

Prospect Researchers for Advancement

A Brief Description of the Profession

Prospect research is a field that has only recently been defined and, in many ways, is still in its infancy. Professionals in development have utilized research and information about their prospects for a long time, but it is only within the last 10-15 years that the profession of "prospect researcher for advancement" has been defined and acknowledged widely by the development community. While some prospect researchers are still working to get professional level status within their organizations, many in the field are managers and directors within their organizations' development offices.

Prospect researchers direct their energy identifying new donor prospects, maintaining and programming databases, researching individuals, corporations, and foundations, and more. Prospect researchers often wear many hats and, in some cases, have other significant job responsibilities (i.e. prospect research is only one-half of their job). In some cases, prospect researchers operate in "one-person shops," doing all the research for their organization. In other cases, prospect researchers are part of larger departments, which have a complex division of labor and duties. In all cases, prospect researchers are professionals who have fund-raising for their organization as their main objective.

Fund-raising as a prospect researcher is done almost entirely behind the scenes. Prospect researchers gather information on people, companies, and foundations to increase the potential of a gift. The sources they use include the internet, on-line databases, CD-ROMs, libraries (their own and public or school libraries), and more. The organizations they work for include colleges and universities, private schools (primary and/or secondary), medical centers and hospitals, arts organizations, social organizations, environmental organizations and political organizations. Their professional and educational backgrounds include training in library science, computers/information systems, law, English and journalism, business, and more.

Prospect research is a dynamic field that changes every day as more and more public information and research resources are available. Like most professionals, prospect researchers follow a code of ethics (outlined by the national professional organization, the Association of Prospect Researchers for Advancement, or APRA). They are very careful to take part in research activities that are legal, ethical, and appropriate for their individual organizations.

The overriding desire of a prospect researcher in training (at an event, conference, or on-the-job) is to develop an understanding of financial information that will enable the researcher to make appropriate recommendations about a prospect. Researchers don't have a lot of time for theory and trends, they need real information about how to analyze specific financial situations. For the practical day-to-day work of a prospect researcher, web sites, definitions, case studies, and reliable matrices are more valuable than ideas about where philanthropy is going in the next century. Not unwilling to consider larger trends, the prospect researcher is often ahead of the game (often, they are the ones discovering the trends) and chooses to focus on identifying prospects and maximizing their gift potential through good research and analysis.