

Careers in NGOs

How do you begin? What skills? What education? What job?

Introduction

Working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a great way to directly create impact and participate in making the world a better place for the underprivileged. Unfortunately, many people shy away from taking up jobs in NGOs because they see them as low paid jobs or worse, unpaid jobs. Hence, people tend to consider jobs in NGOs only when they are caught up in undesirable situations where they are less likely to get money-making jobs. That's why students, unemployed persons, retired persons, housewives, volunteers, are the sort of people who make up the bulk of the workforce in NGOs. In fact, many see a job in an NGO only as a stepping-stone.

However, with the ever-growing number of humanitarian needs leading to the creation of more and more NGOs across the world, this sector is becoming more professionalized in all aspects including the paying of salaries. Highly qualified graduates are now building whole careers working in NGOs.

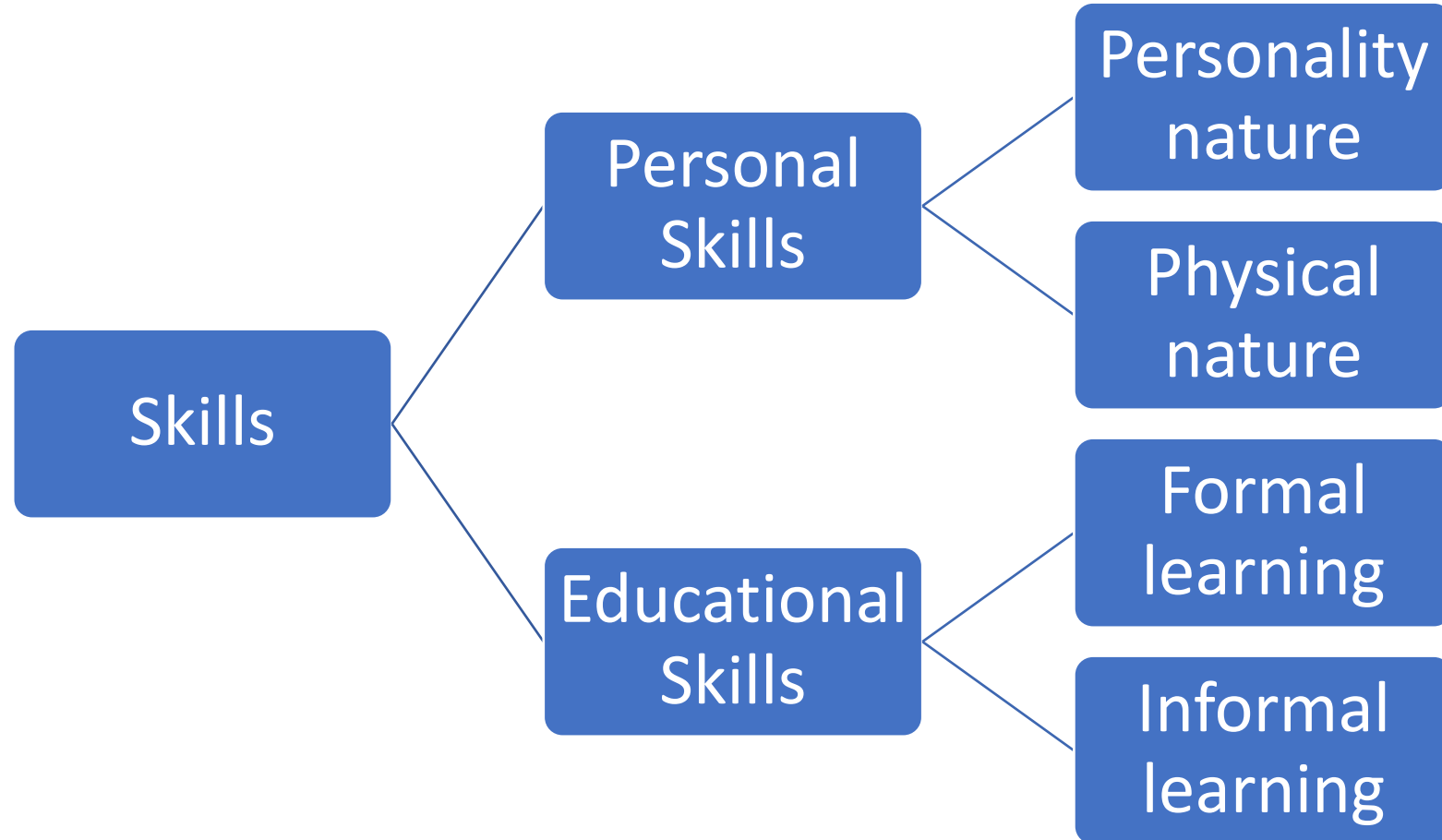
You too can!

How does it begin?

It really begins from the heart! Do you have that kind of heart that feels for others? Do you sometimes feel like giving up your only meal of the day to a child next to you that looks hungrier than you are? Do you sometimes feel like to give up your savings to help a suffering person you know? If you do then you have a place somewhere in the world of NGOs.

It begins from very small humanitarian gestures, right inside your own family, then to your neighbors, then to the little community in which you live and that is the beginning of going public and getting noticed as a humanitarian. Then, lastly, the job offers just come to you. Yes, when you follow the right path as a genuine humanitarian, the jobs come to you. You don't have to look for them. Are you on that path?

Initial Skills Needed



Not for everyone!

You are probably not the “NGO type”. That’s alright. Not everyone is made for every field.

What’s your personality like? Look for elements like: hospitability, bravery, honesty, generosity, sociability, open-mindedness. If people around you say you have these qualities, consider working in NGOs.

Like everything else nowadays some education is required of course. So what is your education background? Don’t think only about the formal, the majors you study and the certificates you get from schools. Think of informal learning too. Nowadays a lot of learning can be done both online and offline but outside the traditional classroom. The good news is that, from Math to languages and computer skills, almost every skill you learn and master can be useful in NGOs. Just be excellent at whatever you choose to learn.

5 Popular sectors NGOs cover

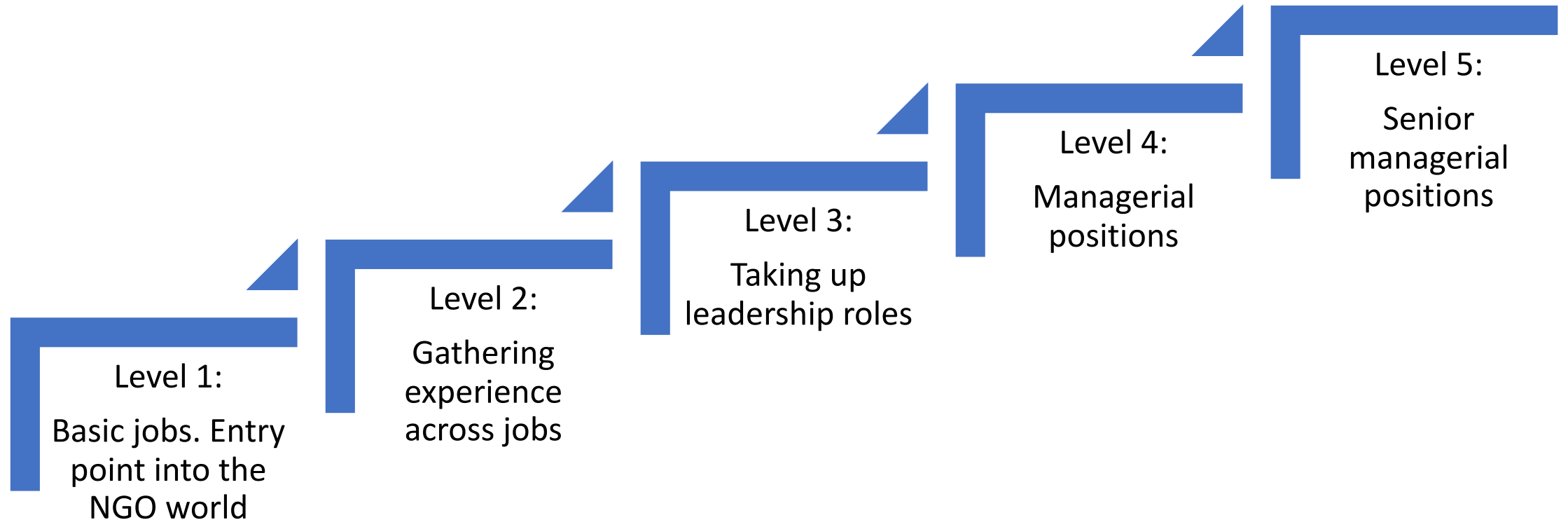


Choosing a sector

When you look through the five popular sectors presented above you are bound to find one or two more appealing to you than others. Follow your first instincts but take into consideration what skills are needed in order to work in each of the sectors. You may like a sector but lack the skills needed in order to work in that sector. In the health sector for example, an NGO like Medicins Sans Frontiers will easily hire a nurse. In the education sector the UNICEF for example will easily hire a trained teacher. In Environmental protection, someone with excellent background education on geography and related subjects has an edge over others.

The choosing of a sector of interest is really the beginning of narrowing down your search for a specific job.

The NGO Career Stairway

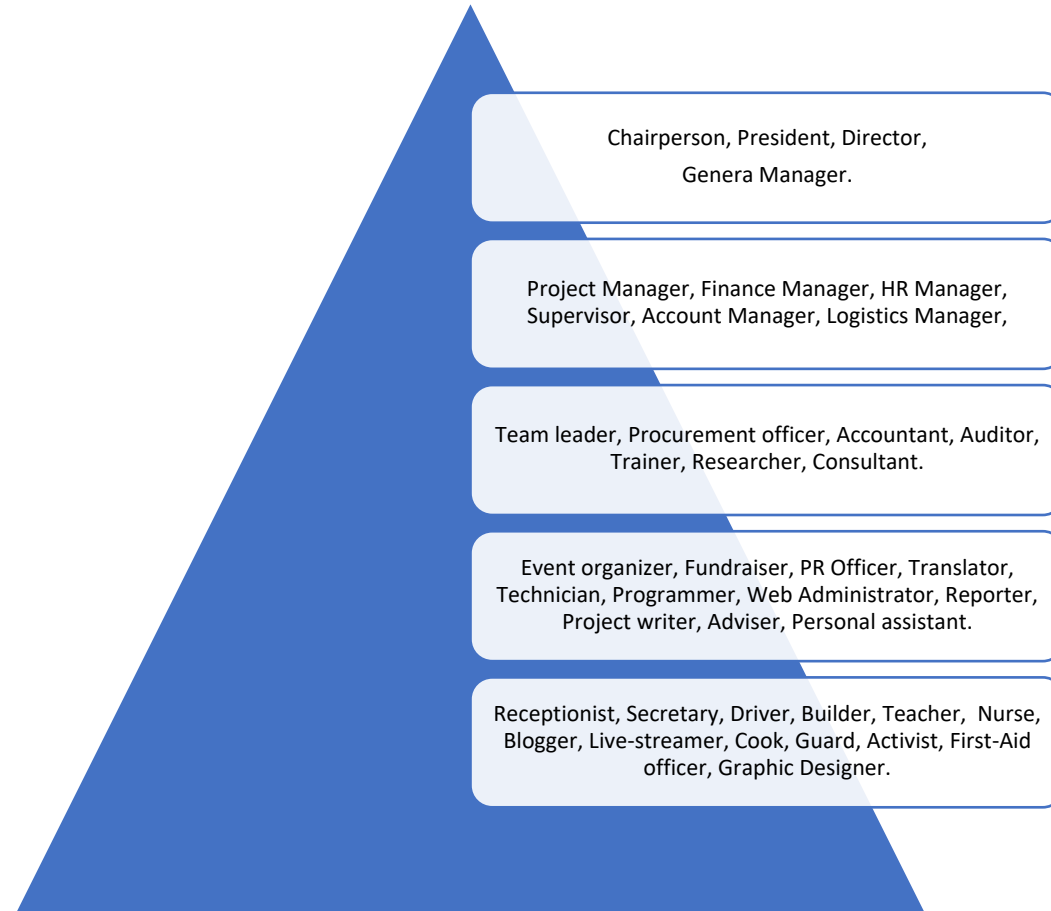


Where are you on the NGO career stairway?

If you have read this article up to this point it means you are interested in careers in the NGO world. You should be able to tell where you are on the NGO career stairway by now. If you can't, go back and read again. It is important to know where you are so that you can know what's ahead as well as what's behind. Knowing where you are also helps in your job search. Your current level in the NGO world should be reflected in your CV clearly, setting the base on which your goals and objectives are formed.

In the next paragraph on this article, you will see that each NGO job listed can easily find its level on the career stairway. It is often said that the best professionals in the NGO world are those who have climbed the NGO stairway all the way from level 1 to level 5. This is rare just like the best of everything is. Will you be the rare gem in the professional world of NGOs?

Popular jobs in NGOs



How much is the pay?

This is a tough question to answer with exact figures because it depends on a lot of factors such as: The specific job, the context, your qualifications, experience, place of work, budget available and your negotiation skills. The best thing is to always do some research on the pay from people who have experience before you settle on any contract.

Remember, working in NGOs is not a money-making adventure. This is humanitarian work. In fact, many NGOs don't even refer to the pay you get as salary. They call it allowance. This doesn't mean the allowance can't be worth the work you do. What it means is that if your sole goal is just to make as much money as possible, then go into business not the NGO world.

Popular NGO Job Platforms

Find an NGO job offer first before you write a CV that targets that particular offer. People usually do the reverse. They write a one-fit-all CV and splash it all over the place applying to any opening that shows up. That action alone shows how unprofessional you are. Take some time and browse NGO jobs. Just browsing NGO jobs teaches you a lot about what is needed in the world of NGOs.

Visit the following popular links:

www.foundationcenter.org

www.devex.com

www.reliefweb.int

www.ngojobboard.org

www.impactpool.org

www.ngojobsinafrica.com

www.ngojobvacancies.com

Fine tuning your CV for NGO jobs

- Don't write one CV for all kinds of jobs. If you like 5 different jobs in 5 different sectors you really have to make 5 versions of your CV, each one of them showing your experience in the job and your objectives.
- In your CV, mention specific things you have done in the past that make you have the confidence you can handle the job.
- Always try to have 1 or 2 referees in your CV
- Avoid CVs that extend beyond 2 pages.
- Don't lie or exaggerate. It's better to be honest and state that you are open to learn and that you are a fast learner.
- Always give your CV to someone who already works in NGOs to read through before you send it out.

Conclusion

Careers in NGOs can be challenging. In fact, no career in life is a piece of cake. If you enter from the base level of the NGO career stairway, humble yourself and learn from those already in level 2 of the stairway and you will grow. The more you broaden your knowledge and skills within many NGOs, the more chances you have to make progress. The first sign of success in the NGO career world you will see is that you will begin to be offered jobs instead of you looking for jobs.

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