



# Self and career assessment

## The foundation of a successful job search and career

by **Cathy Wasserman**, LMSW, Career, Executive, and Depth Coach *and*

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### In this chapter you will:

- Understand the vital role that self-knowledge plays in both your job search and your career.
- Grasp the kind of work that will appeal to you and communicate that connection during your career search.
- Clarify your mission, values, priorities, and greatest skills.
- Create a realistic picture of where your passion fits into the nonprofit sector through the “Career Tracks Exercise.”
- Use the “Four Lens Framework” to better understand what draws you to the nonprofit sector.
- Learn a short exercise to help you rate your interest in applying for a position.
- Begin researching your potential salary range—and learn why research is critical to a successful career search.

## Why is self-knowledge so critical?

by **Cathy Wasserman**, LMSW, Career, Executive, and Depth Coach\*

The big question on most job seekers' minds is: What can I do to make myself stand out to employers? While there are a myriad of ways to increase your “wow” factor, all of them essentially involve “knowing thyself,” not “selling thyself.” While selling yourself can come across as pushy and insincere, knowing yourself inside and out—your core strengths, experience, passions, and goals—greatly increases the likelihood that you will stand out and land a fulfilling job where you can contribute, be supported, and continue to develop and grow professionally. The benefits of professional self-knowledge can be broken down into:

1. **Strategically directing your career**
2. **Identifying jobs and organizations that fit**
3. **Authentically and specifically communicating your fit to employers**

### The rewards of self-knowledge

As you read through the resources in this book and think about taking the next steps on your career path, put some time and energy into deepening your professional self-knowledge. While this takes effort, the information you uncover will undoubtedly save you time in the long run and serve you in all areas of your life—in fact, it might be one of the best time investments you make, both personally and professionally!

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## 1. Strategically directing your career

Most fundamentally, self-knowledge can serve as a kind of North Star, helping you to determine where to invest your time, energy, and focus. It is difficult to make good decisions about your career without knowing your likes and dislikes, experience and skills, strengths and weaknesses, and the environments in which you do your best work. Lack of self-knowledge makes it more likely that you will end up treading professional water or embarking upon a career path that does not maximize your abilities.

In contrast, knowing yourself provides you with lots of detailed information from which to make informed and powerful choices about everything from developing a networking strategy to creating a professional development plan that will maximize your impact and satisfaction over the long term.

## 2. Identifying jobs and organizations that fit

Similarly, without having a good sense of yourself, it is challenging to know the specific positions and organizations that are likely to be the best match for you and therefore a good use of your job search time. Having clarity around your strengths, background, and goals will allow you to discern whether, for example, you are more suited to the day-to-day work of grantwriting or donor relations or, perhaps, both.

It is equally important to know the kinds of organizational cultures that help you to flourish. Seemingly small cultural details such as dress code can have a big impact, not to mention more subtle elements such as how decisions get made. So, for example, knowing whether you prefer working within a more or less formal environment, whether in terms of dress code or decision making, is key.

If you have a clear sense of the elements that accentuate your effectiveness, you will be in a good position to gather mission and culture-related information through networking and organizational research to assess your fit. Because it is impossible to get a complete picture of an organization's culture and the day-to-day responsibilities of a position before you actually begin, it is all the more vital to know beforehand the basics of what works for you.

## 3. Authentically and specifically communicating your fit to employers

Finally, taking an ongoing inventory of yourself provides you with the details you will need to create outstanding application materials, as well as to position yourself for a promotion and raise.

Let's say, for example, that you would like to write a "wow" cover letter for a job that you really want. If you have not identified what specifically attracts you to



**Lack of self-knowledge makes it more likely that you will end up treading professional water."**

### Your unique self (knowledge)

You will naturally stand out if you know how to briefly and vividly articulate the key pieces of your self-knowledge, because no one else in the world has the exact combination of skills, experience, interests, and approach to work that you have.

the position and organization, and how your skills and experience will help you succeed, it is unlikely that you will be able to convey your true connection to the work and the added value that you would bring to the organization.

If you have a clear sense of how the position fits with your interests and expertise, along with what you are excited to contribute, it is much easier to communicate why you are applying. In the end, there is no need to sell yourself when you can simply and straightforwardly describe the nuances of your enthusiasm and fit with a particular position and organization.

## **Key elements of professional self-knowledge**

True professional self-knowledge requires knowing not just the specifics of your skills and experience, but also your values and goals. Indeed, without having insight into both, it is difficult to land the right job.

Below is a list of some key questions that will assist you in building self-awareness. These questions will take time to answer thoroughly so if you have an hour or less, you may want to break them up into a few sittings.

### **Big picture insights**

1. What are your professional mission, values, and priorities? Do the jobs and organizations that you are interested in fit with your mission? (On page 40 you will find an exercise to start writing your mission.)
2. What are your short- and long-term professional goals? Do the jobs and organizations that interest you make sense as a next step, given your goals?
3. What is and is not included in your ideal job description? Be sure to address not just what you enjoy doing most in a given day, but also the kinds of cultures and organizations that are the best fit for you. Do the jobs and organizations you are interested in make sense as a next step, given your ideal job description?

### **Skill and experience insights**

1. What are your greatest skills and strengths? What skills do you need to work on? (On page 43, you will find an exercise to start clarifying your skill set.)
2. What are your greatest knowledge areas? What areas can you build?
3. What are your greatest professional accomplishments?
4. What are your greatest professional curiosities?
5. What are your greatest professional passions?
6. What are the key positive elements of your working style? For example, how do you do your best work? What aspects of your work style could benefit from some tweaking?

#### **Finding time to know yourself**

It takes a lifetime to fully know yourself, and that is if you're moving quickly! So how do you take an express bus to self-knowledge? Well, there are a lot of steps you can take to jump-start or deepen this journey. Setting aside even 10-20 minutes each week to complete any of these activities or answer these questions can go a long way toward helping you to understand yourself and plotting your professional development in just a couple of months.

## Steps to continually deepen your self-knowledge

- **Make the commitment** to “just do it”: In this case, Nike has it right. Just making a formal commitment to periodically check in on everything from your skills to your ideal job is a great way to grow your self-knowledge. Before you know it, it is likely that you will have accumulated lots of useful information to effectively direct your search or on-the-job focus.
- **Try to stay open:** Consciously making the effort to keep your mind open to new professional roles, goals, and skills can greatly open up your professional possibilities. While “job hopping” could be detrimental, trying out new experiences—whether through volunteer work or expanding your responsibilities in a current job (within reason, watch out for burnout)—is a great way to test-drive emerging skills and passions.
- **Assess your past experiences:** Formally assessing every volunteer and professional experience you have had in order to see what you learned and what you would do differently next time can build your self-awareness and help you to refine and clarify where you want to go.
- **Ask for ongoing feedback:** You usually gain valuable information when you ask for feedback from colleagues, supervisors, professors, mentors, friends, or others. Asking people to think about both your strengths and areas you can work on will help you further assess how to build your skills and experience and see what kinds of roles and organizations might be the best fit.
- **Work with a coach:** It can be very beneficial to formally work with a coach at some point as you move through the self-clarification process. It is useful for many people to have a sounding board as well as someone to ask thought provoking questions of you as you stretch not just your knowledge of yourself but also your possibilities. Sometimes we underestimate ourselves, and a coach’s job is to remind you of your highest vision and goals, especially when you are feeling uncertain or stuck.
- **Strategically build your skills, experience, and knowledge:** Take note of where you would benefit from skill or experience building and keep in mind your long-term goals as you plan your professional development. For example, you may want to periodically enroll in a certificate program, take a workshop on an area of interest and/or of importance, or seek out a mentor. At a minimum, it is a good idea to focus on developing or deepening *at least one skill a year*.
- **Periodically refuel your “inspiration tank”:** It is important to make time to do things that inspire you, whether going to your favorite museum or setting aside a few minutes each day to consciously daydream. In order to know yourself, you need to take good care of yourself and give yourself the inspiration and downtime that allow creativity, self-knowledge, and new directions to emerge.



Use the space below to jot down some ideas on how you can develop your self-knowledge.



It is a good idea to focus on developing or deepening at least one skill a year.”

# Activity 1: Clarifying Your Mission, Values, and Priorities

A great way to further clarify where you want to head professionally is to write a mission statement. Mission statements help to prevent “mission drift”—taking on jobs and responsibilities not consistent with your true purpose and values, making it difficult to actively and intentionally direct your life and career. While your mission, values, and priorities will change throughout your life, having something to start with gives you important information for making informed choices and increases the likelihood of living a meaningful life, both personally and professionally.

Writing a personal and professional mission statement can take time. Indeed, meaningful mission statements are the product of deep reflection and thinking. However, even if you do not currently have a lot of time to invest in the process, it is incredibly helpful to create a brief statement that you can add to or edit later.

## 1. Define Your Values

Start writing your mission statement by reflecting on your values: these are the principles that guide your decisions, form the bedrock of your worldview, and make you passionate. Clarifying your values helps you develop a potent mission statement since values motivate us to take action and actively live our purpose. Below are some examples of values:

- Creativity
- Perseverance
- Compassion for all people, including myself
- Friendliness
- Family orientation

List five to ten of your most important values:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Now order these values from most important to least:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

## 2. Define Your Priorities

Next, clarify where your personal and professional priorities lie. Where do you truly want to direct your personal energy, time, and resources? The priorities that form the backbone of a mission statement should be broad and overarching. Below are examples of priorities:

- To provide my daughter with emotional and financial support.
- To make sure I get adequate exercise and rest each week.
- To provide my staff with the support that they need to be the best leaders and managers of themselves and others.
- To continually educate myself in my field of “\_\_\_\_\_.”

List five to ten of your most important priorities:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Now order these priorities from most important to least:

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

### 3. Craft Your Mission Statement

Your mission statement should incorporate your values and priorities, as well as the personal and professional impacts that you would like to make. You should feel strongly, if not passionately, about everything that you include in your statement so that you are motivated to live it on a daily basis. Your mission should include the personal qualities that you want to exhibit and/or develop, and the kind of person that you want to be rather than just what you want to do. Your statement may be short or long. Typically they run from a couple of sentences to one page in length. Whatever the statement's length, if it does not move you to read it, then it is a good idea to continue the reflection process and tap into more of your core purpose.

A very short mission statement might say:

I am committed to living my life with compassion and caring for all people, including myself and with a strong emphasis on and attention to my family. Professionally, I am passionate about helping to elect progressive candidates through highly innovative fundraising, event planning, and the development of persuasive campaign material. I am also committed to devoting the time necessary to develop my staff's skills and to assist them in meeting their own mission statements as best as I can. Personally, I am passionate about raising a self-aware, engaged, and happy daughter, and ensuring my physical, spiritual, and mental health by exercising, meditating, and taking time to refuel with friends every week.

**Begin your mission statement below, considering the values and priorities you listed above, along with your reflections on who you want to be and the impacts you want to make personally and professionally:**

[illegible]

## Activity 2: Clarifying Your Greatest Skills

Being explicitly clear with yourself about your skill set allows you to enthusiastically communicate what you have to offer both during a job search and on the job. It is a good idea to periodically check in with yourself and reflect on your greatest strengths.

This does not just mean knowing that you are, for example, a good communicator. Instead, focus in on the precise ways in which you are a good communicator. For example, if you are a great listener, how do you listen to people? What are some specific examples of how your listening skills have made particular impacts? As you work through the exercise below, it also can be very informative to ask a supervisor, mentor, or colleague to assess your skills. Noting any differences between your respective assessments serves as a great starting point for further reflection and clarification.

When breaking down each skill, be as specific as possible.

### Sample

Summary of the skill	Why do you feel passionately about this skill? Rate your passion from 1-10 (10 being most passionate)	Detailed breakdown of this skill (What is your knowledge base? What are your connections? What is your experience? What are your sub-skills?)	What have been the specific impacts of this skill in your previous positions? (Focus on measurable and quantifiable results.)
Example: Community Outreach: I am skilled at community outreach in urban youth organizing, which works to increase youth involvement in middle school leadership.	<p>I love helping young people identify their leadership spark and then put it into action by planning and making concrete contributions to their middle school community. It really makes me feel like I am giving back because I had some amazing mentors when I was that age.</p> <p>I rate my passion for this skill as a 9.</p>	<p>I am well versed in the personal, family, and educational issues facing young people in New York City.</p> <p>I have dozens of personal connections to youth empowerment groups across the city representing a wide range of ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds.</p> <p>I know how to engage large groups of young people (200+) in working to spread the word about campaigns to increase their voice in their schools and to build their leadership skills, utilizing face-to-face contact and outreach.</p> <p>I know how to build broad support within the schools for increased youth voice in school governance by meeting individually with each stakeholder group (parents, teachers, administration, and students) and organizing meetings in which young people play leadership roles.</p>	<p>I have a track record of assisting young people in playing substantive roles in their middle schools. For example, when I worked for Vocalize Youth last year, I guided 50 seventh graders in developing a group art exhibit and fundraiser where they raised \$5,000 for a sister youth development program in Ghana and I also helped to facilitate a discussion with teachers and administration on expanding the international sister school program.</p>



## Your Greatest Skills

Summary of the skill	Why do you feel passionately about this skill? Rate your passion from 1-10 (10 being most passionate)	Detailed breakdown of this skill (What is your knowledge base? What are your connections? What is your experience? What are your sub-skills?)	What have been the specific impacts of this skill in your previous positions? (Focus on measurable and quantifiable results.)



# Career tracks exercise

by The Office of Career Services of New York University's  
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service\*

Whether or not you are sure what you want to do, the following activity is a great way to fully understand your interests and desires while also developing a thorough understanding of the existing opportunities in the nonprofit sector. This activity creates a clear picture of where your passion fits into the nonprofit sector. It stresses both idealism and realism and is a perfect place to get started.

## Data collection

Look at online or newspaper job postings, and copy or cut out any posting (a “clip”) that appeals to you either by (A) the type of organization or by (B) the job description.

**A. You are drawn to this kind of an organization.** You like its mission. You would like your work to have an impact on this issue, population, or area. You like the agency's approach to the work and you could see yourself, someday, working for an organization like this. Do not worry about where it's located or whether you like the job description that's attached to the organization. Just focus on the agency's overall purpose. Circle the part you like and put it in a folder.

**B. You are drawn to this kind of job description.** You like the way the responsibilities are bundled. You like the skills needed to perform the function of the position, and you could see yourself, someday, doing work like this in your day-to-day activities. Do not worry about the agency the description is associated with or whether you have the skills to perform the job. Just focus on the actual job description. Circle the part you like and put it in your folder.

Remember, the only criteria you are using to select clips are either organization or job description. *The location of the organization or job should not be an issue for now.* By broadening your search outside of the area where you live (or plan to live), you get a much fuller sense of the opportunities that are out there. For now, you are not concerned with finding a job with a ten minute commute.

Repeat this activity until you have at least 50 clips. The more you collect, the better.

Remember, when collecting, you do not evaluate along the way, you just collect ideas. Once you have a minimum of 50 clips, continue to the **analysis** phase.

### Your job does not choose you

If you are new to thinking about self-knowledge and how it relates to your career, know that you are not alone. There's an old stereotype that a job is what you get when you graduate from high school or college and is contingent on either your degree or the first offer you receive. The simple act of reflecting on what inspires and motivates you and then connecting that knowledge to the search for your next opportunity has profound implications. Get rid of the notion you may have that you should simply take the first job that becomes available to you. Your job should not choose you, you should choose your job... and know exactly why!

\* In this chapter, the “Career Tracks Exercise” and “Four Lens Framework” discussions are reprinted with permission of New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service © 2008 <http://wagner.nyu.edu>. Some modifications to the original text have been made by the staff at Idealist.org.

## Analysis

Take the clips out of your folder and see if you can find any patterns or common themes. Points to look for might include: issue, population to be served, approach to the work, geography, kind of organization, unit or department within an agency, and role and responsibilities.

For example, you might notice that a large number of your clips focus on direct service with homeless teens and adults, and most of the organizations you are drawn to are large organizations located in urban areas.

## Synthesis

Using the data gathered from your collection and analysis phases, create at least one and no more than five potential career tracks for yourself. A *career track* is a way to put parameters around and frame your potential career interests, and can include any of the following attributes that have meaning for you:

- Issue or field of interest (homelessness)
- Subcomponents of the issue that are of interest (workforce development that gets people off the street and into paying work)
- Approach to the work (individual training/mentorships, training classes, out-sourced trainings)
- Kinds of organizations that do this work (religious groups, nonprofits with heavy federal funding, local groups that focus on specific neighborhoods)
- Where these organizations are located (urban, rural)
- Size of the organizations (three paid staff, 50 paid staff operating within a larger community organization)
- Potential departments within organizations (Fundraising department, Event Planning department)
- Roles that you aspire to play (curriculum developer, community liaison)
- Requirement of skills, education, experience, and knowledge to fulfill those roles (background in education, mental health, rehabilitation, Master of Social Work)

Take stock of your qualifications and experiences as they relate to your potential career tracks. Your track should inform which groups you join, the people you seek out, the internship/job experiences you look for, and how you present yourself in a resume, cover letter, and interview. (See [Chapter Eight](#) for more advice on cover letters and resumes, and [Chapter Nine](#) for a discussion of interview techniques.)

Remember to reflect along the way to determine if this track feels like a good fit for you. If it does, continue on this path. If not, seek out additional tracks.



Use the space below to jot down one to five potential career tracks that you can explore.

## Application

After you identify your possible career tracks, draft a different resume for each position you identify that fits into each of the tracks. This can be an entry-level position or a “dream job”; the point of drafting a mock resume is to get a clear view of the skills, experiences, and qualifications (which can include certifications or licenses) you will need in that particular job.

Now, fill in the resume with the skills, experiences, and qualifications that you already have for the position. Look at any areas that are blank.

*Your task now is to fill in those blanks.*

- If you need more **management experience**, try to lead a project team in school or take on a leadership role in a campus or community group.
- If you need more **direct service experience**, volunteer to tutor adults, mentor children, or reach out to families in need.
- If you need more **fundraising experience**, organize a campaign through your network of friends, your church, or your workplace to raise money for a cause that is important to you. You can even participate in an endurance event (walks, half-marathons, triathlons) and raise money through your training.
- If you need to demonstrate more **commitment to an issue area**, find organizations in your area that work in the area you care about. Do an internship with them. Participate in a year of service. Volunteer and strive to become a volunteer leader that takes initiative and gains the trust of the staff working in the organization.
- If you need more **professional experience**, find out what national professional associations exist in your area of interest and become a member. Attend the annual conference. Membership organizations are great for networking and they look good on your resume. They show commitment to an issue area and demonstrate to employers that you are up-to-date on the trends and issues affecting their profession.
- Take courses at the local college in **finance** or **administration**. Get a certification online through a reputable organization. Attend workshops held by local nonprofits and businesses.

Whatever the blanks are on your resume, you can find a time and place to fill them. While it is unrealistic to fill all the blanks in all of your resumes in a relatively short amount of time, many of the skills you wish to have should be transferable between resumes.



### START ASKING

After the “Synthesis” phase of the Career Tracks

exercise, you will have a much clearer sense of the kind of work you wish to do. Although you are planning to make your “dream resume” into reality, don’t be afraid to reach out to professionals already doing this work.

Consider setting up a few informational interviews with these professionals in order to get a sense of the steps you should be taking to achieve your goals (see [Chapter Four](#) to learn how).

Ask for recommendations of organizations to join, publications to read, courses or certifications to complete, volunteer and intern positions to apply for, or even intentional opportunities to create, and any other avenues you can think of to help you on your way (see [Chapter Five](#) for more ideas on how to get out and involved).

There is no better place to seek guidance in finding your ideal job than from the people who are doing the job right now.

Ideally, you will have *at least 12 months* for the Career Tracks process. Realistically, you will only have three to six months. Here is how to schedule your tracking for each of the given time constraints:

	12 month timeline	6 month timeline	3 month timeline
<b>Part One:</b> Data collection	First to third months	First month	First two weeks
<b>Part Two:</b> Analysis & <b>Part Three:</b> Synthesis	Fourth month	Second month	Second two weeks
<b>Part Four:</b> Application	Fifth to twelfth months	Third to sixth months	Second and third months



**Successful job searches almost never happen overnight.”**

## What if I need a job right NOW?!?

If you really need a job as soon as possible, you should take a “hold it together” job for now. Instead of trying to find your ideal work *today* (and frustrating yourself in the process), your focus should be on finding interim work: a job that meets your basic needs and allows you to cover the monthly bills. This “hold it together” position should last no more than 18 months. While doing your interim job, start the Career Tracks exercise and stick with it. If you do it right and stay committed, your next job shift will be a lot more meaningful.

If you are looking to find a new job immediately, don’t expect to step into your ideal job at this point. You may need more time to research available positions, develop transferable skills, network through professional associations, and gain experience you will need to make your materials stand out in a pool of applications for your ideal work.

Successful job searches—especially job searches that cross sectors—almost never happen overnight. The more you put into the search, including *time* and *energy*, the more you stand to gain.

# The four lens framework

by The Office of Career Services of New York University's  
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service\*

Simply saying “I want to work in nonprofits” is not enough. People don’t enter the for-profit or public sectors without a specific job, organization, or specialization in mind. An education major knows they want to teach tenth grade math, a business major knows they want to work in print advertising, and a political science major knows they want to work as a policy analyst in the State Department. Approaching the wonderfully diverse nonprofit sector means understanding what draws you to the work.

With the Four Lens Framework you can start from where you are right now and figure out where you want to go next. People typically enter the nonprofit career conversation from one of four lenses:

1. An **issue** (and/or **value**): a matter of public or personal concern
2. An **organization**: a structure through which individuals cooperate systematically to conduct business
3. A **role**: a function or part performed
4. A **system**: a group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole

If you enter the nonprofit sector through the lens of an **issue** or **value**, you may be passionate about and want a career concerning a specific cause; for example, education, the environment, public health, or anti-racism.

If you enter the nonprofit sector through the lens of an **organization**, you might really want to work for a specific organization like Doctors Without Borders, the United Nations, or Habitat for Humanity.

If you enter through the lens of a **role**, you may have decided that you would like to have a specific position like a grantwriter, a program manager, or a volunteer coordinator.

If you enter through the **system** lens, you might be interested in the interplay, patterns, and connections between and among the other three lenses, looking at how they work together, influence each other, and shift based on the movement of external dynamics.

## Activity

How are you thinking about your professional next steps? On the next page you’ll find some questions to ask yourself:

### Reflecting on past work experiences

As you begin to direct your career, identify jobs and organizations that could be a good fit, and understand how to communicate your fit with the organization, take time to reflect on the aspects of past jobs or experiences that you’ve really enjoyed.

- Was there a particular manager or professor you loved working with?
- Is there a certain work environment that you know you prefer? Why?
- Was there a specific aspect of a job or project that you enjoyed doing?

People often reflect on a past job or experience as a “whole”. Dig a bit deeper and look at various aspects of each role you’ve had and ask yourself: “What part of this did I like and why?” Keep track of your answers to refer to as you begin to assess whether an organization will be a good fit for you.

### Consider organizations in the orbit of your target employer

If you are interested in working with a larger, well-known organization—like the Gates Foundation—research small organizations that they fund, contract out to, or collaborate with, and explore working with those smaller organizations first.

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## Issue/value

1. Why is this issue a matter of public concern? Why should anyone care about this issue? How can this issue be broken down?
2. Which of these issue areas am I interested in? Which do I want to find out more about?

## Organization

1. Which organizations am I particularly drawn to?
2. What is it about these organizations that appeals to me?
3. What other organizations exist that share these qualities? (You can search [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) to explore other organizations.)

## Role

1. Do I have a role in mind that I'd like to take on?
2. What are some common roles with organizations that work on issues I care about?
3. How are the responsibilities within job descriptions bundled, and do I have the requisite skills, education, and experience to fulfill them?

## System

1. Do I want to be in a very established organization or a start-up? Do I want to be in an agency that already has a lot of influence in the field, or with an agency that can afford to push an agenda firmly? Which well-funded organizations are very established and in the mainstream? Which radical grassroots organizations are on the fringe? Where do I want to have influence?
2. Do I want the scope of my work to be local, national, or international?
3. What are some approaches to doing this work? (For example: direct service, philanthropy, capacity building, policy, research/analysis, marketing, advocacy.)

After contemplating the four lenses and their related questions, you should be able to formulate a statement reflecting your specific aims and approaches in your non-profit career search. This will be a lot more focused than simply saying, "I want to work in nonprofits." For example:

*I am passionate about learning and education (**issue/value**). Since my issue area is broad, I need to look at organizations that are doing educational outreach that interests me. I want to work with an **organization** that embraces the train-the-trainer model since I want to help teachers and trainers become better at their work, thus impacting a larger number of students than I could impact in a single classroom. Therefore, my **role** would be that of a trainer, curriculum developer, or education program manager. I've worked in several types of nonprofits from well-established and financially secure to new, unknown, and unfunded, and I like the stature afforded to well-established agencies within the **system**.*



# Rate your interest in applying for a position

by Cathy Wasserman, LMSW, Career, Executive, and Depth Coach\*

Job applications take a lot of time and effort so it is crucial to assess whether each job of interest is worth the effort of actually applying. If you find yourself really struggling to explain why you want the job when crafting a resume and cover letter for that position, you may want to reconsider applying. Moreover, it is helpful to formally rate your level of interest in the job, the organization, and its fit with your skills and experience. This exercise will help you do that.

## Step one

First, rate your level of interest and **passion for the position** on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being most passionate. Then, make a note about why you gave it the rating that you did. If you rate a job as less than a 7, then it might not be the right position for you.

## Step two

Next, rate your level of interest and **passion for the organization** itself on a scale of 1-10. Again, if your rating is less than a 7 (even if the position itself looks really great), and if you do not see a fit between yourself and the organization's mission and culture, it may not be the right fit for you.

## Step three

Now go through the job announcement and note whether you meet the **job requirements**. If you meet at least 80 percent of the requirements, then it is probably a good fit (assuming the last 20 percent is not a major component of the position).

## Step four

Lastly, go back through all of your ratings and take a "**big picture view**" in making your final assessment. For example, you might have rated the position a 7, but the organization as 8, and your skill match at 85 percent. Taken together, this is a pretty strong fit and probably worth the effort of applying.



Use the space below to assess your interest in a job opening using this activity.

\* This activity was developed by Cathy Wasserman. Cathy provides career, executive, and depth coaching to a wide range of individuals seeking to increase their personal and professional success, actively direct their life, and realize their one-of-a-kind core strengths and goals through her business, Self-Leadership Strategies. She has 16 years of experience in the nonprofit sector and beyond including work as a training director, a recruiter, and an organization development consultant. Additionally, she has served as career coaching expert with her column, *Ask Cathy*, on Idealist.org. *Working Mother* magazine also featured her as expert of the month on switching from corporate to nonprofit work. She began her career as an advocate for youth and women and she is published in the book *Front-line Feminism*. Cathy holds an MSW in Clinical Social Work from Smith College and a B.A. in Psychology from Wesleyan University. You can contact Cathy at [cathy@self-leadershipstrategies.com](mailto:cathy@self-leadershipstrategies.com) or visit her website, [www.self-leadershipstrategies.com](http://www.self-leadershipstrategies.com).



# Research your salary range

The final piece of the self-assessment process is understanding your market value. While it can be frustrating to try to reduce your worth to a dollar figure, this is powerful—and essential—knowledge to have in mind both when deciding to apply for a job and when deciding to negotiate. So while negotiation may seem a long way off in this process, investing time to figure out your worth in terms of salary will help you further refine how you choose to engage with the sector, which positions you want to apply for, and whether a particular job is right for you. And while this process focuses on salary assessment, remember that a job offer comes with a complete compensation package. Other components of this are harder to put a price tag on, but are no less important to consider as you weigh an offer and decide if it will meet your needs. [Chapter Ten](#) has more information on the multitude of options that you may find (or ask for) in an offer that reflects your true market value.

## Salary surveys and anecdotal research

Nonprofit salary information is particularly hard to find. There are a number of salary calculators and surveys that you can begin with. Take what information you can from these online tools and then begin your “on the ground” research. As you are conducting informational interviews, ask questions like: “For someone [with my skill set/seeking a specific position/coming in at entry-level], what kind of salary could I anticipate in the nonprofit sector?” Do *not* ask the person what they earn! However, if you phrase the question so that it relates to your experience and skills, you will often get a useful answer without having to ask a personal question.

## Factors that affect salary

There are several factors to take into account as you figure out what salary range you should expect in a job offer: experience, education, geography, and both the issue area and size of the organizations you’re targeting.

### Experience

Your experience level generally refers to the full-time years you’ve worked. However, part-time jobs, internships, volunteer work, and course projects can also count as experience depending on their scope and duration. As a first-time job seeker, your coursework may be all of the experience you have; be sure to highlight it on your resume.

### Education

Studies show that your salary correlates with the highest level of education you’ve achieved (see the table on the next page). As you assess your earning potential, take into consideration not only the degree(s) that you have earned, but also the relevance of the degree(s) to the positions you’re pursuing. Another factor that may



**While it can be frustrating to reduce your worth to a dollar figure, this is essential knowledge when deciding to apply for a job.”**



### Salary surveys

For a list of free salary calculators and surveys, see the online

resource page for Chapter Ten (which covers compensation packages) at: [www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/ch10resources.html)



### Financial self assessment

Idealists.org partnered with the National Endowment for

Financial Education (NEFE) to create a free guide to financial self assessment called “Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World.”

Find it here: [www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html)

get taken into account is the institution where you received your degree. Right or wrong, a degree from a prestigious institution may increase your perceived worth.

Unemployment rate in 2006 (%)	Education attained	Median weekly earnings in 2006 (\$)
1.4	Doctoral degree	1,441
1.1	Professional degree	1,474
1.7	Masters degree	1,140
2.3	Bachelors degree	962
3.0	Associate degree	721
3.9	Some college, no degree	674
4.3	High school graduate	595
6.8	Less than high school diploma	419

Data are 2006 annual averages for persons aged 25 and over; earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

## Geography

You will generally find higher salaries in big cities as compared to more rural areas. Even among big cities, salaries in cities like New York, San Francisco, or Washington, DC will be higher (on average) than those in Kansas City or Atlanta. However, don't make a beeline for a big city just because your salary will be higher; the cost of living in big cities is also significantly higher than in rural areas. If you're curious how salaries translate from one town or city to another, try several combinations of salaries and cities in CNN's cost of living calculator (<http://cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/costofliving/costofliving.html>). This tool will also help you compare housing, utilities, transportation, and health care costs.

## Size of organization

Bigger organizations tend to have larger budgets to put toward compensation packages as compared to smaller organizations. However, the nonprofit sector in general, and small nonprofits, in particular, are often very creative in their compensation package offerings. So even if the salary isn't as high at a small organization, you may be able to negotiate benefits like more vacation time, a flexible schedule, or tuition reimbursement to make the offer work for your needs.

## The value of research

Investigating your potential salary range is only part of the research you'll need to do during your career search. As the exercises in this chapter have shown, and as the sidebars on this page note, research comes up at every stage of the job search. Rather than viewing research as one more time-consuming task that keeps you from finding that perfect job, take it for what it really is: intelligence gathering that will help you find an opportunity that meets—and hopefully exceeds—your needs and aspirations. If you value your long-term fulfillment and sustainability, you should recognize the value of research in your career search.



### I DON'T HAVE TIME TO RESEARCH

In your job search, the more you

know, the better you will fare. This is true for all aspects of the job search, from having a clear awareness of your worth in terms of salary to being well versed in the work and plans of organizations you're interviewing with. This kind of in-depth understanding will allow you to craft specific and tailored cover letters, ask thoughtful questions during your interview, and negotiate a fair compensation package.

At every stage of the job search, you should make thorough research a priority. It will pay off.



### Further ideas on research

Research is a critical part of the nonprofit career search.

You can find more research tactics in several chapters of this book:

**Chapter Six** has ideas for researching work opportunities near and far.

**Chapter Seven** explains how to research and evaluate organizational culture, while **Chapter Nine** has tips on researching an organization before your job interview.

**Chapter Ten** includes useful advice on researching an organization's compensation package so you can negotiate more effectively.

All these chapters are available at [www.idealists.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealists.org/beginacareer).

## SUMMARY

**Self-knowledge** greatly increases the likelihood that you will stand out in your career search and obtain a fulfilling job where you can contribute and grow professionally. Self-knowledge also helps you to strategically direct your career and authentically communicate your fit to employers (pages 36-38).

**The two key elements of professional self-knowledge** are big picture insight, and skill and experience insight (page 38). Take steps to **continually deepen your self-knowledge** on a regular basis (page 39).

**Your mission statement** is a great way to further clarify where you want to head professionally and helps to prevent “**mission drift**”—taking on jobs and responsibilities not consistent with your true purpose and values (Activity 1, pages 40-42).

**Clarifying your greatest skills** means being explicitly clear with yourself about your skill set, so you can communicate what you have to offer both during a job search and on the job (Activity 2, pages 43-44).

After developing your self-knowledge, **finding a nonprofit career path that is right for you** is the next step in the process of locating work in the nonprofit sector (pages 45-50).

**Career Tracks Exercise.** Collect, analyze, and synthesize nonprofit job postings (regardless of geographic location) to better apply your energies toward seeking fulfilling nonprofit career paths (page 45-48).

**The Four Lens Framework.** People tend to view possible nonprofit careers through the lens of **issue**, **organization**, **role**, or **system**. Answering some questions for each lens can help you formulate a strong and clear statement about your ideal position in the nonprofit sector (page 49-50).

**Rating your interest in a position** is a simple analytical method that can help you decide whether applying for a specific job is worth the effort (page 51).

**Start researching your salary range** as a natural part of your career search. The more you know, the better you can advocate for yourself! (pages 52-53)

## You are here

- This is **Chapter Three**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/beginacareer](http://www.idealists.org/beginacareer).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. **Idealist.org**, a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

*The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers for First-time Job Seekers* is a product of Action Without Borders' Nonprofit Careers Program based in Portland, OR. This team works to support individuals and organizations with graduate education options; HR and volunteer management resources; and job, internship, and volunteer opportunities.

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