

Book Review . . .

A Guide to Careers in Community Development

by Jeffrey Chinn

A Guide to Careers in Community Development, by Paul C. Brophy and Alice Shabacoff, Island Press, 2001.

If you look around the country, you will see that many communities have been revitalized by attracting new businesses, creating affordable housing, and setting up job training centers. This is done through Community Development Corporations (CDCs), which transform and revitalize communities into vibrant economic and social centers. CDCs work with community groups, financial institutions, foundations, state and federal government agencies, and others to accomplish their goals. Many law students (and lawyers) are becoming attracted to this area of law that combines legal issues, public policy, and community involvement. Housing, real estate, contracts, and banking law are all subject matters emphasized in this field. Several law schools (including American University, George Washington, Georgetown, Harvard, Northeastern, St. Louis University, SUNY - Buffalo, Maryland, Michigan, and Yale) now have clinics or programs focusing on CDCs.

But, is this the field meant for J.D.'s, and how can a student use a J.D. in this field? An essential place to start is *A Guide to Careers in Community Development*, which can provide students and counselors with all the basics. Authors Paul Brophy and Alice Shabacoff have turned their 50+ years of combined experience in the field into an impressive 300-page career guide packed with information, resources, and profiles. Each of the eight chapters and 13 appendices are well-organized and reflect the authors' years of experience.

One of the best features of the guide is the chapter devoted to choosing community development as career. This chapter honestly and clearly explains the pros and cons of choosing this career. While not aimed at those with legal training, the reader can see how many of their legal skills parallel those used at CDCs — problem solving, communication (written and verbal), analytical, process, multi-tasking, and management. A very simple self-assessment quiz is included at the end of the chapter to determine whether the reader has the personality traits and skills typical of those who are successful in the field.

As with most public interest jobs, the four most common factors mentioned by the book as helpful in getting started in the CDC field are no surprise — community service, training and education, related work experience, and serendipity. Law school is mentioned as useful training for dealing with increasingly complex issues.

The guide offers a comprehensive look at the “key players” (e.g., CED specialists, program directors, executive directors, funders/capital providers, etc.) including real life job descriptions with sample salary ranges. The guide also explains where jobs exist and where there is projected growth. The chapter focusing on jobs is especially useful because it covers executive director and management jobs, which may be more suitable to law graduates. Another chapter, “A Day in the Life of Community Developers,” provides an up-close look at the field. Students can see how their coursework (law school, graduate, and undergraduate) helps develop the substantive knowledge and skills

useful for business and real estate transactions common to CDCs.

The chapter on “Job Seeking” offers a standard but worthwhile guide to the networking skills needed for any public interest job. The book’s only minor stumble comes in this section. The authors refer to but do not provide any tips on or examples of cover letters or résumés. Instead, they refer readers to several career guides, including the *Harvard Law School’s Public Interest Job Search Guide*, which can already be found in many career services offices. However, the material on forming a plan and organizing a search is well written.

One of the best features is the appendices, which are very well organized lists of web sites, Internet resources, sources for job announcements, and organizations. The organizations included have detailed descriptions and cover domestic and international sites. A bonus is a glossary of terms used in the field. There is a lengthy list of post-graduate

fellowships available. Anyone wanting to get a start in the field or design a fellowship project should keep this book as a starting point and reference for networking contacts and ideas for proposals.

Can counselors, students, or lawyers use this publication? The answer is yes. Although the target audience is broad (all levels of educational and work experience), this is a recommended resource for someone wanting to break into this field.

Careers in Community Development *is not carried by NALP but can be ordered through your favorite bookstore or online bookseller. List price is \$17.95.* ■

Jeffrey Chinn is Assistant Director & Public Interest Coordinator for Office of Career Services, American University, Washington College of Law.