

# Careers

Compensating charity

## Nonprofits beginning to value professionals

More and more young people are starting careers in the nonprofit sector, and those in the field detect the beginning of a trend toward more competitive wages - good news for a sector notorious for underpaying its workers.

By KATHERINE NOBLE

The nonprofit sector is notorious for long hours and low pay - and for losing its employees as they reach their 30s to jobs with salaries that can support families and a middle-class lifestyle.

That's a trend that may be changing, and as more and more talented young people let their passions lead them in their choice of careers, some experts say the sector is realizing that keeping these valued employees past their 20s will require more competitive compensation.

Jacquelyn Gist, career counselor for nonprofits, the arts and social work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says that when students interested in careers in nonprofits tell her they know they won't make a lot of money working for a nonprofit, she tells them: "Don't be a martyr."

In the late 1960s, young people contributed to the devaluation of nonprofit work by working for little or no wages, says Gist, who was one of those young people.

"If people see our work as unimportant, then the very causes we are working for become unimportant."

Today, she sees that changing.

"I think today there is a definite

professionalization of the nonprofit sector," Gist says. "There has to be." If the nonprofit sector is going to keep people past their late 20s and early 30s, "it's got to pay people what grown up people make."

The nonprofit sector is made up of "professional human beings, doing professional work, dealing with complex issues and they're beginning to demand adequate compensation. Salaries are never going to be what major corporations pay, but we're starting to get away from people in their mid-30s making \$18,000 a year."

Robert Hawkins, 29, deputy director of People for the American Way in North Carolina, a nonprofit constitutional liberties organization, says all the attention to high executive salaries generated by the United Way scandal hurt the public's perception of nonprofit salaries.

"Right now, there is so much scrutiny of salaries in nonprofits," Hawkins says. "Part of that has to do with what went on at United Way, but it makes me upset that the perception is, if you work for a nonprofit, you should not make a lot of money."

"We still have to pay the rent and feed our kids just like everyone else."

Like Gist, Hawkins doesn't think the salaries of most nonprofit employees will ever reach the corporate level, and he doesn't think they should. But he says salaries are getting better.

"The sector can't afford to lose its most experienced people," Gist says. "It's got to start paying them more."

Sue Stein of ACCESS, Networking in the Public Interest, says the non-

profits that are surviving have become stable and are therefore able to provide better salaries overall.

ACCESS provides networking services and job listings nationwide for people looking for work in the nonprofit sector.

A recent survey of 2,229 nonprofits nationwide by Abbott, Langer & Associates, shows that although the median salaries of file clerks, cooks and typists still hover in the low to mid-teens, median salaries in professional positions such as outreach workers and counselors neared \$20,000, while positions like directors of program services, public relations and information were in the low to mid-30s.

Editors, field staff directors and planned gift managers received annual compensation to the tune of \$40,000, while directors of government relations, publishers and legal officers received \$50,000 to \$80,000 a year.

Median annual income for chief executives of nonprofits ranged from \$20,000 for nonprofits with a staff of one, to more than \$250,000 at the high end of the scale.

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JACQUELYN GIST  
Career Counselor  
UNC-Chapel Hill

More than 75 percent of top executives, however, made less than \$75,000 a year.

As in most professions, entry-level salaries are relatively low. Dian Poe, career specialist for community and public service or government at Duke University's Career Development Center, says entry-level salaries in the Southeast range from the mid-teens to low 20s.

But whether the sector manages to make its salaries more competitive and keep this generation of idealists into their 30s and beyond, more young people are deciding to work in the nonprofit sector than in the recent past.

According to the Independent Sector, 15.7 million people, or 11.4 percent of the workforce, were employed in the nonprofit sector in 1990, the latest year for which statistics are available.

Both figures have been increasing steadily since 1977.

"I think our society is once again experiencing an upswing in social consciousness," says Gist of UNC-Chapel Hill. "I have an awful lot of students coming to me and saying, 'I want to do something that matters.'"

"It's like caring is cool again." Gist's position was created in 1992 because more students were asking for direction in finding work in the nonprofit sector.

When the Children's Museum About the World in Raleigh recently advertised the position of outreach program developer, with a salary between \$18,000 to \$21,000, plus benefits, more than 80 people applied.

"We got a very, very good

response," says Anne Kabore, the nonprofit's educational programs coordinator.

Pam Hartley, 22, a Morehead Scholar and 1993 graduate of UNC-CH with a degree in speech communications and an emphasis on performance studies, landed the coveted position. Hartley was working as a volunteer when she applied for the job at the Children's Museum.

When Hartley graduated in June, she was determined to work in the nonprofit sector.

So determined, in fact, that if she couldn't find a paying job, she was willing to volunteer at a nonprofit by day and work nights to pay the rent - which is what she did from May until the end of July at the Durham Arts Council.

Career counselors recommend at least one internship as crucial to landing that first job in the nonprofit sector.

At Duke, for example, Poe takes a group of about 125 students to a nonprofit job fair at Georgetown University every February. There, the students make contacts and set up interviews for internships and full-time employment.

Hartley says she isn't alone in her dedication to nonprofit work.

She says her friends that didn't go to graduate school all went to work in the nonprofit sector after graduation.

"I can't work just to make money, just to fill my time," she says. "There must be a reason to it."

For job listings in the nonprofit sector call 800-424-7367 for The Nonprofit Finder, and (617) 720-5627 for Community Jobs.

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