up, you can make decisions … but at an entry-level, you're pushing someone else's agenda. Within a nongovernmental, I feel I'd have some breathing space to create programs, to do what I want to do, to get out there and be a rebel.

A male participant said:

> When I think of government jobs, it's like I'm signing my life over to them in a way. I just have that perception for some reason, like everything I do is watched or something.

Others said that they just don't understand much about what qualifies a person to work for the government, but they felt that such jobs would be very stable. One said:

> I didn't know that I was even qualified for a government job until I talked with somebody, and she was a case worker. She said you only have to have a Bachelor's degree, and that it was such a great job, and she loved it. She encouraged me to apply. So I just did.

**NONPROFIT**

Except for the pay, the nonprofit sector was perceived very favorably by the overwhelming majority of focus groups participants – from the work it conducts to the people executing it.

Participants characterized people who work in the nonprofit sector as:

> friendly ◆ younger ◆ not in it for themselves or money ◆ really want to reach out and help others ◆ free-spirited ◆ women ◆ open-minded ◆ patient ◆ hardworking ◆ more relaxed because they're not looking at the bottom line all the time ◆ passionate about the work that they do

Students thought nonprofit workers tended to have "more liberal politics" and "higher job satisfaction" and can "work outside of government controls or limits or restraints."

While one group did not associate a particular gender with work at nonprofit organizations, the other two groups felt women dominated the sector. One female participant said:

> I always thought that nonprofits were an arena for women who couldn't get corporate degrees, because it was always just very, very open to women with great fundraising and networking skills. I always thought, to be at a nonprofit you have to be good on your feet, good at marketing your

> organization. I thought that at any nonprofit you have to be a real go-getter. And I think you have to be ideological. You have to be able to see the big picture and not be limited by what is realistic or pessimistic. I think that's kind of the idea I had about nonprofits.

Another woman participant said her stereotype, which has since changed, was that:

> People who deal with nonprofit organizations would typically be middle-aged, older women and they would be doing it for something extra to do, more for some kind of fulfillment … And that's not true at all … Some of the most intelligent people and the most serious people and the most motivated people are in charge of nonprofit organizations, and I feel like such a jerk for ever thinking that way.

One participant with first-hand nonprofit sector experience said:

> I am working in a nonprofit right now, so I think of everyone there, and it's just the most fun office. And everyone's there because they want to be there, so it's a really friendly working environment. Everyone gets along really well, and they have the same passion and mission in mind.

The only negative comments about the sector (aside from salaries) emerged in the one group that had a number of international students and participants who seemed generally more aware of the sector. Two of these students distinguished between small and large nonprofits and the problems they saw with excessive growth. One said of government and nonprofit organizations:

> I think they both have this same disadvantage – sometimes they both just get too big. And I agree with [my colleague] – she thinks grassroots organizations that stay small are the best way to deal with it. Big not-for-profits – like the museums and universities and things that definitely have an agenda – they really don't let you have as much personal freedom as you think.

Another said when nonprofit organizations "become big, they start to have a huge budget and start to waste funds … That's why I usually like people who are working directly with the people. Then I feel like they are doing something." When funds are wasted, commitment to mission might change. One student said:

> But my perception of not-for-profits changed dramatically after working for a not-for-profit, because it seems that there's a shift in the not-for-profits that some are really becoming "for profit not-for-profits."

Although students didn't volunteer their perspective on salaries and nonprofits, when asked, they all shouted, "Low!" This appeared to be based on their perceptions, first-hand experiences, and what they had been told by professionals. One student said:

> When I think about it straight off the bat, I will think, "Okay. I'm only going to get paid a little bit." I remember being a sophomore … and someone coming from [a career services association]. And she just said, "Oh – nonprofit. You're not going to be paid anything."

Another participant said, "I think of someone really not being paid a lot but doing a lot of work." Only one person countered, saying:

> But I just heard my boss say the other day that his wife doesn't have to work because he's making enough there that she doesn't have to … And he's president of a nonprofit organization.

#### FOR-PROFIT

The attributes associated with people who work at for-profit organizations were rather negative.

Students characterized them as:

> hungrier ◆ looking for more advancement ◆ conservative ◆ greedy ◆ clean cut ◆ business suit ◆ extraordinarily motivated ◆ they just want to make as much money as possible ◆ looking to make a name for yourself ◆ you're looking to be noticed ◆ [interested in] power and status

One said, "I think about Enron." A few said they would never work for corporate America. One said, "Any experience I had working for the corporate America thing – it was horrible to me." Another said, "I think of sitting at a desk and all those boring, tedious things, and never being appreciated for it."

While a great deal of anti-corporate America banter emerged, not all students agreed. One female student interrupted the conversation to say, "It's not that bad." And a male student quickly followed to say, "No, it's not, and I look forward to it. And I don't think I'd – I can't say that I'd never work in nonprofit, but it's definitely last on my list."

Another student reiterated that career choices in the shorter term were connected to loan repayment, and as such, she didn't rule out a for-profit sector job:

> I think I could be in any of those three [sectors]. I don't know, maybe I'm idealist, but I do feel I could work for government and be the pain in their butt. Like the World Bank or the INS. In 10 years. I still have to pay my loans, so that's going to be an important factor, for the fact that I just want to get it over with. If I can get a job that can get me paid up quicker, so that I can do what I really want to do, then yeah.

**Job-hopping**

When asked which sector they predicted they would be working for in 10 years, students split between for-profit and nonprofit, with no one clearly choosing government (and many clearly avoiding it: "I definitely don't see myself working for the government.").

However, each group discussed the tendency for professionals to change jobs frequently during the course of a career. One student said, "I've already had 10 jobs. It's not like I ever got fired. But I would just stay for the summer and then do something else." A male student said:

> I think a lot of it has to do with just the type of age we're in. Our generation … we have convictions, but we just seem to move around a lot. All my teachers, all my professors keep telling me that you'll have seven to 10 different jobs. You just don't stay in that one career path anymore. You jump around.

Another student attributed job-changing to the lack of job security more broadly. When asked how long he thought he'd stay in a position, he said:

> Yeah, I have some sort of happy medium between long career and job-hopping. You hear a lot these days about in corporate America, you have a job for two years, there's no security, there's no loyalty. And I think that there's somewhere in between; like maybe five years for a job … Get a job without thinking, "This is a two year job."

**Assessments of college career services**

The majority of focus group participants had direct experience with their campus office of career services (OCS) – eight of 10 participants and seven of eight participants in the two groups that were directly polled. (In part, this surely is due to the fact that much of the recruitment for focus

group participants came through directors of OCS.) The respondents expressed a range of opinions about the services these offices provide.

The majority of participants commented that the offices were helpful for preparing resumes and cover letters, practicing interviewing techniques, and finding job and internship listings … and the majority said these were the only helpful services provided. One participant said career services staff were "discouraging." Another said these offices offer some resources, but job searching requires great initiative: "I'm sure [career centers are] good for some people. But a lot of it, you're going to have to do it on your own." "I have never really felt comfortable going to career services," said one woman. "I never really felt that they knew my personality or know who I really am and what I want," she continued.

Another agreed, saying of job hunting, "It's just all done on my own. The career services, it's just one person." On occasion, some offices don't even have that level of staffing: one participant said his OCS was impersonal and was currently completely without staff. He said:

> It had limited uses. [The director] would post offers that came through. But she didn't do much to help you match yourself up with that stack of jobs. She just kind of pointed to it, and said these are people who have contacted the university. And she left, which means there is really no one there now.

Students drew particular attention to career services' limited use for finding permanent opportunities and those outside of the region. One participant said, "My career services told me 'good luck!' if I wanted to move outside of Pittsburgh." Another said:

> Our career center, it helps you while you're in college. But as far as opportunities after college – our on-line postings are like: "I need a nanny on Tuesdays" and "This ice-cream store has an opening." And then you click on it, and it was posted August 22nd and it's now March 18th.

However, not everyone agreed. Students from one small, private college said they received tremendous personal attention, networking opportunities, and meaningful advice from their OCS. One student acknowledged this was probably due, in part, to her school's size:

> I think [our college] is able to do it because we have such a small student body. I mean, you know all your professors by name I'm sure … And it's the same with our career services advisor. She knows all of us by name and characteristics of each of her students.

In addition, another participant from this same school said, "And we have a good alumni office." The alumni office worked closely with OCS, to add to networking and other professional development opportunities. Students from other schools seemed surprised by this. One said:

> I don't even know if our alumni services … does anything besides raise money for sports teams. I've never heard of them doing anything besides that so I'm impressed that you know what your alumni services department adds to your college education.

However, not all positive OCS experiences came from small college participants. One participant from a large public institution called her experiences with career services "extremely helpful." She said:

> I just didn't know where to start with job searches and she pointed me in the direction of where to start looking, websites that give you all the information about job choices and the salary and how long they have been around, if it's growing fast, that field. So I thought it was really helpful.

When asked what services they feel their campus career centers could provide or improve, students mentioned the need for more personal relationships with students; stronger alumni networks; more information about jobs and cities beyond their college's region; more current, long-term, and career-focused job postings; and data to be able to formulate appropriate salary expectations.

**Networking and faculty connections**

The majority of focus group participants spoke of the benefits of networking, "shadowing" at companies, and, especially, the positive role faculty members and academic departments have played in career guidance and developing connections. Students said professors often have worked in students' chosen fields and have more first-hand experiences and connections.

One participant said, "My professors have actually been wonderful, they've probably been the most helpful of any resource." Another said, "I think professors have more connections than the career services themselves. Especially if they're in your major, and you talk to them." And a third clarified:

> I agree. Professors. I don't know if they have more connections, but they have the right connections. Career centers have email addresses, websites, and phone numbers for the PR departments of companies.

Professors also offer moral support, tell people "what to expect," encourage them not to feel badly if they accept a job for a lower-than-expected salary in order to get a few years of experience, and give candid feedback about the "real world."[54]

Surprisingly (given that national survey data suggest otherwise), only a few students in each group said they turned to their parents for advice (e.g., 40% in one group, none in another group). Those who did seemed to be pursing careers in an area where a parent had worked. Several joked that their parents don't remember their children's areas of study, so they could offer little career guidance.

**Career fairs**

Generally, career fairs were not rated highly. In one focus group, six of 10 participants had been to career fairs, five of whom characterized them as basically unhelpful except for finding internships and volunteer opportunities. One student commented that fairs are oriented towards business and technology jobs, and less towards careers in education and research. In addition, many participants plan to relocate, and career fairs mostly featured local companies.

One participant said fairs help raise awareness: "I found the job fairs to be helpful in learning about different companies, but not really helpful in my particular job search." Another commented:

> Fairs get you in a relaxed interview situation … they get you talking and asking the right questions. It's just good experience from that standpoint. But I've never gotten an interview or a job from a job fair.

Another participant concurred:

> I'm not a big fan of career fairs … I don't feel like they are very personal and I kind of feel like they're cattle herding … I just feel like you don't really have a face or a name or anything, it's just this piece of paper that you hand to them. I'd rather use networking or approach the company directly, instead of going to a job fair and being one of hundreds or thousands.

In sum, students' attitudes are that at career fairs, "They're accepting resumes, but they aren't hiring."

## SURVEY RESEARCH

Paul Light of New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and The Brookings Institution recently conducted a national telephone survey of "College Seniors and Public Service," discussed in the report *In Search of Public Service*. Details on the methods and data sources used for Light's survey appear in Appendix B (*see p. 71*).

While Light's study was an independent research effort, Light agreed to include questions in his survey on this project's behalf. Key findings from the survey relevant to attracting young people to careers in the nonprofit sector include:

- College seniors care more about finding meaningful work and being able to help people than they do about high salaries. However, benefits, job security, and repaying loans are important to most college seniors surveyed.

- Young people associate public service with the work of the nonprofit sector. They think this sector spends money the most wisely, does the most to help people, and, as a place of employment, would bring with it the most respect. Government runs a distant second.

- Although the majority of college seniors would consider a public service job – especially one in the nonprofit sector – most said they knew not too much or nothing at all about finding such a job.

- College career counselors were the least likely to be called very helpful sources of career advice for students.

### Work-related values

When asked what they value in a job, more than 50% of seniors ranked the following qualities as very important considerations:

- opportunity to help people
- benefits
- opportunity to do challenging work
- opportunity to learn new skills
- job security
- opportunity for advancement

However, more than 80% of seniors gave a top-two-box rating (very or somewhat important) to all of the job characteristics listed (except opportunity to repay college loans). So, for example, although only 30% of seniors said salary was very important, 58% said it was somewhat important, meaning 88% gave it a top-two-box rating. As such, some of the differences in rankings are subtle.

In summarizing his findings, Light said, "Young Americans are not saying, 'Show us the money.' In our surveys, what they're saying is, 'Show us the job.' They put the highest value on making a difference in the work they do. They put a very high value on the chance to learn new skills and the opportunity to do challenging work."[55]

Seniors also emphasized the importance of benefits and job security, although Light points out that his findings "suggest that all three sectors are dealing with a highly mobile workforce"[56]: 39% of seniors said that a person should stay with any given employer less than five years. (It appears young people want job security, but are not prone to offer much loyalty in return.)

Light notes, "Seniors who preferred a public service job in the nonprofit sector were significantly

less likely than their peers who preferred jobs in government or contractors to emphasize the opportunity for advancement or job security."[57]

Forty-three percent (43%) of seniors said the opportunity to repay college loans, and 30% said salary, were very important considerations.

**Rating the sectors**

The "College Seniors and Public Service" survey paid particular attention to young people's perceptions of the nonprofit sector, government, and private contractors providing services to government in terms of how well they help people, spend money, and make decisions. Data collected offer strong support that young people associate public service with the nonprofit sector, and that they think this sector spends money the most wisely, does the most to help people, and, as a place of employment, would bring with it the most respect. Government runs a distant second *(see Table 4)*.

**TABLE 4** **College seniors' views of government versus the nonprofit sector**

| | best at spending money wisely | best at being fair in decisions | best at helping people |
|---|---|---|---|
| **nonprofit** | 60% | 61% | 76% |
| **government** | 6% | 22% | 16% |

N=1001 Source: Light.

**How the sectors compare as places to work**

Of the 62% of college seniors who said they had given somewhat or very serious consideration to a public service job, 42% said they would prefer it to be at a nonprofit organization (versus 37% who indicated government).

However, finding those jobs poses a problem. Only 9% of seniors said they knew a great deal about finding a job in the nonprofit sector, and the majority (56%) said they knew not too much or nothing at all. (These data mirrored those for finding a job in government.) Interestingly, although college seniors don't know much about finding a job in the nonprofit sector, they don't think it would be particularly difficult if they wanted to: 62% said it would not be too difficult or not difficult at all (as compared to 28% who said the same of government employment). Only 4% thought it would be very difficult to find a nonprofit sector job.[58]

These findings may be connected to the fact that college seniors have much more first-hand experience with the nonprofit sector. The majority of respondents (54%) said they had volunteered, interned, or worked in the nonprofit sector. Of those, 88% volunteered, 30% interned, and 28% worked at a nonprofit organization. Only 8% of respondents had such an experience with the federal government.

When asked to assess their experiences working in the different sectors, seniors with nonprofit experiences were more likely to describe their jobs as valued, challenging, and frustrating than students describing other sector experiences.

Of the seniors with some kind of work or volunteer experience in government, 85% said they had very seriously or somewhat seriously considered a public service job, versus 68% of those who had experience with the nonprofit sector. But overall, Light found that "the more contact students have with any of the sectors, the better they feel about a public service career."

While seniors think the nonprofit sector does the best job at delivering services to the public, they rank it lowest for salaries, benefits, and job security. When seniors were asked about the difference in starting salaries between nonprofit and for profit sector jobs, 5% estimated there is no real difference, 13% estimated starting salaries are 5% higher at for-profits, 41% said 10% higher, 31% said 25% higher, and 6% said 50% higher.

Surprisingly, Light found that "the nonprofit sector was seen as the best place to go for respect of family and friends."[59] This contradicts focus group data from conversations with career service professionals who attributed low student interest in the nonprofit sector (in part) to "lack of prestige."

**Sources of career advice and finding jobs**

College career counselors were the least likely to be called very helpful sources of career advice for students – they ranked behind parents and other family members, professors, volunteer or internship associates, work associates, friends, and staff at campus volunteer programs. For 42% of college seniors, family is ranked as the single most important source of career advice. Professors come in a distant second (22%). Only 6% of seniors ranked career center staff as their most important career source (and there's little difference among students who preferred one sector over another). Nearly one-third (31%) called career center staff not too helpful or not helpful at all – no other source ranked so low. Nearly one-quarter of seniors (24%) had never visited their career center, although a comparable number (23%) had visited six or more times.

Given the importance of family career advice, Light suggests that, "To the extent government and nonprofits want to increase their attractiveness to future recruits, they might look to the parents."[60] Many scholars focusing on the Millennials would agree (recall Howe and Strauss's characterization of the "helicopter parents" who hover and co-purchase products, as discussed on p. 30).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this research was on the recruitment and retention of young professionals to the nonprofit sector and, as such, exploring the perceptions and attitudes of college seniors poised to embark on their careers was critically important. However, our conclusions emphasize the role nonprofit organizations and key "gatekeepers" (especially career service professionals) must play in strengthening the nonprofit sector workforce. As such, we concentrate our recommendations in the sections dedicated to those two populations.

This is not to say, however, that young professionals don't play a vital role in strengthening their connections to nonprofit organizations and bolstering nonprofit sector career-related services. They do. Recommendations for college students interested in nonprofit sector careers (as well as those who may not have considered this path) include:

- Start early. Begin building relationships with faculty members, program directors, and offices of career services (OCS) during the first and second years of college.

- Pursue volunteer and internship opportunities with nonprofit organizations. Work-study students might try to secure placements at nonprofit organizations in the community.

- Tap OCS for information on nonprofit sector careers. Provide positive feedback on helpful nonprofit sector-related programs and formally encourage offices to do more when representation and services seem inadequate.

- Network. Schedule informational interviews with nonprofit sector leaders in the community, identify and cultivate a mentor, and talk with family members and friends.

■ Conduct research. Learn about the nonprofit sector and the organizations that comprise it. Establish realistic salary expectations and determine "bottom line" salary requirements necessary to pay back student loans and still live reasonably comfortably. Explore scholarship opportunities for students accepting low-paying public service jobs.

■ Be prepared for every interview. Nonprofit organizations are looking for skills, flexibility, and commitment. Discuss your past experiences, demonstrate your ability to multi-task and work independently, and communicate your passion for the mission of the organization.

Many of these recommendations apply to any student in a job search, regardless of field or sector of interest. However, data indicate that offices of career services and other established career resources are better equipped to help students interested in for-profit sector jobs. As a result, students interested in public service may have to be more aggressive, independent, and creative in their career development efforts.

# offices of career services

"No, my staff is not equally able to talk about nonprofit careers. We're not adequately aware … I think that part of it is insufficient effort on our part, and I think another part of it is, in our experiences, a lot of nonprofits don't approach us." – DIRECTOR OF CAREER SERVICES

# offices of career services

## OVERVIEW

Staff at college offices of career services (OCS) are an obvious first stop when looking for potential or actual "gatekeepers" to nonprofit sector careers. The majority of colleges and universities have a career center staffed by a counseling professional and dedicated to providing career and job search services for students and alumni. Our goal was to better understand the nonprofit sector-focused career services these offices provide and their staff members' knowledge of the sector. Our qualitative data are drawn from in-person "audits" of OCS at seven Pittsburgh, PA area colleges, as described in Appendix C (*see p. 73*), as well as a focus group with OCS directors. Our quantitative data are drawn from a national print and on-line survey of OCS directors. We conclude with recommendations for college career centers on how to strengthen their resources and programs for students interested in nonprofit sector careers.

## BACKGROUND

Georgetown University's career services office is named the "MBNA Career Education Center."[61] The largest issuer of credit cards in the world – a company fueled by 28,000 employees – clearly sets a high premium on recruiting young workers and understands that marketing itself on college campuses is vital to its outreach efforts. A $2 million gift to Georgetown's career center brought with it naming rights and far-reaching branding on this prestigious campus.

Of course, few employers – whether nonprofit or for-profit – can compete with the recruitment resources a company of MBNA's size possesses. However, research suggests that small and mid-size nonprofits are at a particular disadvantage. The Georgetown case is an apt symbol for just how institutionalized the challenges are for nonprofit organizations interested in campus recruiting. The programs, operations, and staff of offices of career services are geared towards mid-size and large for-profit companies that have regular, known recruitment needs and the dedicated staff and resources necessary to travel to campuses and participate in career fairs.

A leading website for feminist students on campuses nationwide – www.feministcampus.org – characterizes career services offices this way:

> Where can a feminist student go to learn about job/internship opportunities with organizations that match her/his ideology? The first stop in any job/internship search should be your college or university's career-planning center… Unfortunately, most university career centers are geared primarily towards careers in the for-profit sector. Many are not really equipped to assist students with career interests in the non-profit sector, beyond the basic job/internship hunting skills that apply to everyone.
>
> There are several reasons why career centers tend to focus the majority of their energies on the for-profit sector. Most career centers devote a substantial portion of their resources to courting

> employers (usually large for-profit companies) that send representatives to campuses to recruit young talent for entry-level positions and training programs. Non-profit organizations, which rarely have extensive financial resources or numerous job openings to justify campus recruiting visits, are infrequently represented in campus recruitment programs and thus receive less attention from career center staff.
>
> In addition, relatively few publications on nonprofit work exist, despite the fact that nearly 10% of U.S. workers are employed in nonprofit organizations. Of the books that do discuss careers in the nonprofit sector, many are not updated regularly and the vast majority are not written from a feminist, progressive perspective. For these reasons, your career center staff may not be familiar with the wide array of jobs and internships that are available in the nonprofit sector.
>
> Your career center's offerings may not accurately reflect the full range of career choices, but you should not give up![62]

Career center staff don't deny these institutionalized obstacles to representing nonprofit sector careers. At the University of California Berkeley website, the career center addresses the dilemma head-on:

> Why don't nonprofits recruit on campus? Nonprofit organizations tend to have fewer staff members and smaller budgets than the majority of organizations that recruit on campus. They may hire 1–2 new hires a year, and cannot predict with the same regularity when they will need to hire. It's not cost effective for nonprofits to come to campus for the on campus recruiting program, so interested students must take a more proactive approach to their job search.[63]

However, the problem may be more than a structural one. The monster.com website – the most popular job search engine for college students (and the top vendor used by college career services offices) – posted an article on transitioning from a for-profit job into the nonprofit sector. The writer quotes an assistant director of career services at a major university who stresses that interviewees must be ready to defend their interest in the nonprofit sector, given the low salaries:

> You've got to think it through. When you give up a lot, people suspect you. They're thinking, "Did you have a nervous breakdown?"[64]

Clearly, nonprofit sector interviewees need to demonstrate commitment to an organization's mission, but the "Did you have a nervous breakdown?" characterization of nonprofit sector career interest seems more indicative of the career services staff than any real "suspicion" a nonprofit sector interviewer is likely to feel towards a candidate.

**About career centers**

In an annual performance measurement survey of career services conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), more than 90% of career services professionals said that the leading services they provide include resume development and critique, maintaining a career library, individual career counseling, electronic job listings, career planning and job search workshops, career and job fairs, campus interviewing, and employer information sessions.

On average, 92.5 organizations scheduled interviews through the "typical" career services office surveyed. More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) said employer participation was lower than the previous year. Data from a 2001 survey showed that 14% of career services offices had shrinking budgets.

Career services professionals said the biggest change to their jobs was an increase in time spent working with technology and career counseling via email and a decrease in time spent providing services to employers and assisting students through individual appointments.[65]

## FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

To gather qualitative data to support the national on-line and print survey of college career services professionals, researchers conducted in-person "audits" of offices of career services and held a focus group with directors of offices of career services (OCS) at Pittsburgh, PA area colleges and universities. A discussion of important information learned in the audits, as well as details on the methods and data sources used for the focus group, appear in Appendix C (*see p. 73*).

Focus group participants addressed student, faculty, and OCS staff perspectives on careers in the nonprofit sector; obstacles to building student awareness and interest in the sector; the quality and quantity of nonprofit sector career resources available to counselors; the strength of their connections to local and national nonprofit sector employers; and how their services and networks could be improved, especially vis-à-vis nonprofit sector career counseling.

Core themes and perspectives on nonprofit sector career counseling that emerged include:

- Senior OCS staff members do not distinguish between sectors in their counseling of students – they focus more on fields or issues.

- Students are perceived to be disinterested in nonprofit sector careers because of low salaries, lack of career advancement, and students' very limited knowledge of the sector.

- Service-learning and internship experiences boost interest in and knowledge of nonprofit sector careers, but advisors still need to make the connection to professional opportunities for students.

- Colleges with religious affiliations or emphasizing liberal arts majors may cultivate greater student interest in the nonprofit sector, as compared to strictly secular schools or those known more for their business or technical programs.

- Faculty involvement and top-down institutional support significantly enhance OCS programs, and this support depends on networking and relationship-building by OCS staff.

- The major vendors of job databases and software for the management of content on OCS web pages do not provide satisfactory coverage of the nonprofit sector.

■ OCS directors have limited knowledge of and want more information on nonprofit sector jobs – especially non-entry-level positions – and stronger connections to nonprofit sector employers.

■ Approximately one-half of career counselors stated a need for better and more up-to-date resources on nonprofit sector careers.

**Student disinterest in nonprofit sector careers**

Career services directors communicated a strong sense of student disinterest in the nonprofit sector. They stressed the sector's low salaries, limited opportunities for advancement, invisibility on campus, and lack of prestige, as well as students' lack of knowledge about the sector and parental and faculty disapproval of nonprofit sector careers.

The directors all believed the greatest deterrent was the sector's salaries. One participant expressed the sentiment of the group:

> The salaries and the benefits that the nonprofit organizations … can offer individuals are significantly below what these students can expect to make in the traditional for-profit. And we have kids coming out with 20, 30, $40,000 worth of debt, and they're being offered $25,000 a year (which is not unusual, it could be less, that wouldn't be too unusual either), and perhaps no healthcare as part of the package. They're in a position where they can't afford to do it. I think salaries and benefit packages are a major obstacle for nonprofits in attracting young men and women into it.

One director characterized the attitude of students as, "I want to make a living. I don't want to suffer." And another participant said, "That's what they think … except those people who think 'I'll get a government job and I'll be safe'." Distinguishing between directors' perceptions of their students' sense of nonprofit salaries and their own was difficult. As one director acknowledged, "We think the worst [vis-à-vis salaries]." Another said, "We only see entry level [positions]."

Perceptions of low salaries are exacerbated by perceptions of limited opportunities for advancement. Many participants spoke in particular about nonprofit sector service jobs – for example, those in residential treatment facilities. Directors characterized these organizations as "organizationally flat":

> They have entry-level positions for a lot of people. But when you look beyond those counselors or residential advisors, there's not much of a career ladder there. They need 25 new residential counselors, and one ED, a controller, and two supervisors.

Another participant concurred, saying nonprofit organizations don't offer employees "a path to advance, a way to be promoted." She said:

> Most of the nonprofits that come to these [job] fairs, they're not large, and a person is limited as to how far they can go. If it's the Red Cross or the United Way, there's a lot of room to move around and up. But that's not true of most nonprofits.

In contrast, the perception is that for-profit companies, especially those that colleges see at job fairs, "tend to be bigger, they tend to have more [to offer]":

> The nonprofits don't have a network where you feel you can move from one to the other and move up. Even if a for-profit company is smaller, the idea is that you can start there and then go to a little bigger one, and then wind up at FedEx … because that exists. If you start out in some of the traditional smaller nonprofits that we see at the job fairs, there's not a sense that there's someplace to go.

Another participant agreed: "It's not as easy to understand how you move through, and where you go from there. And where that kind of investment will pay off. You can be the very best residential counselor in the world, and you'll qualify to be a residential counselor somewhere else."

OCS directors also believe parents, faculty, and lack of prestige thwart student interest in the nonprofit sector. One participant said, "I think parents, too, influence students that nonprofits are not acceptable. And faculty don't want their graduates out there in nonprofits."

The participants attributed these perceptions concerning the sector's low salaries, inadequate benefits, and limited opportunities for advancement to the students they counsel. However, the tenor of the conversation suggested that perhaps OCS directors were projecting their own attitudes onto students as well. Not one participant raised potential benefits of working in the sector, except to point out that nonprofit sector employees are part of mission-driven organizations offering a potentially "smaller, kinder, gentler environment." It would be worth exploring whether the attitudes, expertise, and services (geared more towards for-profit employment) provided at OCS deter students interested in the nonprofit sector from ever entering the career center's doors.

**Student knowledge of the nonprofit sector**

All focus group members, however, agreed that a critical factor to overcoming these negative perceptions was to increase student knowledge of the sector. One director said, "They don't know what 'nonprofit' means. We can't get the word out." Another said, "Frankly, the name of the sector still doesn't serve it well. Students hear 'nonprofit' and they assume it's not for them." This comment was met with significant laughter and excited agreement. One person continued with:

> That's exactly it. It's a very good analogy. They don't know what it means. It's the last place they're going to be looking. It's a matter of educating them. If they come in, we can educate them.

Participants associated student interest in and knowledge of the nonprofit sector with their access to experiential learning opportunities and community service programs, as well as the type of institution they attend. One participant attributed greater student interest in public service careers to her institution's religious affiliation, saying, "Maybe [our high interest is] because I am from a Catholic religious school. And they want to go and do 'do-gooder' jobs." Another said her students' interest was high, too, but not for the same reason:

> I think for the population we serve, a government job, a nonprofit job is a good job. It's something that they are familiar with. A number of them have experienced them personally.

Two participants associated their colleges' academic emphases to the level of student interest in the sector (a college known for business programs perceived low interest and a college recognized for psychology, social work, and nursing degrees perceived much higher student interest).

Participants also associated the existence of a service-learning requirement (which four schools had) with higher student interest in the nonprofit sector (e.g., "We have a service learning requirement. We're 20% nonprofit."). And one thought the creation of a service-learning post housed in her OCS could boost interest:

> This past year, we got responsibility of volunteer and community service in our office, so we have someone who focuses on providing opportunities for students who are exploring positions, volunteer work, and community service / nonprofits, that type of thing, and then hopefully trying to translate it back into career options at graduation. So hopefully [the number of students interested in nonprofit careers] will increase over the years.

Another said, "I see it as I see any experience education. If they're not out there, they have no clue. This is an awareness." One participant said that although her school's community service program is voluntary, "It is very large. It is very strong. And you get a certain number of those students who get really into it, and they get involved. And those students definitely gravitate towards the nonprofit sector."

Access to internships helps educate students. One participant said, "We have students who are going into those jobs, but they are doing it through internships. For those that offer internships, then the students can learn about that whole realm of life, and then they work for them." While there was agreement on the vital role internships play in career development, participants stressed that the abundance of unpaid nonprofit sector internships deterred many students from pursuing them.

But another participant argued that students don't necessarily connect these experiences with career opportunities. She said:

> But I think someone has to have a discussion with them, to help make that connection, between community service or volunteering and how that might translate into a career. I don't think they just do it. They compartmentalize.

No one suggested that that "someone" should be a career counselor. One OCS director said, "That's really sad … if those people who are actually working in these programs aren't connecting the dots." Participants seemed to believe that at least a significant part of the education process needs to happen in arenas outside of their OCS.

This perceived lack of interest raises important questions about the type of students who use campus career services. Who are the students and are they a self-selecting group? One participant indicated that he sees more students from the business school (70 to 80%), and fewer from liberal arts majors (40 to 50%), suggesting that students with interest in the nonprofit sector may not use career services. (Participants estimated that anywhere from 7 to 35% of graduating seniors went into a nonprofit sector job, although the majority said the range was 10 to 20%.)

**OCS operations, capacity, and staff understanding of the nonprofit sector**

In size and structure, focus group participants represented diverse institutions and similarly diverse career services offices.

Participants discussed the implications of offices of career services (OCS) reporting to Student Affairs versus Academic Affairs. Many saw opportunities and obstacles in both reporting structures. However, all participants stressed the benefits of strong faculty involvement in OCS programming, and some said this is abetted when reporting to Academic Affairs. One participant said:

> Academic Affairs is extremely important in our work because of the faculty. You need the faculty to market our programs to students, especially for these types of arenas … for social services or liberal arts majors. If we aren't sitting at a table with faculty, they don't know we exist. If I were pure Student Affairs, I would not have that access.

The majority of participants agreed, and one said, "As others have said, the closer you can get into the academic network, the more effective it is ultimately."

One participant, however, believed reporting to Student Affairs is more effective. "I feel more comfortable with the VP for Student Affairs because he runs all of the student support services.

And from my perspective, that's where we belong." This same participant stressed that connections to faculty were less contingent upon reporting structure and more upon whether his staff personally networks with professors. Another participant concurred, saying, "So much of what you are able to do is relationship-driven, in terms of the access you have to faculty."

One participant remarked that she has seen a shift in how receptive faculty members are to integrating career development programs in their classrooms: younger faculty members are much more receptive to OCS programs. She commented:

> A lot of the older faculty ... are just not interested in dealing with us. They do things the way they've always done it. But the younger faculty coming in are more likely to be inviting us to their classes and interested in what we're doing. So I see a real shift taking place ... in terms of the faculty interested in experiential learning.

For her, this shift has been reinforced "from the top – we have a president who is very supportive of experiential learning, so that has brought a focus over to a lot of people, except the diehards." The result is that "for the first time six years of trying, I have an advisory board for experiential education out of our office."

Half of the offices assign staff members to specialize in certain areas, yet only one dedicates someone to nonprofit, government, and/or public service career counseling.

Of vendors that provide on-line career counseling services, two participants used Experience.com, two used the College Central Network, seven used or are planning to use NACElink, and everyone was enrolled – at least for its job base – in MonsterTrak.com. While all expressed basic satisfaction with the vendors, they acknowledged that they do not represent nonprofit sector job opportunities well. One participant said this is because, "Basically, when they solicit employers, they're going for fees. So they're soliciting corporations that can pay the fees." If nonprofit sector employers are included, it is generally because the individual OCS has identified and added them themselves.

In terms of their own knowledge, all of the participants save one indicated they had no trouble staying informed of developments in the nonprofit sector. They said that associations such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and its regional affiliate Eastern ACE (EACE) keep them informed, especially of salary data and industry trends. One participant added, however, that she had to combine national information with local sources of data to "really zero in on the local opportunities."[66]

It's unclear if directors have a true sense of how much time they spend counseling students on nonprofit sector careers. They offered rough estimates, which were evenly distributed between 7 and 30% of their time being devoted to nonprofit sector counseling.

Yet in their responses, 60% of the directors stressed that they don't think of jobs within specific sectors in their work. One participant echoed the sentiments of the majority when she said, "I don't really talk to them about sectors. I talk to them about what they're interested in." Another commented, "I've never really separated nonprofit from for profit, because I don't think [the students] care, as long as it's a job they like." And a third said, "Profit/nonprofit is not a line that we draw." A fourth participant said:

> I haven't heard that question in 10 years – "What would it be like to work in a nonprofit?" I don't think I've ever heard that question. And I've worked in all kinds of schools. I'd say, "It's just like a for-profit place, except it's not-for-profit. It's a job."

The response suggests that both the quantity and quality of nonprofit sector career counseling – in part based on career counselors' knowledge of the sector – could be lacking. However, when pressed, the majority of participants did articulate an understanding of differences between the sectors. Distinctions ranged from, "There's a mission statement," "It's not bottom line driven," "It's not profit driven, there's a whole different feel in what are we here for," "There's a purpose," and "'It's very different', that's what I would say."

But one participant countered, "For three years I was doing a consulting job with a nonprofit, and it was all about money, that's all we talked about, we have to watch money, we have to get money, one of the main things I did was I went to fundraisers. So I think it is more about money."

Many participants emphasized that their services focus on career development not job placement activities, and as such, values were an important theme. For example, one participant said:

> What we do with students so often is find out what's important to them and what they value. And I think the value structure inherent in a corporate, profit-driven environment versus a service environment, drives different value sets ... And that's the only thing I would talk to them about, the idea of what it is philosophically and by mission you feel you want to be involved with.

In general, participants believed the quality of their nonprofit sector counseling services was strong. But one director added the caveat that her office is helpful on nonprofit-related information only if the students ask for it:

> The problem is, they don't know it's out there. We're talking civil service – "I never thought of that." Government jobs – "I never thought of that. I never realized there were nonprofits that might use my communications degree." But if they come to us, we've got it.

Only one participant said he felt his office doesn't handle nonprofit sector counseling as effectively as for-profit:

> No, my staff is not equally able to talk about nonprofit careers. We're not adequately aware … I think that part of it is insufficient effort on our part, and, I think another part of it is, in our experiences, a lot of nonprofits don't approach us.

At that point, however, the group then concurred. One said "We don't know who they are." Another added, "Networking does not exist." Significant responsibility for disinterest and lack of information was attributed to the students and the nonprofit organizations.

However, as the conversation progressed, participants began to identify some of their own knowledge gaps. One said:

> We'd also need some more information. I do not know about the $100,000 jobs in the nonprofit sector. I would like to know about those. And about the $50,000 jobs. The $30,000 jobs! Because it would help our students to know that that is a viable option, and you don't have to starve to want to do something. But we don't get that. It's not just the *Where To Turn* stuff. We know the agencies are there. We need to know, if it's going to help, what the structure is, where the opportunities are.

Participants expressed interest in having more information on employment opportunities beyond the entry-level positions and a strong need for greater networking with nonprofit sector employers.

**Strength of nonprofit sector career resources**
When asked about materials on the nonprofit sector, one respondent said, "Books, brochures, websites. It's there!" Another spoke with enthusiasm about a single book, *Good Works: A Guide to Careers in Social Change* (although the most recent volume was published in 1994) that she said, "I love to have (students) look through it!"

But another said, "I don't think we have enough [resources]. They are probably there, but we don't know where to find them. To show the students. To lead the students to."

Overall, the group seemed divided as to whether they felt that had equally strong resources for nonprofit as for-profit sector careers. (This is in contrast to the national survey, which showed overwhelmingly that OCS directors believed their nonprofit sector career resources were weaker than those for for-profit employment.) Participants said the percentage of listings in their offices that are nonprofit sector jobs are 10 to 40%. The entire group said that for students who wanted to connect to nonprofit organizations, they did not have trouble.

**Connections to nonprofit sector employers**
However, career services directors in the focus group emphasized the need for stronger OCS connections to nonprofit sector employers. Directors believed that stronger networks would lead to greater nonprofit sector visibility on college campuses and at job fairs, easier identification of nonprofit sector jobs and internships, and greater understanding of nonprofit sector career opportunities.

As mentioned, participants stressed that student interest in the nonprofit sector is correlated to awareness. One said:

> A lot of companies put a lot of time, effort, and money into visibility. In other words, they realize to recruit, students have to almost see them as a brand name that they identify with readily, and want to work with. Social service organizations do not have that kind of resource, so they are invisible to students, unless they have interned. And of course that number is going to be small. So by and large there is just not that kind of visibility built into the system.

The majority of participants expressed frustration with their ability to recruit nonprofit sector employers to their campuses and, specifically, job fairs. One said:

> Some of the smaller nonprofits that I have talked to say they don't have the resources. There's no HR capacity or function in that organization. It's whoever has a spare moment or two. So for smaller organizations, I have gotten the feedback that it is hard for them to even leave for a day and attend a job fair, because there is no one else to cover the office. But a lot of the profit organizations usually have someone – if not a department, at least someone who has part of the function of their job to sell their organization or responsible for HR, etc. Not as much so with nonprofits.

One participant, however, said this problem is not unique to nonprofit organizations, as small for-profit firms also have limited capacity to recruit and build visibility on campus.

Participants discussed the 2002 Idealist.org nonprofit sector career fair [67] and considered it a success. The number of students (400) participating in 2003 was 1½ to 2 times that of the previous year. While directors believed publicity, outreach, and attendance could have been greater, they seemed largely supportive of and enthusiastic about the idea of jointly-sponsored nonprofit sector career fairs.

In the context of "connections" to nonprofit organizations, one participant returned to the issue of finances. She pointed out that many students learn about careers and specific job opportunities through their internship experiences (and other participants mentioned the usefulness of the Regional Internship Center of Southwestern Pennsylvania[68]). However, the fact that many nonprofits offer only unpaid internships is a hurdle:

> Nonprofits can't afford to pay for internships. Corporate America can. So we can't even get them into some of the nonprofits for internships and coops, because they can't pay. And they have to pay for the credits, and they can't afford it … That's another stumbling block. The money.

**Improving career services**

Participants brainstormed ways to deepen their connections to nonprofit sector employers in the region and build student awareness of the sector. Three directors commented on the need to reach younger students. One said:

> I think everyone has alluded to the idea that we have really begun as a profession to shoot for the first-year students, for the purpose of career development. Because of that, we are seeing a more diverse group, and a much more undeclared, uncertain group, at which time we can help to have an impact. But that's a challenge. We try to give them the options, to have their own sense of direction. That's a big challenge to give them that full range of options.

For these OCS directors, young faculty members and top-level institutional support are a vital component to reaching these younger students.

In addition, participants stressed the need for stronger networks among college campuses and non-profit organizations. One participant expressed frustration at her failed efforts to build a network:

> We have been trying within our staff to reach out to the social service community, to develop a fluid network of information, so that if they did have an opportunity they would think to call us, that we could refer students to for information. I'm talking a viable network. And it is just so difficult. We're just not successful. So if through the efforts of this kind of a research activity that kind of a need could be identified and addressed, that would be enormous for all of us. Because we would then have somebody that we could connect with, whether it is an individual institution or a collective group.

Other participants concurred. One said, "I was thinking we could use a 'United Way for Employment' – an organization that could pool resources among agencies, and provide a feed to a neutral organization, and dispense information."

Another director offered an idea for helping nonprofits participate in job fairs. She said,

> When I've asked several nonprofits, and I forget who said this before, they've said "we can't come to job fairs because we can't take a day off," … Couldn't 10 or 12 of them get together and each take turns and collect resumes for all 12 organizations, distribute information? Because that's so important, especially to my students. It's one thing to look at a website, but if they could all "consort" and then just take turns doing that.

Another participant returned to the need for more information about career paths:

> It would also be good if there were some way for us to dialog with some of them around how do you break in beyond the entry-level? How do you do that? How would they recruit and how could we be helpful to them to do that, to bring some candidates to them. How do you break in?

Participants concurred. One reiterated the need to reach first- and second-year students with "some kind of centralized career shadowing program," and her colleagues unanimously agreed. Throughout the conversation, participants reinforced their desire for stronger networks and more information.

## SURVEY RESEARCH

To gather quantitative data on the knowledge, practices, and needs of OCS offices and staff, researchers conducted a print and on-line survey of 1,757 career services professional at four-year colleges and universities nationwide. While 489 completed surveys were received by the deadline, 89 were unusable and data in the study were drawn from a sample of 400 surveys Details on the methods and data sources used for this survey appear in Appendix C (*see p. 73*).

Key findings from this national survey of college career services professionals include:

- Nonprofit sector representation at career fairs and other career center programs is low. Just more than one-quarter of career centers offered a nonprofit sector career fair. Nearly one-half of career centers (44%) said that representatives from the nonprofit sector accounted for 5% or fewer of the individuals at their workshops and other career programming.

- Nonprofit sector job postings and other resources are limited. Approximately one-third of respondents said that 10% or fewer of their listings are nonprofit sector jobs, and more than one-half of respondents said that 10% or fewer of their resources are devoted exclusively to the nonprofit sector.

- College seniors need more and better information about nonprofit sector careers. Nearly three-quarters of career services professionals said college seniors understood the range of nonprofit sector career options not too well or not well at all.

- Career center directors' assessment of the helpfulness of their nonprofit sector career services and the strength of their connections to nonprofit sector employers – relative to their for-profit services – is strikingly low.

- Most respondents (81%) said their students would like to have more nonprofit sector career-focused programming. However, career services offices are limited by staff time and money.

A wide range existed in respondents' estimates of how many college seniors visited their office in the last academic year. The largest percentage of respondents (18%) estimated that they saw 30% of their seniors, but 83% fell in the range of 20 to 70% of seniors. (Focus group discussions and in-person "audits" of OCS suggested that career service professionals calculate "student contact" within a wide range of activities – from web-site visits only to in-person office visits, so it is not clear that there was any consistency in respondents' answers.) On average, respondents estimated that they see one-half (48%) of college seniors. Private schools were more likely to estimate that they see a greater percentage of students.

More than one-half of directors (57%) said that 10% or fewer seniors came into their offices with an interest in working in the nonprofit sector. While the majority of respondents indicated they didn't know the percentage of their graduates who actually accepted nonprofit sector positions, for those who were willing to estimate, 40% said it was 5% or fewer.

Well over one-half of respondents (62%) work at a school with a separate office of public service, or the equivalent. Public schools were less likely than private schools to have a dedicated public service office.[69] Of schools that had one, the overwhelming majority characterized their

working relationship with that office as excellent or good (88%). This was surprising, as qualitative research suggested that many OCS directors feel frustrated with how isolated their offices are. Not surprisingly, however, OCS that had three or more staff members were more likely to give a top-two-box rating to their relationship with a public service office – more staff probably means more time to build those relationships.

Nearly three-quarters of career centers (73%) report to Student Affairs, 19% report to Academic Affairs, and the remainder report mostly to External Affairs, Dean's Offices, and President's Offices. These findings are consistent with other national data: for example a recent NACE survey of career centers found that 73% report to Student Affairs. Private schools were more likely than public schools to report to Academic Affairs.[70] The reporting structure of OCS might be worth considering, given that students (and career counselors) stress the important role played by faculty and academic department heads in career counseling.

Only about one-quarter of respondents (27%) have staff members assigned to specific sectors. Of those, more than one-half (56%) have someone assigned to the nonprofit sector. Just fewer than one-half of all respondents (45%) have personally worked at a nonprofit organization other than an educational institution.

More than three-quarters of respondents (76%) use an outside vendor to support job listings and other services. The most popular vendors are MonsterTrak, Experience, and NACElink, although College Campus Network, EcampusRecruiting, CSO Research/Interfase CS, and others were mentioned as well. This is consistent with NACE data that showed 71% of career centers used an outside vendor.[71]

**Low nonprofit sector representation in OCS programming**

Respondents indicated that they held anywhere from 0 to 15 career fairs during the previous academic year, with a mean of 3.1 fairs, a median of 3, and a mode of 2. Public schools averaged 3.6 fairs and private schools 2.9.[72] One-quarter of respondents (26%) said they had held a fair focused exclusively on the nonprofit sector. When asked to estimate the percentage of nonprofit sector employers that participate in fairs, respondents were quite evenly divided within the range of 5% or fewer to 30% (*see Table* 5). However, the largest number of respondents (44%) said that they only had 5% or fewer nonprofit participants at their workshops and other programming.

**TABLE 5** **Nonprofit sector representation at OCS job fairs and workshops**

| % nonprofit at fairs | respondents | % nonprofit at workshops | respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5% or fewer | 17% | 5% or fewer | 45% |
| 10% | 20% | 10% | 15% |
| 20% | 20% | 20% | 15% |
| 30% | 19% | 30% | 10% |
| 40% | 12% | 40% | 4% |
| 50% | 6% | 50% | 6% |
| 60% or more | 6% | 60% or more | 5% |

N= 400 Source: OCS survey.

As shown, more than one-third of respondents (37%) estimated that 10% or fewer of employers at career fairs represented the nonprofit sector, and 60% of respondents estimated that 10% or fewer of employers participating in other workshops and programs represented the nonprofit sector. Public schools were more likely to report lower nonprofit sector representation at their career fairs

and other programs: for example, 54% of public schools said representation was 5% or less, versus 41% of private schools.

Notably, private schools, smaller schools, and schools that had separate public service office were more likely to have greater nonprofit sector representation at their career fairs than public schools, larger schools, and schools without a dedicated public service office.

**Few nonprofit sector job listings and career resources**

In terms of the actual job postings in OCS or on their websites, approximately one-third of respondents (32%) said that fewer than 10% are in the nonprofit sector (and more than one-half said 20% or fewer). Resources devoted exclusively to the nonprofit sector are also limited: 52% said that 10% or fewer of their resources are devoted exclusively to the nonprofit sector (*see Table 6*).

**TABLE 6** **Nonprofit sector representation in OCS job listings and career resources**

| % nonprofit job listings | respondents | % nonprofit-exclusive resources | respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5% or fewer | 13% | 5% or fewer | 27% |
| 10% | 19% | 10% | 25% |
| 20% | 22% | 20% | 19% |
| 30% | 21% | 30% | 14% |
| 40% | 13% | 40% | 7% |
| 50% | 8% | 50% | 6% |
| 60% or more | 4% | 60% or more | 2% |

N=400 Source: OCS survey.

Again, public schools were more likely than private schools to report lower nonprofit sector representation in their job listings and other resources. Private schools and schools with a separate public service office were more likely to report higher nonprofit sector representation at career programs than public schools and schools without a separate public service office.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) characterized their nonprofit sector resources as only somewhat adequate, and 21% said they were not too adequate or not adequate at all. And nearly three-quarters (73%) indicated that they thought college seniors understood the range of career options in the nonprofit sector not too well or not well at all. The overwhelming majority of respondents (81%) indicated that they believed their students would like to have more nonprofit sector career-focused programming.

In an open-ended question on what nonprofit sector-specific resources were the most important, respondents frequently mentioned Idealist.org, state and local directories of nonprofit organizations, their own office's website and its links, Opportunity NOCS, United Way directories, and other websites. Many respondents listed the same handful of books on nonprofit sector careers, many of which were published more than a decade ago. A few respondents pointed out that students don't ask about nonprofit sector careers, but rather about jobs in specific fields, suggesting that the nonprofit sector-focused questions were difficult to answer.

**Limited nonprofit sector services and connections**

Career center directors' assessment of the helpfulness of their nonprofit sector career services – relative to their for-profit services – was strikingly low. And government recruiters take note: government career services ranked even lower (*see Table 7*).

| TABLE 7 | Helpfulness of OCS career services offered, by sector | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | very helpful | somewhat helpful | not too helpful | not at all helpful |
| **for-profit career services** | 70% | 28% | 2% | 0% |
| **nonprofit career services** | 40% | 50% | 9% | 1% |
| **government career services** | 32% | 59% | 9% | 0% |

N=400 Source: OCS survey.

Similarly, career center directors said that their connections to nonprofit sector and government employers were much weaker than their connections to for-profit employers (*see Table 8*).

| TABLE 8 | Strength of OCS connections to employers, by sector | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | excellent | good | fair | poor |
| **for-profit employer connections** | 24% | 56% | 17% | 3% |
| **nonprofit employer connections** | 16% | 48% | 29% | 7% |
| **government employer connections** | 12% | 42% | 35% | 11% |

Private schools, schools with a dedicated public service office, and offices with more staff rated their nonprofit sector career services and connections higher than public schools, schools without a public service offices, and smaller staff offices. (This did not hold for ratings of for-profit and government connections.)

**Lack of time and resources**

Career services professionals who thought that students would like more nonprofit sector-specific programs said they faced a range of obstacles limiting their ability to do so. Three-quarters (75%) blamed lack of staff time, 50% blamed lack of funds, 21% said they had trouble identifying non-profit sector employers, 38% said they had trouble attracting these employers to campus, and 25% said they lacked ideas for nonprofit sector programs. Public school respondents were much more likely to identify funding and staff time problems. Although public school respondents had on average more full-time staff, they are serving many more students.[73]

In an open-ended question, survey respondents were given the opportunity to identify other obstacles they faced in providing more nonprofit sector programming. Of the 94 respondents to this question, 42% wrote in some aspect of student interest and time as a limiting factor. "Students are in programmatic overload," wrote one respondent; and "too many competing programs," wrote another (and a few of these respondents connected low student interest to low nonprofit sector salaries). In addition, seven of these respondents (7%) said nonprofit organizations are not represented at career fairs because they "can't even pay event fees, even at reduced costs," and, "we charge for fairs and they have no budgets."

Almost all respondents (96%) said they would be very or somewhat interested in having access to new resources (books, training guides, etc.) and professional development opportunities on advising students on careers in the nonprofit sector. The only real caveat – often handwritten into the margin of the survey – was "so long as they aren't too expensive."

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Like the nonprofit sector at large, college offices of career services are making do with limited budgets and over-extended staff, and promoting nonprofit sector careers to college students presents added obstacles in the counseling practice. Some OCS directors see limited student interest in the nonprofit sector. Others acknowledge that their staff have limited knowledge of the range of nonprofit sector career options available. Most agree that it is harder to identify and connect with nonprofit organizations than for-profit companies in their region (and beyond).

Add to these obstacles the fact that systemic issues inhibit nonprofit organization involvement: the costs of most college career fairs are covered, at least in part, by the fees participating employers pay. Fairs appeal mostly to large companies that can anticipate large recruitment needs and couldn't survive without a major presence on college campuses. As such, as one career professional said, OCS might need to "think outside the box" and find alternative recruitment and cultivation strategies for nonprofit sector employers.

However, OCS staff overwhelming believe that their students would like more nonprofit sector-related programming and that the resources they do offer could be significantly improved.

In focus group discussions, career center staff were the first to say that deeper connections among career services, faculty, department heads, and senior college administrators would make all of their services better. Stronger connections to nonprofit organizations in the region and nationally would, obviously, make their nonprofit sector career counseling services better as well. Better informed students who visit their career center before their senior year would also make their work more effective.

Again, recognizing that time and resources are limited, some specific recommendations for OCS to strengthen nonprofit sector career programming include:

- Educate OCS staff about the nonprofit sector.
- Build the nonprofit sector section of OCS libraries.
- Deepen and institutionalize connections among OCS and key players on campus.
- Hire an intern to assess and expand nonprofit sector career services in the OCS.
- Consider appointing a staff member to spearhead nonprofit sector program initiatives.
- Collaborate with regional colleges.
- Work with alumni affairs and the development office to raise targeted funds for nonprofit sector services.

**Educate staff about the nonprofit sector.**

Career counseling professionals need and want more information about nonprofit sector careers. Directors of OCS might try to ensure that professional development opportunities offered to staff include trainings specific to the nonprofit sector. These might include trainings offered by regional nonprofit sector associations as well the opportunity to attend national conferences devoted exclusively or in part to nonprofit sector workforce issues.

As members of many professional associations, directors of OCS might lobby to have the organizations that represent them and their field devote more attention to the nonprofit sector – in their publications, on their web sites, and at their annual events.

**Build the nonprofit sector section of OCS libraries.**

While only a limited number of resources on nonprofit sector careers exist (and many of them are outdated), every OCS library's holdings should include what is available. Just one example of a

good starting point is the list of resources posted at the web site of the Brown University Swearer Center for Public Service's "Careers in the Common Good,"[74]. A quick Google or Amazon web search will yield additional resources.

In addition, directories of nonprofit organizations in a college's geographic region can often be secured through a local United Way chapter or a state-wide association of nonprofit organizations.

**Deepen and institutionalize connections among OCS and key players on campus.**
OCS directors repeatedly reinforce the notion that deeper connections with faculty members; staff at offices of public service, service learning, and work study programs; and key academic departments would boost the effectiveness of their nonprofit sector-related programs. When time and resources are limited, strengthening these connections is challenging, of course. OCS staff might start with a "Top 20" list of individuals with whom they'd like to work more closely and place them on all event invitation lists. OCS also might try to organize occasional brown-bags with these key campus contacts, to keep them informed of OCS programs, and, likewise, to stay informed of their colleagues' work.

These connections might be institutionalized by web links to other departments' and programs' web sites, if such links don't already exist.

**Hire an intern to assess and expand nonprofit sector career services in the OCS.**
Since staff time and resources are limited, OCS directors might hire an intern to conduct an "audit" of their nonprofit sector career services. The intern might assess the nonprofit sector job listings, resources, and programs, especially relative to for-profit and government materials. The intern might interview students and staff to gather qualitative data on sector-specific services offered and prepare a report on findings for OCS staff.

The intern might then develop a strategic plan for expanding nonprofit-related programs and services, if such a need is identified. An intern could also implement the plan by develop relationships with nonprofit organizations in the region (as well as other college OCS), increasing nonprofit organizations' representation in OCS programs and job listings, building the nonprofit sector section of the library, and strengthening connections with public service and/or service learning offices, as well as with faculty members working in related fields.

**Consider appointing a staff member to spearhead nonprofit sector program initiatives.**
Most OCS operate with a limited number of full-time professional staff members. As such, most OCS obviously do not have the resources to assign a staff member to focus exclusively on nonprofit sector careers. In larger offices, however, a director might invite an interested staff member to take the lead in assessing nonprofit sector-related services and proposing opportunities for expanding them. This person could receive targeted professional development opportunities and might be responsible for overseeing the work of any intern hired to address these issues as well. Data suggest that building field-specific expertise of staff members strengthens OCS services more broadly.

**Collaborate with regional colleges.**
Offices of career services might consider the possibility of increasing their collaborations with neighboring colleges and universities, especially vis-à-vis nonprofit sector career development. For example, many colleges that don't have the resources to sponsor their own nonprofit sector career fair have found that joining forces with regional colleges has allowed them to offer such programs for the first time, with great success.

**Work with alumni affairs and the development office to raise designated funds.**
Many university endowments are down and budgets are constricted. Programs and departments are being asked to make due with fewer resources, not share any newfound wealth. However, OCS staff can be powerful partners in the development process. They might try to work more closely with their office's supervisor and appropriate deans to build deeper understanding for the value and needs of their OCS programs. Special funds might be available from Student, Academic, or Alumni Affairs departments for programs dedicated to nonprofit sector career development. Local philanthropists – individuals, foundations, and even corporations – might find these initiatives particularly appealing and could be tapped for sponsorship opportunities.

# summary conclusions

> When kids are growing up, you never hear them say, "When I grow up, I want to be the director of a not-for-profit." Or "I want to run my own not-for-profit." They tend to stick to doctors and stuff, because we don't highlight the good things that the not-for-profit sector does. This has a lot to do with the individualistic approach in America, but we tend to shy away from not-for-profit because it's about being poor, and no one wants to be poor. Become a lawyer, or become a doctor … and be rich.
>
> —COLLEGE SENIOR

As is often the case, the research undertaken by this initiative found cause both for celebration and concern. Many of the Millennials who are about to graduate from college and enter the workforce believe deeply in public service and think that nonprofit organizations perform it the best. However, the perception remains – among college seniors and the individuals charged with helping them make career decisions – that the nonprofit sector does not offer viable career paths. The risk, of course, is that we are losing the talented young workers so needed to lead our organizations in the years ahead.

How can we best highlight the "good things that the not-for-profit sector does" to the next generation of working professionals and the individuals influential in their career decision-making process? How might we market nonprofit sector jobs to talented, committed young workers so that they understand that the sector offers viable career paths and it is not (necessarily) "about being poor"? What should foundations that focus on nonprofit sector capacity and workforce issues (and youth and civic engagement) do to build awareness, facilitate connections, and ensure that the nonprofit sector attracts and cultivates the leadership it needs?

It seems clear that building knowledge and positive first-hand experiences within all of the target populations is a critical first step, for we've seen that …

… When nonprofit organizations use interns, they are more likely to believe in the talent recent college graduates can bring to their organizations. When nonprofit organizations have preexisting relationships with colleges, they are more likely to tap them for their recruitment needs.

… When students have volunteered or interned at a nonprofit organization, they are more likely to consider a nonprofit sector career.

… When career counselors understand the nonprofit sector and the range of opportunities within it, they can better (and more enthusiastically) serve students interested in public service careers. When they have had successful relationships with nonprofit organizations in their community, they are more likely to try to expand their nonprofit sector network.

Raising awareness, strengthening connections, and offering young people real opportunities require innovative workforce development initiatives that focus on nonprofit organizations, young professionals, and the key "gatekeepers" to nonprofit sector careers.

**Nonprofit organizations**
Nonprofit organizations need information on the benefits they're apt to find in stronger relationships with colleges and universities in their region and beyond. They need concrete strategies on how to target appropriate colleges and build relationships with academic departments, service learning initiatives, work-study and internship programs, and offices of career services. Managers at nonprofit organizations – especially small and mid-size agencies – need trainings and other resources to help them professionalize their human resources activities, pool resources when possible, and plan for their future workforce needs. They need adequate funding to compensate interns with reasonable stipends and full-time employees with livable salaries.

**College seniors**
College students need basic and up-to-date information about the nonprofit sector, salaries in it, and strategies for finding public service volunteer, internship, and job opportunities. Information should introduce students to the sector quite broadly, but also address nonprofit sector work by specific issue areas or fields. College students can be reached through all of the work- and volunteer-related programs on campuses, as well as through relevant academic departments, nonprofit management programs (for example), and the campus and national media outlets students read.

**Offices of career services**
Office of career services (OCS) professionals need the same information as college students do, developed to recognize that they, too, approach career counseling by fields, not sectors. OCS directors need a tool kit on how to assess and expand their nonprofit sector-related career resources, fairs and workshops, and job listings. They and their staff members need access to professional development opportunities that will allow them to better understand – and speak more enthusiastically – about the opportunities within the nonprofit sector. Corporations provide a critical revenue stream to financially-strapped career centers. Colleges and universities – as well as the philanthropic community – must join forces to help reduce the costs associated with nonprofit sector programs. OCS must not see nonprofit sector outreach as simply an unrecoverable and unnecessary cost.

The professional associations to which career counselors belong must be encouraged to provide more and better information on the nonprofit sector and students' and professionals' rising interest in the role of values in career decisions. Nonprofit sector advocates and the philanthropic community addressing these issues also will want to explore other critical "gatekeepers" to nonprofit sector careers, beyond career services professionals.

**The nonprofit sector workforce as a collective goods issue**
Perhaps most importantly, however, the nonprofit sector might do well to see its next generation workforce needs as a "collective goods" issue. The entire sector requires talented, committed workers who are able and willing to live on the salaries nonprofit organizations can pay. One way to recruit and retain young professionals – who are now graduating from college with ever-increasing levels of debt – is for the sector to take "collective action" on loan forgiveness programs.

The federal government has already recognized this imperative – loan forgiveness programs are a critical component to attracting new workers to the public sector. Individual schools also have tried to help students with a call to serve: Stanford Business School, Harvard Law School, the Yale School of Management, Georgetown University, the School of Information at the University of

Michigan, and others all offer some type of loan forgiveness for select graduates pursuing public service careers.

While extraordinarily important, these discrete programs are not enough. The nonprofit sector needs a far-reaching initiative – embraced by the philanthropic community – to address nonprofit salary structures, student debt, and loan forgiveness.

Communities with vibrant nonprofit sectors and solid philanthropic networks might conduct research to assess the extent of nonprofit sector recruitment and retention challenges in their region. Based on their findings, a coalition of key stakeholders affected by workforce issues might develop a pilot initiative (modeled, in part, on loan repayment assistance programs) to serve graduates working in low-paying nonprofit sector jobs. These leaders would incorporate into their initiatives materials aimed at educating young professionals about the sector and facilitating their entry into its workforce.

These advocates and innovators would then want to share their findings and experiences widely. They will have recognized that today's new recruits to nonprofit organizations are the executive directors of tomorrow, entrusted to care for and lead the agencies providing the services upon which our people and our planet depend.

# appendix a RESEARCH ON NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

**FOCUS GROUPS WITH SENIOR STAFF FROM NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

To better understand how individuals responsible for hiring practices at nonprofit organizations recruit and retain talent – especially for junior-level positions – researchers held three focus groups with human resources directors, executive directors, and other staff responsible for hiring practices at nonprofit organizations in the Pittsburgh, PA area.

Thirty individuals (19 women and 11 men) participated. Separate groups were held for representatives from organizations with annual operating budgets characterized as "small" (< $500,000), "mid-size" ($500,000 – $1,000,000), and "large" (> $1,000,000).

Participants were recruited from a list of more than 400 nonprofit organizations that responded to a recent survey conducted by Kevin Kearns of the University of Pittsburgh (described below). In an attempt to achieve diversity of size and mission, researchers sorted organizations by budget and key classifications within the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities–Core Codes (NTEE-CC). This methodology produced a diverse pool of potential participants, but after significant outreach efforts additional recruitment was needed to ensure sufficient numbers of participants. Project advisors and the moderator offered other recommendations to complete the groups.

Participants represented organizations dedicated to the arts, environment, medical disciplines, youth development, advocacy, community improvement, philanthropy, religion, mental health, employment, housing, human services, international affairs, and science research. Their organizations' annual operating budgets ranged from $350,000 to $35 million and the number of full-time employees ranged from two to 220.

As mentioned in the body of this report, HR duties were handled by a single staff member (with possible input from others) by 25 of the 30 participants. Only one of the participants from small and mid-size organizations had any formal training in human resources. For organizations that had an HR team, department size ranged from two to seven full-time staff.

The job titles for individuals responsible for human resources were: executive director or president (18), human resources director or human resources administrator (4), program supervisor or program director (3), assistant director (2), director of administration (1), director of organizational planning (1), and director of operations (1). Only four of the 30 participants had a background in human resources before they assumed their current positions: one from small organizations, none from mid-size organizations, and three from large organizations.

**MAIL SURVEY OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

In Spring 2003, University of Pittsburgh Associate Professor Kevin Kearns and Research Assistant Chisung Park conducted a mail survey of 1,600 nonprofit (501(c)3) organizations in Allegheny County, PA. Funded by The Forbes Funds, the research explored whether faith-based human service organizations have special management needs relative to their secular counterparts.

The researchers agreed to incorporate into their survey a number of specific questions on the recruitment and retention of young professionals and organizations' experiences hiring from college campuses in the region. Data from those questions were discussed in this report. They are based on information from 403 completed surveys. This data set represents approximately one-quarter of the population of nonprofits in the region and is representative of the full range of nonprofit organizations' missions, as based on key classifications within the NTEE-CC.

# appendix b RESEARCH ON COLLEGE SENIORS

**FOCUS GROUPS WITH COLLEGE SENIORS**

To gather information on how young people make career decisions and think about the nonprofit sector, researchers held three focus groups with college seniors from colleges and universities in the Pittsburgh, PA area. Twenty-six students – 19 women and seven men – participated (and it was a coincidence that 73% of our focus group participants were women and 71% of all paid employees in the nonprofit sector are women).

The participants represented seven area colleges and universities: Carlow College (5 students), Carnegie Mellon University (6), Chatham College (6), Duquesne University (3), Pennsylvania State University (1), Point Park College (1), and the University of Pittsburgh (4). All but one were either 21 or 22 years old. One 27 year old student, currently in the army, participated (and his comments revealed more than average professional experience and knowledge of government employment).

Seventeen of the students (65%) were white and nine (35%) were minorities. Each group included at least two men, but all groups were predominantly women. Almost half of the students (11) had double or triple majors. Nearly one-half of the students (46%) were majoring in either communications or psychology. Other majors included anthropology, business, computer science, creative writing, engineering, health management, music, philosophy, political science, and women's studies. The majority of participants had majors in the humanities or social sciences, and just more than one-third were pursuing business and technology.

Participants were recruited largely through college career counselors, who were asked to identify a diverse mix of students. Some students were recruited by other students and by faculty members. Because students were identified by OCS, they were obviously more likely to have had experiences with career services and researchers were less likely to hear from students who had never visited their college's career center. In addition, because those recruiting students knew of the researchers' interest area, they appeared to reach out more aggressively to students with a nonprofit sector "bent." However, overall, the groups were fairly diverse vis-à-vis majors.

**TELEPHONE SURVEY OF COLLEGE SENIORS**

The NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and The Brookings Institution conducted a national telephone survey of "College Seniors and Public Service." The survey was executed between March and April 2003 by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The full report, a topline analysis, and additional information on this study is available on-line at The Brookings Institution's website, http://www.brook.edu/gs/cps/light20030603.htm.

"College Seniors and Public Service" was a national telephone survey of a random sample of 1,002 about-to-graduate college seniors majoring in the liberal arts, social sciences, social work, or education. Nearly two-thirds were women (63%), 82% were white, and 72% were between the ages of 21 and 23. More than one-third (37%) had no students loans, 18% would graduate with less than $10,000 in loans, and 34% with between $10,000 and $30,000 in loans. Respondents were almost evenly divided among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.

One-third of respondents (34%) were planning to go to graduate school immediately after graduation (and of those, 49% had already been admitted), one-quarter (25%) had already gotten a job (and of those, 15% indicated employment with a nonprofit organization).

**PITTSBURGH, PA AREA COLLEGE SENIORS**

Acceptable national lists were not available that would allow Princeton Survey Research Associates to over-sample for Pittsburgh, PA area college seniors. As such, in order to try to compare national findings to the region, researchers contracted with Campos Market Research to develop an on-line version of the national telephone survey. This survey used verbatim many of the questions of the national survey.

Campos Market Research determined that the best available email list was an American Student List comprised of 1,573 college seniors in Allegheny County, PA. This sample was selected from a database of more than 3.5 million individuals ranging in age from 16 to 25 years who completed an on-line profile and self-reported information on a variety of general interest categories. All records were 100% "opt-in" (meaning the individuals have given explicit permission to receive emails in this capacity).

A brief email letter requesting participation in the on-line survey was sent to the entire list on April 21, 2003. Follow up emails were sent on April 23 and April 25. The 4.8% response rate to this on-line survey was too low to provide meaningful data, and these data are not discussed in this report.

# appendix c RESEARCH ON OFFICES OF CAREER SERVICES

**AUDITS OF OFFICES OF CAREER SERVICES**

To gather background information on the operations, programs, and nonprofit sector-related resources of offices of career services (OCS) at four-year colleges, Coro Fellow Sara Chieffo conducted "audits" of Pittsburgh, PA area OCS. The data collected helped inform the national survey of and a focus group with OCS directors.

In late February and early March 2003, Chieffo spent approximately two hours per visit at the OCS at each of seven colleges: Carlow College, Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham College, Duquesne University, Point Park College, Robert Morris University, and the University of Pittsburgh. These colleges and universities represent a range of institution types – from a large, co-ed, public university to a small, private, all-women's college. They had from 2 to 20 full-time staff. All OCS welcomed the researcher, participated in a one-hour-plus informational meeting, and made their offices and resources available for review.

Five of the career centers report to Student Affairs, one reports to Academic Affairs, and one reports jointly. This representation is very consistent with national data.

The number of institutions (of the seven) with membership at the following professional associations were:

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) [7]
Western Pennsylvania Career Services Association (WestPACS) [7]
Eastern Association of Colleges and Employers (EACE) [6]
American College Personnel Association (ACPA) [3]
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) [3]
National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) [3]
Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Employers (PennACE) [3]
National Career Development Association (NCDA) [2]

A single institution was a member of the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE), the Midwest Association of Student Employment Administrators (MASEA), and the Pittsburgh Human Resource Association (Pittsburgh HRA). All participants said they felt most connected to NACE and, overwhelmingly, it is NACE publications they first indicate they read regularly.

In terms of critical partnerships within the Pittsburgh, PA area community, four of the offices identified the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance and three mentioned Coro (and the Regional Internship Center), the Pittsburgh Technology Council, and WestPACS. Directors also spoke of the importance of their connections to the Chamber of Commerce, healthcare and human services organizations, other colleges, and alumni.

The directors were asked what percentage of students visit their offices, and the variation in their answers – reinforced by respondents' margin comments from the national OCS survey – flagged the range of interpretations of "student contact." Estimates ranged from 37 to 91%. Some considered reaching a student a visit to the career center's website; others calculated only students who physically entered the career center.

The smaller colleges stressed that they could not afford to host their own career fairs, but worked actively to partner with other organizations (however this evidently must refer to the human

resources involved, as three schools said that the fees charged to employers mean fairs pay for themselves). Annual operating budgets (not including salaries) ranged from $18,000 per year to $230,000 (although one institution would not disclose this figure). Three respondents said their operating budgets were approximately $60,000, even though they served undergraduate populations of 2,700; 5,500; and 16,000.

Many of the centers had a section devoted to nonprofit sector resources. However, these resources generally accounted for only an estimated 1 to 3% of their holdings. Offices had anywhere from none to 4 of the approximately one dozen nonprofit sector-focused career books available, with the most popular being *Good Works: A Guide to Careers in Social Change* (1994), *100 Best Nonprofits to Work For* (2000), and *Non-Profits and Education Job Finder: 1997 – 2000* (1997).

All stressed the role faculty can or should play in career development programs, given their faculty's position on the "front-line" with students. Only two of the offices audited felt they could benefit from better relationships with faculty – the others felt those relationships were critical but already very strong.

#### FOCUS GROUP WITH DIRECTORS OF OCS

Nine directors and one assistant director – representing ten area schools – participated in the focus group of directors of offices of career services. The schools included Allegheny College, California University of Pennsylvania, Carlow College, Community College of Allegheny County, Duquesne University, La Roche College, Point Park College, Robert Morris University, University of Pittsburgh, and Waynesburg College. Nine of the schools are four-year colleges or universities and one is a two-year college granting associate degrees only. Two are state-supported, one is county-supported, and the remainder are private colleges. Two have strong religious affiliations and one is women's-only. Their undergraduate student enrollments range from 1,442 to 17,910 students.

Seven of the participants were women and three were men. The offices they manage range in size from two to 21 staff members, including support staff.

#### ON-LINE AND PRINT SURVEY OF DIRECTORS OF OCS

Researchers mailed surveys to 1,757 career services professionals at four-year colleges and universities in the United States. This sampling frame included all individual members of a national professional membership association of career services professionals who were coded as "directors of career services" and at "four-year colleges" by that association. They were understood to be responsible specifically for undergraduate career services.

The list received a mailing with a cover letter and print survey – which indicated they could also complete the survey on-line – and two follow-up postcards. Responding by a specified date allowed all respondents to be entered into a raffle to receive a resource package for their career office. Four hundred eighty-nine individuals responded.

Survey data collected, however, indicated that the sample included individuals working at associate degree-granting institutions, technical schools, and graduate programs as well. Of the 489 responses received by the deadline (a 28% response rate), 84 were coded as individuals serving associate-degree, technical-degree, or graduate-degree students. These individuals were deleted from the sample. An additional five schools submitted more than one survey. The survey from the more senior respondent was kept, and the other was deleted.

The final data set consists of 400 completed surveys (215 returned via mail, 185 completed on-line) from career centers that serve undergraduates at colleges and universities nationwide.

#### ABOUT THE DATA SET

Of the 400 colleges and universities represented, 19 were single-sex (4.7%), 149 were public (37%), and 251 were private (63%). Nationally, of the 2,364 accredited four-year institutions, fewer are public (26%) and more are private (74%). Because the data set over-represented public institutions – and because one hypothesis is that institution type (public versus private) is a critical variable in determining the quality and quantity of nonprofit sector career services provided – researchers statistically controlled for this institution type bias. Appropriately more weight was given to the private school respondents.

Respondents represented all regions of the country:

| REGION | PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS |
|---|---|
| west | 14% |
| southwest | 8% |
| southeast | 12% |
| midwest | 29% |
| east | 37% |

Respondents also represented the range of colleges by enrollment size:

| ENROLLMENT | SURVEY RESPONDENTS |
|---|---|
| < 500 | 2% |
| 500 – 999 | 14% |
| 1,000 – 2,499 | 44% |
| 2,500 – 4,999 | 18% |
| 5,000 – 9,999 | 9% |
| 10,000 – 19,999 | 8% |
| >20,000 | 5% |

Nationally, although 41% of campuses have 1,000 or fewer students, they account for only four percent of college students. On the other hand, 11% of campuses with 10,000 or more students account for 51% of students (USDE data).

Respondents also represented the range of career services office staffing (with respondents indicating 0 to 40 full-time staff members). The average was 4.3 full-time staff, the median was 3, and the mode was 1. Offices had, on average, a single additional part-time staff person and 5.3 student employees. Public schools averaged 6.2 and private schools averaged 3.6 full-time professional staff. The survey did not ask for operating budgets. Data from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) indicate that the average operating budget for career centers (not including salaries) is $149,901.

#### NONPROFIT SECTOR-RELATED RESOURCES

In an open-ended question, career services professionals listed the nonprofit sector resources they use and offer. This information is not included in this report, but will be used to assess existing and develop new nonprofit sector-focused career counseling resources.

# endnotes

**Nonprofit organization notes**

[1] Howe: 35.

[2] and [3] As described in detail in the body and appendices of this report, these two data collection efforts were not formally part of this project. However, their principal investigators – Kevin Kearns and Paul Light – generously offered to incorporate into their instruments additional questions relevant to our study and share data with us. The findings specific to those questions are discussed in this report. We are most grateful to these researchers.

[4] Salamon, *The Resilient Sector.*

[5] O'Neil: xvii.

[6] Salamon: 1.

[7] Independent Sector: 45.

[8] Independent Sector: xxvii.

[9] Salamon: 1.

[10] Independent Sector: xxxvii.

[11] PANO.

[12] At the time of De Vita's study, the Pittsburgh metropolitan area included six counties: Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland. The population of this region was approximately 2.4 million in 2000, 54% of whom resided in Allegheny County.

[13] De Vita: ii.

[14] KnowledgePoint: 1.

[15] Hinden: 1.

[16] Gordon: 1.

[17] Chieffo: 3.

[18] CompassPoint.

[19] As reported by Matthew Sinclair in *The Nonprofit Times*, in reference to the paper's annual salary survey, "When it comes to executive salaries, organizational size still matters most." Geography is also important, although less so.

[20] Ban, *HR Challenges*: 8.

[21] Light, *Content*: 6.

[22] Ruhm: 2.

[23] Light, *Health*: 6.

[24] Light, *Health*: 17.

[25] Hewitt: 1.

[26] Carnegie Mellon, *Destination*: 1.

[27] Carnegie Mellon, *Plugging*: 1.

[28] Carnegie Mellon, *Plugging*: 4.

[29] Carnegie Mellon, *Plugging*: 6.

[30] Carnegie Mellon, *Plugging*: 6.

[31] CompassPoint: 7.

[32] Ban, HR *Challenges*: 1.

[33] Ban, HR *Challenges*: 21.

[34] NACE: 1.

[35] Hansen: 18.

[36] Chieffo: 9.

[37] As a result, the data set of organizations self-reporting higher-than-typical salaries is very small. This raises the question of just how accurate the self-assessments are – in theory, a comparable number of organizations should have assessed their salaries as "lower than typical" as "higher than typical." Or, the sample might be biased towards lower-salaried organizations (i.e., higher salary-paying organizations did not respond to the survey).

[38] Chieffo: 10.

[39] Schwinn.

**College seniors notes**

[40] Howe: 99.

[41] Howe: 11.

[42] Howe: 134.

[43] All statistics listed in these bullets are from the 2001 Harris Poll referenced in the bibliography. It is important to note that this poll was conducted before September 11, 2001 and when the U.S. economy was more robust.

[44] Snell.

[45] Jacobs: 10.

[46] Independent Sector: 45.

[47] Baum.

[48] Bouchey: 3.

[49] Equal Justice Works: 6.

[50] Light, *In Search*: 2.

[51] Light, *In Search*: 8.

[52] Light, *In Search*: 10.

[53] Light, *In Search*: 11.

[54] Two recent studies of young professionals currently working in a range of professions substantiate our focus group findings on perceptions of the best job searching tools. Ban *et al.*'s study found that graduates of Pittsburgh, PA area colleges (from the classes of 1994 and 1999) ranked college career counseling as the least helpful resource in job searching. This perception was no different among individuals working in nonprofit versus for-profit sector jobs. However, nonprofit sector employees were more likely to rank faculty connections as more helpful than for-profit sector employees did.

[55] The Brookings Institution.

[56] Light, *In Search*: 17.

[57] Light, *In Search*: 176.

[58] In a 2002 study on the human services workforce, Paul Light found that young people who are interested in human services work – a part of the nonprofit sector with particularly acute workforce development needs – didn't know how to get jobs there. Only 16% of students at the nation's top 100 schools said they knew a great deal about finding a job in children, youth, and family services.

[59] Light, *In Search*: 13.

[60] Light, *In Search*: 18.

**Offices of career services notes**

[61] Similarly, the University of Delaware and Penn State are home to the "MBNA Career Services Center."

[62] As posted at http://www.feministcampus.org/know/sam/unit10.pdf.

[63] As posted at http://career.berkeley.edu/Nonprofit/FaqNP.stm.

[64] DeZube: 1.

[65] National Association of Colleges and Employers, *2002 Career Survey*.

[66] As an aside, all OCS focus group participants were very enthusiastic that the next EACE meeting had been scheduled for Pittsburgh, PA in 2004. They believed EACE is particularly strong on nonprofit sector employers and that the Pittsburgh, PA conference offers tremendous networking opportunities for colleges and nonprofit sector employers in the region.

[67] On February 14, 2003, Idealist.org / Action Without Borders organized a Nonprofit Sector Career Fair in Pittsburgh, PA. It was held at the Duquesne University campus and was open to all members of the community. More information on the Idealist career fairs program is available on-line at www.idealist.org.

[68] The Regional Internship Center (RIC) of Southwestern Pennsylvania was created with the support of the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board to increase the number of internships and to create a centralized internship system in the region. It is directed by McCrae Holliday of the Coro Center for Civic Leadership. More information is available on-line at http://www.ric-swpa.org/index.html.

[69] This is significant at the 90% level. All other data are significant at the 95% level.

[70] NACE.

[71] NACE: 2.

[72] NACE data drawn from a significantly smaller sample found that career centers sponsored an average of six career fairs per year, with an average total attendance of 2,560 students.

[73] These findings are consistent with data from a national NACE survey of its membership, which found that career services directors' biggest challenge involved engaging students in career programming before their senior year and "making do with dwindling resources"– including staff, time, and funds. Respondents also indicated that they had inadequate facilities, insufficient support from faculty and administration, and trouble keeping up with changing technology.

[74] As posted at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Swearer_Center/CCGood/books.shtml.

**Conclusion notes**

[75] These initiatives are backed by compelling data. A 2001 Hart-Teeter poll on employment in the federal government found that three-quarters of respondents thought that loan-forgiveness programs for recent college graduates would be an effective recruitment strategy, and 82% of adults under age 30 and 84% of students believed this. (Hart-Teeter: 6.)

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# bios

**CATHERINE CRIMMINS,** RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Catherine is currently director of community service and volunteerism at Wesleyan University. Previously, she served as a team leader for AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps and was the community service fellow at Madison House, the Student Volunteer Center at the University of Virginia. Catherine's focus areas include student development and leadership development, civic engagement of young adults, national service, and education. She received a B.S. from the University of Virginia and an MPA from the NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

**SHELLY CRYER,** PROJECT DIRECTOR

Shelly is the director of the Initiative for Nonprofit Sector Careers, a research and advocacy project that she founded and launched in 2002. The Initiative's goal is to cultivate a skilled and committed next generation of nonprofit sector leadership. For the past 12 years, Shelly has run a consulting business designing public education campaigns for nonprofit organizations, with a special focus on human rights, women's health, and international affairs. She has worked with Housing First!, the Coalition for an International Criminal Court, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, International Women's Media Foundation, National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations, Population Reference Bureau, and Alan Guttmacher Institute, among many other organizations. In addition, Shelly has taught graduate classes at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and CUNY's Baruch College on how nonprofits can use the media to influence public policy. A graduate of Duke University and Columbia SIPA, Shelly lives in New York City.

**MELISSA WITHAM,** RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Melissa has focused her professional experience in vocational rehabilitation and workforce development. She currently works as a project manager overseeing job placement for adults with disabilities graduating from vocational training. Prior to this position, Melissa received specialized training through Cornell University to provide benefits counseling services in southern Maine as part of the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program. Her other areas of interest include welfare reform and education. Melissa received a B.A. from New York University and will complete her MPA in public policy and nonprofit management at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service in May 2004.

**The Initiative for Nonprofit Sector Careers**
170 Claremont Avenue #15
New York, NY 10027
212/665-0588 scryer@erols.com