

The MBA-Nonprofit Connection

Preparing a resume for a nonprofit job application

The ideal resume for a nonprofit job search is not the same document as the ideal resume for a private-sector job search. It might be a different length, will probably include different information, and almost certainly will use different language. While private-sector employers tend to focus on assessing MBAs' skills and abilities, nonprofit employers give as much weight to "values" (do we care about the same things?) and "culture" (will this person fit into our organization?) as they do to expertise.

- *It's OK for your resume to be more than one page long.*

Many MBAs leave valuable information out of their resumes due to the business school requirement of confining a resume to a single page. Nonprofit employers generally do not care if a resume is one page or two, as long as the contents are concise and relevant. (Note possible exception: a nonprofit organization staffed primarily by MBAs might prefer single-page resumes.)

- *The resume should include all of your volunteer work/community service*

One of the key criteria nonprofit employers use to evaluate job applications is demonstrated commitment to the mission of the organization, often signaled by volunteer or community service. MBAs tend to drop nonprofit experience from their resumes due to perceived space constraints (see above), leave it out because they feel it was too long ago to be relevant, or bury it under the unhelpful title "Other." You should include *all* of your nonprofit experience on your resume, ideally in its own labeled section. (Note: community service from years ago can actually be more rather than less relevant, because it demonstrates that you didn't just discover the nonprofit sector yesterday.)

- *Streamline the descriptions of your for-profit work experience, unless the information is directly relevant to the job you're applying for.*

A resume that contains long and detailed descriptions of work unrelated to the nonprofit job at hand emphasizes your "outsider" status. This is also a way to free up some space, if you still prefer to keep your resume to one page.

- *Scan your resume for business jargon*

Your resume should be user-friendly for a non-business audience. Even if the supervisor for a nonprofit job is a business school graduate, other members of the staff or board members who do not have business backgrounds may be involved in the hiring process. Show a draft of your resume to classmates or friends who have worked in the nonprofit sector to get feedback on phrasing.