

# THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

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THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY'S  
**philanthropy**careers

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Q. I am a woman over 40 who's had a management career in the for-profit world. I'd like to move into nonprofit work, and I have a lot of experience in product management, business planning, and market analysis. Can I transfer these skills to charities, and how do I get started?

A. You absolutely can transfer your for-profit business skills to the nonprofit world, says Tom Geldner, director of marketing at the San Diego Regional Energy Office, a nonprofit organization that conducts research on energy issues. Since most charities deliver services and sometimes goods, your skills in sales, product management, and competitive analysis are all important assets that many charitable organizations would be thrilled to acquire, he says. For instance, your market-analysis skills can help identify ways to raise money. "Nonprofits compete for consumer dollars just like for-profits," he says. "And your overall business-planning skills will help you think strategically -- something that some nonprofits are sadly lacking."

One thing to keep in mind, he says, is that many nonprofit organizations have limited resources, so any skills you can offer that will help a charity do more with less will be appreciated and valued.

"For us marketing types," he says, "that may include everything from hands-on graphic design to writing press releases, making donor calls, or staffing a booth at the local fair."

**The first step is to discern what kind of nonprofit organization you want to work for, says Amber Rosenberg, life coach and communications director at Breakthrough Collaborative, a national non-profit organization that helps improve the education of middle-school students from low-income families. Think hard about what motivates and inspires you, says Ms. Rosenberg, who spent years at a for-profit public-relations company before making the switch to the nonprofit world. "There are plenty of nonprofits out there, and, since you'll likely be taking a significant cut in salary, it's important that you find a mission that fuels your passion." Start by volunteering at a charity whose cause you support, she says: "Many nonprofits are understaffed, so if you make a good impression, it can lead to a more permanent, paid opportunity."**

In addition to volunteering, you might consider doing some freelance consulting work for charities, says Stephanie Wagner, a marketing consultant in Glendale, Wis., who works with nonprofit groups. "Freelancing might allow you to continue your current employment while you build a network of nonprofit clients," she says.

Ms. Wagner, who worked as a corporate brand manager and executive director of a charity before starting her consulting business, also advises that you completely revamp your résumé. Be sure that it communicates the value of your skills, rather than just a chronological list of past employers, she says. Organize it according to types of skills, such as "project management," "communications," and "strategic planning." Under each heading, she suggests, include bullet points demonstrating your accomplishments, such as "created a five-year strategic plan for a division of XYZ Company" or "led the introduction of a new product generating a 20-percent increase in sales." At the end of the résumé, provide a brief chronology of your work history.

Making contact with other nonprofit executives is also very important, both to help you learn more about nonprofit culture and to ensure that you hear about job openings, adds Ms. Wagner. Participate in fund-raising events, request informational interviews from nonprofit officials you admire, attend seminars, and join professional organizations. Get in touch with your state's nonprofit association to see if it can provide you with training opportunities and other services. These centers often offer classes that can help you hone your skills, and some have programs that match people with skills like yours with nonprofit organizations that need help. To find your state's association, visit the National Council of Nonprofit Associations [Web site](#).

For more information on the growth of marketing jobs in the nonprofit field, see the *Chronicle's* [special report](#) from last year on the field's hottest jobs (March 18, 2004).