

Maxwell School Center for CAREER DEVELOPMENT

YOUR GUIDE TO FOUNDATIONS

OVERVIEW

A foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit organization with its own funds (usually from a single source, either an individual, family or corporation) and program managed by its own trustees and directors established to maintain or aid educational, social, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common welfare, primarily by making grants to other non-profit organizations. Foundations are categorized as independent foundations, company-sponsored foundations, community foundations, and grant-making operating foundations. Operating foundations sponsor research, social welfare or other programs as determined by their governing bodies or charters. Most award few or no grants to outside organizations and are not listed in the Foundation Directory. Community foundations derive their funds from many donors rather than a single source. These are usually classified under the tax laws as public charities, and are therefore subject to different rules and regulations than either independent or company-sponsored foundations.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The work of foundations involves reading proposals, visiting with prospective grantees, making judgments about awards, preparing detailed memoranda for governing boards and files, answering questions from prospective grantees, monitoring grants already in place and attending board meetings when asked. Some types of foundations have a significant fundraising/development component, and the largest foundations have staff to manage their investments.

The duties of program officers in smaller foundations may resemble those of executive directors in larger foundations. There are no standardized career paths. People may enter the field as generalists from a variety of backgrounds. In order to advance in the field, they work in a progression of positions within a particular foundation. These include program assistant, program associate and program officer; others move from one foundation to another for career advancement.

TYPES OF JOBS

- Program officer/coordinator
- Communications
- Grant development
- Human resources
- Investment analysis
- Editor/writer

QUALIFICATIONS + SKILLS

- Ability to write clearly and succinctly
- Project management
- Global perspective on ideas and issues
- Active listening skills
- Creative thinking
- Critical analysis and quantitative skills
- Grant writing

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SAMPLE EMPLOYERS

- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Carnegie Corporation of New York
- Commonwealth Fund
- Ford Foundation
- George Gund Foundation
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Kellogg Foundation
- Kettering Foundation
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- The Century Foundation
- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- David and Lucille Packard Foundation
- Pew Charitable Trust
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- Rockefeller Foundation
- Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
- ...And more!

SAMPLE MAXWELL CLASSES

- Policy Administration in Developing Countries
- Governance and Global Civil Society
- Challenges of International Management and Leadership
- Human Resources Management
- Nonprofit Management and Governance
- Financial Management in Nonprofit Organizations
- Fund Development for Nonprofit Organizations
- Managing Interpersonal, Group and Systemic Conflicts
- Social Media in the Public Sector
- Ethics and Public Policy

RESOURCES

- Council on Foundations
- Foundation Center
- Exponent Philanthropy
- Philanthropy.com

RELATED CAREER GUIDES

- Nonprofit Management
- Associations
- Think Tanks

PRO TIP: Knowing someone on the staff or board of a foundation, completing an internship or project with a foundation, working as a support person until another job opens up, or connecting with a mentor (including professors and alumni) who may serve as a consultant to the foundation or on the board, are all ways to break into the field. Volunteers or community activists who have been grantees of the foundation may become known to the foundation staff and connections made through fundraising, consulting or serving on a committee that reviews proposals can also provide a way into the foundation world.