

Sustainability Non-Profit Founder

Job Description

Non-profit founders create an organizational model to address specific needs in their community, such as those in the sustainability sector. These thought leaders plan for both organizational stability and community impact by making connections, tracking funding, and monitoring progress towards self-established goals. Sustainability non-profit founders must balance environmental outcomes with human relationships and programmatic feasibility.

Salary

Entry — \$52,000
Middle — \$82,000
Top — \$120,000+

Core Tasks

- Oversee day-to-day organization progress and activities
- Forecast into the future to plan for program's financial success
- Establish a collaborative, empowering working environment among partners and coworkers
- Foster community connections through outside groups and programs
- Track impact, progress towards goals, and areas for improvement

Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**
Approx. 40-60 hours/week
(Long hours are common, but founders define their own schedules)
- **Environment**
Working from **home** or a **personal office** is common, with occasional meetings at **other office spaces** to maintain partnerships
- **Travel**
Travel sometimes required to attend **conferences** and broaden **community connections**

Education / Prerequisites

Education Level

Bachelors or Masters in relevant field or nonprofit management or administration, PhD possible for research-focused nonprofits

Licensing

Non-profit
Licensing

Pre-Job Preparation

Exposure to field of interest, Connection with individuals in similar fields through professional organizations and general networking

Experience

Soft Skills

- Networking
- Intuition
- Organization
- Systems-thinking

Technical Skills

- Communications Software (Microsoft Word, etc.)
- Financial Knowledge
- Understanding of Technical and Legal Language



Career Path: Kelly Rodgers

About Me

Founder of Streetsmart

PhD candidate in Urban Studies

High School Life

"I started an **environmental club** in high school, which was an influential moment for me. That was in Tennessee 20 years ago, so it wasn't popular at the time. I was thinking about the environment pretty conventionally then, which was centered on **recycling** and **waste management**—I wasn't making the connections to transportation or other concepts at that point."



Career Shifts

"I have **jumped around** a lot in my career, which I don't necessarily advise, but it is possible to make work. The thread that connected all of these passions was sustainability. Working for the **Bureau of Planning** helped orient me to the **planning and policy landscape**. Even though it wasn't my ultimate destination, it was a good experience that gave me really important information. After city planning, I moved to **urban agriculture** and then renewable energy. What I learned working in **renewable energy** was that I'm actually really invested in the **built environment** and how our cities function. Renewable energy wasn't tangible enough to me—you can't see energy. I wanted to know how implementing sustainable practices created spaces and the experience of people. That's when I realized I needed to kind of go back to my core of **urbanism** and focus there."

"I focused on green infrastructure and community design later in my career. It wasn't until about 10 years ago that I got started in **transportation**. I worked for the **Sustainable Transportation Council** and we developed a set of **performance measures** and a **rating system**, something like LEED, but for transportation plans and projects. That's what really helped me **pivot into transportation** and inspired me to pursue a **PhD**, where I continued thinking about transportation and performance measures."

"I've never been very satisfied working in a regular job because I've always felt driven to do the things that I've wanted to do. Having **creative control** is important to me."

Pursuing Interests

"I **founded Streetsmart**—so this is not something that there was a job opening for. I had to make my own position to integrate **health and transportation** with **research and coordination**. I have the privilege of being able to undertake this effort because I have financial support from my family. I'm undertaking a **PhD** at the same time, so I'm in a **student and start-up mode**."

"I don't fit into one category very well. My nonprofit is a research synthesis and resource clearinghouse for transportation to **integrate climate, health and equity** into transportation. What I enjoy about it, and part of the motive for starting the organization, is **bridging academia and practice**. The transportation world can be really highly technical and can rely on some outdated assumptions and data. I was thinking, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could give civic leaders the evidence to support healthier, more equitable communities?'"

"My job is now a variety of different kinds of activities and using different parts of my brain—it's everything from **marketing** and **communication**, to **organizing** and **strategic thinking**, and then bringing in the focused **research** piece."

About My Job

"I like looking across the landscape to identify the problems that people have and develop solutions"

Pros

- "I like the **bridging role** I'm in right now. I also like that I work in **partnership** with a lot of other organizations and I serve on a number of different **committees**. I'm involved with the Transportation Research Board, I'm Vice-Chair of the ITE Transportation and Health Committee, and I serve on the advisory for the American Public Health Association center for climate, health, and equity."
- "I communicate with a variety of other **nonprofit organizations** across the country on transportation intersecting in those areas. I'm definitely an **ideas person**. I like looking across the landscape to identify the problems that people have and **develop solutions** for that integration."

Cons

- "Don't berate yourself for not being risk-taking enough to follow your dreams if you can't see a way to make it work **financially**. It's taken time to work towards having a sustainable **revenue stream**."
- "A lot of people advise others to follow their dreams and their passions and take big risks. There's definitely merit to that, but when you hear that advice it's important to take into account what kind of risk you can afford to take."

Coordination & Committees

- "There is the coordinating piece of what I do. I consider my service on various **committees** to be part of promoting integration of climate, health, and equity into transportation."
- "My activities with the Transportation Research Board committee are really pretty varied. It can include **convening other committees** within the Transportation Research Board to address **missing data** for pedestrian fatalities and injuries as it relates to really vulnerable populations. It's trying to figure out how to position our **research questions** in a way that will get funded and result in change."
- "My work on the ITE Health and Transportation committee is helping to develop **technical products** for members to **help them better understand** the relationship between transportation and health through **webinars** and **fact sheets**."

Skills

- "I think it's important to **learn your own strengths** and skills. A Myers Briggs or Strengths Finder test is useful. I've also found the Enneagram Test really helpful because it gives you the words to describe what your skills are and helps you **understand what you can contribute** in a workplace. I'm also an introvert and for a long time, I felt like **introvert** strengths weren't really discussed in the workplace. There's been this big resurgence now though and it's felt very validating to me."
- "It's helpful to **know yourself**, and try to understand what you **enjoy** and what you are **good at doing** so you don't feel like there's something wrong with you're in a position that isn't working—it might just not be the right position for you."

Research & Organization

- "I'm always scanning for the latest **journal articles**, or looking for opportunities to find reviews to upload into the site. The research piece of my job uses the part of my brain that requires **deep, focused work**."
- "Part of what enables me to do my work is building **partnerships** with other research-oriented institutions. I'm in the very early conversations of that, in terms of funding."
- "The organizational piece of managing my board and strategic planning is figuring out **where do we want to prioritize** our efforts, how do we **fund** ourselves sustainably, and what sort of **structure** we have as an organization to facilitate all of that."

Education/Experience

- "There's a lot of different ways of thinking about **sustainability** and so I do think it's worth spending time understanding those **concepts**. It's important to understand the difference between weak and strong concepts of sustainability. You do have to kind of dig into those concepts a little bit to understand the landscape."
- "I think one of the things to realize about sustainability is that yes, it's important to understand principles of sustainability, but ultimately sustainability is something you bring to any job. You need to have the **technical expertise in that topical area** and you bring sustainability to it. Sustainability is applied to something else. Figure out what that **'something else'** is for you."

The Future of **Green Transportation Work**

“There are a lot of really excellent opportunities to integrate climate, health, sustainability, and equity into transportation”

“You don't have to create your own organization. There are a lot of **excellent opportunities**—far more than when I was young—to integrate climate, health, sustainability, and equity into transportation and other fields. There are actually **job positions** with that in the title now.”

“The big future tension I see is **people versus technology**. I think it can be easy to be attracted to new technologies that promise sustainable results, and we probably need a lot of them, but we need to consider how these approaches **reduce inequities**, how they **improve health**, how they **solve multiple problems** simultaneously, and how they really **benefit people**. I think we will continue to see jobs in both directions, growth in both areas, so just be mindful in trying to find that sweet spot between the two. If you're working in technology you should make sure that your solutions benefit everyone.”