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DEVEX CAREER ADVICE AND INSIGHTS

NAVIGATING THE USAID CRISIS: A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR CONSULTANTS

JUNE 2025

INTRODUCTION

WEATHERING THE STORM AS A CONSULTANT

From networking to negotiating and everything in between, our guide aims to help consultants succeed in global development's new normal.

With thousands of development workers laid off or furloughed in the wake of USAID's dismantling, many affected are wondering if there will be enough work to go around to maintain a successful consulting career in the sector.

This is why we've put together this guide for development consultants, which draws from the collective wisdom of career coaches, recruiters, and seasoned professionals in the field. They offer insider guidance on how to navigate this uncertain period. Coupled with the latest job board data insights, this guide will help you manage the most prevalent challenges consultants are encountering in the current development recruitment landscape.



JOB MARKET OVERVIEW

WHO'S STILL HIRING CONSULTANTS?



> *It is still possible to break into the global development sector, but it's important to be strategic and flexible, [as] those entry level roles are competitive with the current funding challenges.*
>
> **— Jack Jarrett, HR consultant**

With thousands of development professionals out of work due to USAID's dismantling, many are considering whether a pivot to consulting may be the best next step on their development career path. But this is coupled with concerns about an increasingly saturated job market.

"The number one thing that I'm saying to people right now is that this is a period of time, and things feel saturated and they feel impossible, but they're actually not," says Kelsi Kriitmaa, a social impact coach. "There are still jobs out there. There are still consulting gigs, but a lot of it is going to come down to personal networking and personal branding."

While there are actionable ways for development consultants to remain competitive, which will be detailed in the following pages, there is also no getting around the fact that the development consulting recruitment landscape is quickly evolving and growing more competitive.

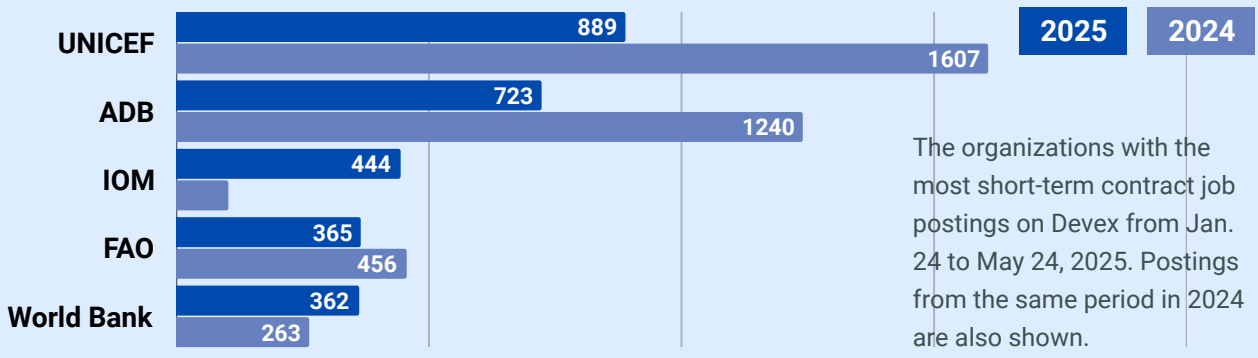
16,277

Consulting jobs since aid freeze.

Advertised on Devex from Jan. 24 - May 24, 2025 **(-24.5% vs. 2024)**.

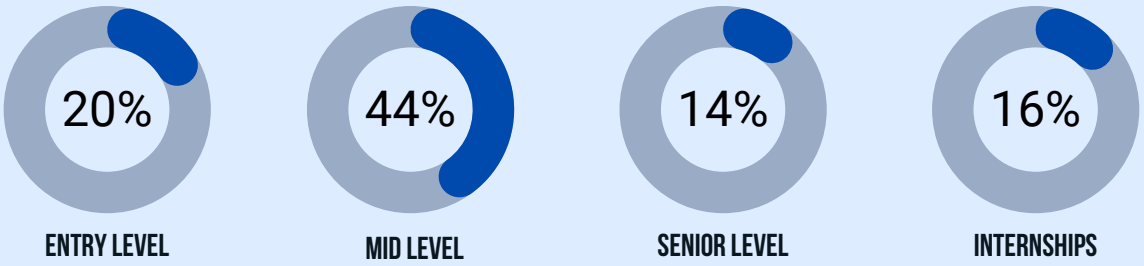
"It's hard to see anything but a net decline in funding, which is going to mean less work, and it will, I think, in the short- to medium-term, mean more people looking for the same work," says Loksan Harley, a veteran development consultant and the co-founder of the Impact Consulting Hub.

TOP 5 EMPLOYERS FOR SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS SINCE JAN. 24



The organizations with the most short-term contract job postings on Devex from Jan. 24 to May 24, 2025. Postings from the same period in 2024 are also shown.

SHORT-TERM CONTRACT ROLES SINCE JAN. 24 - EXPERIENCE LEVELS



Based on 10,245 short-term contract roles jobs advertised on Dexex from Jan. 24 to May 24, 2025. The 2,080 entry level postings represent a 36% decrease compared to 2024.

Since the aid freeze was first announced on Jan. 24, nearly 16,300 consulting jobs, which include both short-term contracts and long-term consulting roles, have been posted on Devex's board, about 25% fewer than the same period in 2024, according to our analysis. The 6,032 long-term consulting roles this year represented a steeper year-on-year decline (-32%) compared to short-term contracts (-19%).

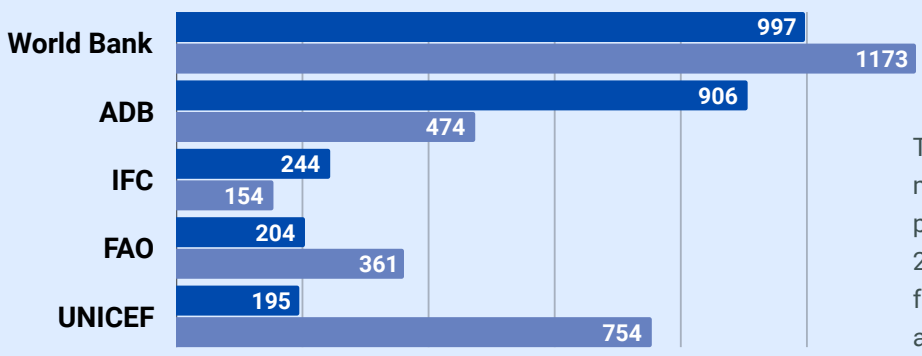
We also found that the aid crisis has not affected all organizations and sectors equally, with some organizations bucking the trend by posting more consulting opportunities compared to last year. Sometimes these discrepancies are within the same organization, which may indicate how some are changing their recruiting strategies during this period.

For example, the Asian Development Bank has advertised 42% fewer short-term contract roles this year, but its 906 long-term consulting postings represent a 91% increase.

Other noticeable increases by organizations include the World Bank, which has increased its postings for short-term contract roles by 32%, while the International Organization for Migration's 444 short-term contract postings are more than four times as many as last year.

But more often than not, organizations are advertising fewer jobs overall, and in some cases, the drops are drastic. While UNICEF posted the most short-term contract roles of any other organization, its 889 roles are 45% fewer than in 2024. The news is worse for those seeking long-term consulting roles with the U.N. agency, with 74% fewer appearing on our board.

TOP 5 EMPLOYERS FOR LONG-TERM CONSULTING ROLES SINCE JAN. 24



The organizations with the most long-term consulting job postings on Devex from Jan. 24 to May 24, 2025. Postings from the same period in 2024 are also shown.

NETWORKING | WHAT NOW?

REBOOT YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK



> *Look at your LinkedIn profile like an up-to-date version of what you stand for right now.*
>
> **— Simone Anzböck, international coach**

If you haven't been active on LinkedIn for awhile, there are several steps to take to make it an effective platform for networking.

START SMALL

"Start with something like, 'I'm going to update my LinkedIn tagline ... and that's going to be my task for this week,'" Kriitmaa says. No matter how long it takes, the goal is to make "sure that you are findable" by those looking for talent.

BE FOCUSED

"Trying to be everything to everyone often means they put too much information [and] try to write for everyone," coach Simone Anzböck says. Ask yourself who you are trying to connect with and build your profile solely around that.

CONNECT WITH CONTENT

Posting content relevant to who you are hoping to connect with can create effective pathways to engagement. "I think what turns most people off is when they get a LinkedIn message just to say, 'Hi, I'm looking to get work,'" Harley says.

WATCH: HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR LINKEDIN PROFILE

International career coach Simone Anzböck offered practical advice on how to use your LinkedIn profile to drive greater engagement and connectivity across your professional network. **WATCH THE EVENT**

NETWORKING | BEST PRACTICES

KEYS TO UNLOCKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

While many job opportunities for consultants are posted publicly, there are also several roles that are not advertised externally. This is why networking is crucial to finding consulting work.

CONNECT AS A PROFESSIONAL

One key to networking as a consultant is to be "visible, not as a candidate, but as a professional ... that's the best way to demonstrate that I can be a resource," says Roberto Amorosino, former senior HR specialist at the World Bank. **READ MORE**.

STAY IN THE KNOW

Being on top of the latest sector happenings will help you feel more confident and prepared during your conversations. Know "what's happening in the development world as a whole, on top of trends," Amorosino says. **READ MORE.**

TALK TO EACH OTHER

"I think there's actually a lot that you can gain by talking to someone who has a very similar profile to you," says Susanne Barsoum, CEO at Keylime International. This is especially important if you are new to consulting. **READ MORE.**

FOLLOW-UP

Whether it's over LinkedIn or video chat, "the most important thing to do right away is to agree on how to keep the conversation going," Amorosino says. It can be as simple as asking if it would be fine to keep in touch. **READ MORE.**

PRO TIP: BE REAL



If you are doing a copy paste message on LinkedIn or through a CRM program, people can sense it. Be human. Instead of sending 20 messages a week, send just a few and make them tailored, make them customized, and put some soul into it.

— Kelsi Kriitmaa, social impact coach

CVS AND SKILLS | WHAT NOW?

DIVERSIFY TO THRIVE



> *If you are a consultant, and you've typically been providing grant writing skills, [think of how] that can be transferable to strategic planning or other things*
>
> **— Kelsi Kriitmaa, social impact coach**

As organizations potentially shift more work from full-time roles to consulting positions, diversity and flexibility may emerge as key attributes.

VARY YOUR CLIENTELE

Consultants "can become comfortable and very much dependent on one organization, and this shows that we need to diversify," Harley says. "This is about … positioning yourself more as an expert and not just a contractor, not just a project taker, but also a project maker."

WATCH FOR HYBRID ROLES

Kriitmaa expects there will be more development jobs characterized as "fractional" and "part-time." Therefore, "one of the things you should be looking for is not just the skill set or the role or the title, but looking for the type of work [itself]," she says.

KNOW WHAT'S TRANSFERABLE

When looking to transition from a USAID project to others, "a lot of the skills there are highly transferable," including "program management, compliance, [and] stakeholder engagement," says Jarrett. But "understanding the different donor languages" is crucial as well.

WATCH: HOW DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS CAN STAY COMPETITIVE

Development consulting experts Loksan Harley and Kelsi Kriitmaa on how networking and diversifying your skills can help you stand out from a crowded field of consulting talent.
WATCH THE EVENT

CVS AND SKILLS | BEST PRACTICES

CRAFTING YOUR NARRATIVE

As a consultant, you likely have a lot of experience to fit into one CV. Still, it's important to keep your CV precise and succinct while still showcasing your accomplishments and level of expertise.

WHY YOU?

"An organization is looking for a consultant cause they have a problem to solve," says CV writing expert Kathryn Harper, so framing your experience on your CV through this lens is the key message you want to convey. **READ MORE.**

THE NUMBERS GAME

As a consultant, being able to quantify your experience and achievements is crucial to convey the scope and impact of your work. For example, think of funding costs or how many people were involved in or served by a project. **READ MORE**.

TIME IS SHORT

The first person screening your CV will likely spend 60 seconds or less reviewing it, Amorosino says. So, a strong summary at the top is essential as "a time saver" and "a way to understand if the person is on the right track." **READ MORE**.

THE 'CAR' FORMULA

Focusing on "context, action, results" effectively illustrates your value to clients. This involves describing the context of the situation you came into, the actions you took, and then what the results were. **READ MORE**.

PRO TIP: SHOW YOUR WORK WITH NUMBERS



Being able to quantify as much as you can, whether it's multigeography, population served, if you know how much the project is being funded by who and by how much, those types of things give you a distinguishing position.

— Kathryn Harper, professional development writing expert

RATES AND CONTRACTS | NOW WHAT?

FAQ: SHOULD I NOW BE CHARGING CLIENTS LESS?

During a recent digital event, social impact coach Kelsi Kriitmaa addressed whether consultants should lower their rate to gain an edge in today's market:

I have heard people ask recently: Should I low-ball a potential client in order to get in? My answer is always, absolutely not. Know your worth, because if you get in on a certain rate, sometimes it can be hard to increase it, particularly contracts with organizations like the World Bank, based on my experience. Not every organization is the same. Some U.N. agencies and NGOs do have salary bands, but there are always ways around them.

The No. 1 piece of advice I give consultants is to ask your peers, and be transparent yourself by telling people what you're getting. This is why community is important. But when setting any rates, it's crucial to think beyond just what the market will pay. You should consider how many days a year you want to work, because we all have other things going on, and we're not just our jobs. Also, how much tax do you have to pay? What are your benefits? So, determine your daily rate first, and then cross-check that with the market.

Some are also considering doing pro bono work that they hope leads to paid work. Remember, some volunteering positions are just volunteer, and others could turn into consulting. Try to know the difference and to be protective of your time. There's also a big difference between pro bono and low bono, so be careful of, for example, board roles where they try to get you to do something that actually you should be paid to do.



The thing with consulting, as we know, is that things never go according to plan. Client payments will be delayed, among other things. So I always tell people to de-risk as much as possible.

Kelsi Kriitmaa
Social impact coach

MORE RATE ADVICE ON DEVEX

- Advice for consultants: Setting your rate
- How to negotiate your best job offer

PRO TIP: LOOKING BEYOND THE DAILY RATE



Many over-focus on a daily rate when you've really got to look at the overall picture of what you're committing to and how much you're charging for it. Put as much effort into trying to shape the terms of reference that cap downsides,.

— Loksan Harley, co-founder, Impact Consulting Hub



Are you a development job candidate looking to stand out to recruiters?

Our in-house recruitment specialists are currently compiling talent pools based on specific global development skill sets, including communications and food systems experts, and many more.

Candidates can update their Devex profiles to be considered, and employers can learn more here.

We hope you found this guide helpful. For more insights aimed toward global development professionals, visit our Career Center.

This report was compiled, edited, and designed by:

Justin Sablich.

Original writing, reporting, and analysis by:

Katrina J. Lane, Justin Sablich, and Emma Smith.

Data analysis by:

Justin Sablich.

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