



Non-Profit Consulting Careers in a Changing Economy

Thursday, February 5, 2009

4:30 – 6:00 PM

Amado Recital Hall, Irvine Auditorium, 3401 Spruce St.

Panelists:

- Lindsay Albright, MSW (Social Policy & Practice), TCC Group
- Nancy Burd, MGA (Fels), The Burd Group
- Vikas Choudhary, PhD, Center for High Impact Philanthropy, School of Social Policy & Practice

What is non-profit consulting? What kinds of projects do non-profit consultants work on?

Vikas: In international development consulting, the lines are very blurred between consulting and implementation. Consulting firms can have a “niche” such as Action for Enterprise, or be broad in scope, like Deloitte and Touche or Bearingpoint. Other organizations in the field include AED (nonprofit), DAI, Chemonics and Berger Group.

Nancy: Nonprofit Consulting is about what nonprofits need to know in order to operate effectively; the finance and business of nonprofits, as well as capacity building and organizational effectiveness. Many nonprofits work in a nontraditional way, not in the framework of a common business model. Foundations and funders have a huge influence on nonprofits. Nancy works on “both sides” – directly with nonprofits helping them with transformations like replicating programs nationally, or building a building, or merging with other nonprofits. She also works with foundations to help them with more effective grant making, having their programs and investments have more effective outcomes.

Lindsay: Nonprofit consulting means you work to help nonprofits carry out the mission of their organizations with limited resources – help them understand and assess the needs of their communities and what they can do best. As part of TCC, Lindsay does capacity building, strategic planning, and consults regarding financial management.

What is the effect of this economy on this type of work? What do you need to do to make yourself a competitive candidate for this field?

Vikas: Breaking into NGOs/international development consulting requires planning, networking, perseverance and patience. People are looking to hire candidates with international exposure/experience. Innovation and challenge are important parts of the work – solving VERY complex problems. The change in the economy means that there is a need for effective, collaborative service delivery.

Nancy: To be in nonprofit consulting really requires “field” experience – having worked or volunteered for nonprofit organizations. Taking classes in psychology can be helpful in order to learn the dynamics of the staff and board interactions. Nancy does hire people on a project by project basis for skills such as research, evaluation, writing and interviewing. It is too early to know how the changes in the economy will affect nonprofit consulting as a field.

Lindsay: Understanding organizational dynamics, conflict resolution and mediation, and experience in nonprofit settings is important. The MSW is a great degree for non-profit consulting. Qualifications include ability to read dynamics – what is being said or not said about organization; time management, juggling multiple projects; financial understanding and/or statistics (such as using SPSS); public speaking and communication skills; and a willingness to learn.

Resources for the field:

- Organizations to be aware of –
 - **Reinvestment Fund:** <http://www.trfund.com/>
 - **NFF:** <http://www.nonprofitfinancefund.org/>
 - **LaSalle Nonprofit Management Center:** <http://www.lasallenonprofitcenter.org/>
 - **TCC Group** (<http://www.tccgrp.com>) and **Bridgespan Group** (<http://www.bridgespan.org>) put out helpful materials

- Consider networking with nonprofit or philanthropy focus professional groups, volunteer on nonprofits' boards (esp. aim for participating in a finance committee)

- Chronicle of Philanthropy: <http://philanthropy.com/>
- Independent Sector: <http://www.independentsector.org/>
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: <http://www.geofunders.org/>
- Association of Small Foundations: <http://www.smallfoundations.org/>