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## Managing

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### **As New Graduates Size Up the Job Horizon, Smart Recruiting Matters**

*By Jennifer C. Berkshire*

Michael Watson, who oversees hiring for the Girl Scouts of the USA, is already looking forward to January, when he can attend the next annual conference of the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance. That's where he will have a chance to interview students from dozens of colleges that prepare undergraduates for careers at charities.

"You get 600, 700 undergraduates who've already committed to pursuing a career in the nonprofit sector," says Mr. Watson, who is senior vice president for human resources at the Girl Scouts New York headquarters. "It's basically one-stop shopping for us."

The gathering run by the alliance, a Kansas City, Mo., group, formerly called American Humanics, draws exactly the sort of students the Girl Scouts wants to hire. And it will help Mr. Watson achieve another of the charity's aims: cost savings.

"Major corporations have the budgets to send recruiters to campuses all over the country," he says. "We don't have those kinds of resources, so for us what makes the most sense is to go where the students are."

The number of college graduates seeking to work at nonprofit organizations has soared as the economy has declined, according to news reports, with both AmeriCorps and Teach for America reporting significant increases in applications. Still, charities that are seeking to hire these newly minted graduates may find that effective recruiting, even in a tight job market, requires more than merely posting a "help wanted" advertisement.

With a fresh crop of potential hires about to collect their diplomas, charity experts and leaders offer their tips on finding the next generation of nonprofit talent.

**Use social media.** Christine Bolzan, who advises college students on job hunting, knows exactly where to find members of that demographic: Facebook.

"The reality is that 80 percent of college students are on Facebook. That's a lot more than are visiting their college career centers," says

Ms. Bolzan, the founder of Graduate Career Coaching, in Boxford, Mass. But reaching potential candidates via social media requires more than just setting up a Facebook page or opening a Twitter account, says Ms. Bolzan, who also teaches several courses on social media in the Boston area. “These are fantastic tools for reaching college students, but you need to be strategic about how you use them.”

For charities that are new to Facebook, she recommends starting with a fan page that allows anyone to join. As the organization picks up fans, any news that is posted, including updates about recruitment opportunities, will appear in the news streams of everyone who follows the charity. She also suggests creating a specific tab for job opportunities at the top of the Facebook page. Then, Ms. Bolzan says, start posting “dynamic content that is going to keep people coming back. When you post a job description, include a picture of the team and tag the various people in it. You can even post a 30-second video of the team in action.”

**Focus the search for candidates.** The school year is still in session, but Kamy Akhavan’s search for potential hires for Procon.org, a nonprofit Web site that provides research on the pros and cons of controversial issues, is well under way. Disappointed with the candidates he found through career Web sites, Mr. Akhavan, president of the organization, now uses online college message boards to find students whose interests in political science, sociology, or history meshes well with ProCon.org’s mission. The Santa Monica, Calif., group then works directly with the relevant academic departments at several universities in the Los Angeles area.

“They want to provide their students with a career path, so they’re excited to work with us,” says Mr. Akhavan.

“We might get a smaller number of applicants,” he adds, “but those are the candidates that have turned out to be the right ones.”

**Know the audience.** When Melissa Gregson, a recruiter at Teach for America, a New York nonprofit that seeks to close inequities in public education, visits college campuses to talk to students about the charity and its mission, she knows exactly what sorts of questions they will ask.

“They want to know what my own experience in the program was like,” says Ms. Gregson, who taught middle-school science in New York’s Washington Heights neighborhood beginning in 2006. “They want to know: What was it like? What was the most challenging thing you faced teaching at an urban school?”

Of Teach for America's 140 recruiters, 76 percent have participated in the program, which requires a two-year teaching commitment at a public school in one of 39 urban and rural areas across the country. That experience serves as a powerful recruitment tool, says Ms. Gregson, who works in Teach for America's Boston office.

"We're looking for candidates who are excited about the challenge and committed to our mission," she says. "When we go to college campuses, the fact that we've gone through the program makes it much more real to the students we talk to."

The group's message seems to be getting through. Last year, more than 48,000 soon-to-be college graduates applied for 5,000 teaching positions; Ms. Gregson says the number is likely to be even higher this year.

**Lose the hierarchy.** Michael Smith, president of the Washington Center, a nonprofit in Washington that coordinates academic internships for thousands of students each year, estimates that in the past decade, his organization has worked with more than 15,000 millennials (the generation born in 1982 or later). And while the center has successfully shifted much of its recruitment work online—both for the internships Washington Center advertises and for the organization's own hiring—Mr. Smith notes that the charity's communication has changed in a more profound way.

"New and recent college graduates are much more interested in one-on-one communication—if they want information, they'll go to the source," he says.

Rethinking the way that the group's staff members communicate has been key to attracting—and retaining—the Washington Center's youngest employees, says Mr. Smith, noting that 37 of the organization's 80 workers are millennials.

"In the past, other generations might have been reticent about coming forward and challenging their supervisors, but this group is very assertive," Mr. Smith says. And while he adds that responding to the sheer volume of questions generated by the new recruits can sometimes seem overwhelming, changing the organization's internal communication style has been well worth it. "We're better for having adapted," he says.

**Offer mentors.** When Miranda Bogen, the 23-year-old director of communications at Masa Israel Journey, a New York charity that enables young Jewish college students to spend a semester in Israel, wanted advice about how to do her job more effectively, she went straight to her mentor. "Having someone who is looking out for my interests and provides me with feedback is a real drawing point for

me,” says Ms. Bogen, who got involved in one of the charity’s study-abroad programs in 2007 and started her current position in 2009.

Employment opportunities that come with the advice, guidance, and feedback of a mentor, whether formal or informal, are a major attraction for the millennial generation, says Reena Nadler, co-author of *Millennials in the Workplace*.

“Members of the millennial generation have grown up feeling not just central to their parents’ lives but very close to their parents as well. In many ways, they’re seeking those same kind of close relationships with their managers at work,” she says. “Nonprofits that have mentoring programs in place are going to have a real edge when it comes to recruiting millennials.”

**Build a talent pipeline.** Massachusetts Jobs With Justice, a nonprofit in Boston that advocates for workers’ rights, attracts dozens of interns from local colleges and universities each year. So when the group recently decided to add to its staff, plenty of potential candidates were easy to find.

“Working with interns helps us to see who is really interested in this work as opposed to wanting an experience that can be added to a résumé,” says Jennifer Doe, the group’s program coordinator. “Not everyone can organize a rally in a day without losing their minds.”

This auditioning process also helps the intern see what working at a charity would actually be like. Mary Hewey, a 23-year-old who recently made the transition from intern to employee at Massachusetts Jobs With Justice, says that for her the choice was easy.

“I absolutely loved the work I did as an intern, so I was very happily surprised when they offered me a paid position doing work I both enjoy and believe in,” says Ms. Hewey. “I’m excited to go to work, which is a pretty great thing to be able to say, especially given my age and the general job market.”

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