

# Dream Jobs: Urban planner

By Hailee Romain, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.27.18

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Image 1. Lindsay Woodson is an urban planner who specializes in coastal resilience. That means she helps design city spaces to protect urban areas from natural disasters, such as hurricanes. Photo by: Travis Bunt.

Lindsay Woodson grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. As a child she was always fascinated by the design of city buildings and public spaces. Today, Woodson is an urban planner. She works in New York City.

Woodson helps plan and build cities and communities to make them more useful and enjoyable for their citizens. Her specialty is coastal resilience planning. That means that she helps create city spaces designed to survive and protect against natural disasters, such as hurricanes. Resilience is the ability to bounce back quickly from difficult situations.

## **What is urban planning, and what does an urban planner do?**

The best part of my job is dreaming up new places for people to play, live and work. I design public spaces such as parks and neighborhoods in cities. There are many designers at my firm. Together we think up and draw these places. Then, we use computer software to create three-dimensional images of our ideas. As a planner, it's my job to put these designs into action.

Urban planning requires you to communicate with people and to understand the neighborhood you're working in. Every neighborhood, community, city and country is different. They developed in their own ways and they have their own special history. That means that each project has a very different set of needs.

### **What kinds of projects do you work on?**

My planning firm has projects all around the world. Right now, I am working on projects in the Philippines and the United States. In the Philippines, we're helping officials plan and create a new city. This city will host the Southeast Asian Olympics next year! City officials want to build a stadium for the games. They want to make sure it will have uses after the Olympics, too.

In New York, we're working on a design to better protect the city against hurricanes. We want to design and build parks that can be useful during natural disasters. They could be a place for people to gather or a place to store emergency materials.

### **Can you explain what coastal resilience planning is?**

Coastal resilience planning is a pretty new field. Basically, we design cities to be better prepared for natural disasters, such as hurricanes, rain storms or earthquakes. Resilience is really just good planning and being prepared. We say that resilience is not just about bouncing back. It's also about coming back stronger than before.

For example, I'm working on a project in the Philippines. We are trying to protect the coastline against typhoons by planting mangrove trees. Mangroves are a good defense against coastal erosion. Erosion is when the land at the coastline wears away. Strong storms can cause this erosion.

### **What made you want to work in this field?**

I grew up loving design and I have always been interested in both art and science. I originally wanted to be an architect. But when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, it was a very clear turning point for me. The hurricane hit when I was studying architecture in college. Watching the images on TV was really frightening to me because it didn't look like the United States. It looked like a demolished place I'd never seen. I suddenly understood the destruction that Mother Nature could cause. I decided I wanted to help cities to be better prepared for storms like Katrina.

### **What is the process for developing these types of projects?**

First, officials put out a request for proposals for a project -- for example, a plan for a new park. Then many firms submit their ideas. One plan is chosen. If my firm's idea is selected, we start gathering information. Usually this means we visit the site and talk with community members.



The second step is drawing out design solutions. Often, we lead community events where we just talk with people to get ideas. We create a design and present it to the community for feedback and then come up with the final plan.

### **What is a typical day like for you?**

A normal day is hard to describe because it varies a lot. In the office, I usually have meetings or phone calls, and there are brainstorming sessions and sketch sessions. We also do a lot of presentations during the day. We present to people within our own company or we present to city officials or other groups.

I'm also out of the office quite a bit and I travel to project sites in the United States and overseas. I take on-site pictures and participate in community meetings.

### **What are your favorite and least favorite parts of your job?**

I most enjoy traveling to new places and meeting new people. I like to listen to them, step into their shoes and think about their lives. I also really love dreaming of better and more beautiful places to create. That's the really fun part.

Sometimes it can be challenging to receive criticism or negative feedback on a job. Designers put their feelings and emotions into the design. When community members criticize your ideas that isn't so fun, but it's a part of the job. You can't let your feelings get hurt.

### **Do you have any advice for kids who are interested in a career like yours?**

In terms of hard skills, I would say it is important to learn how to be a good communicator. It also helps to read and learn about the history of cities. You should also have a background or interest in art, science, math and computer science. It's important to be curious and ask a million questions.

You need some creativity to be an urban planner, but it's equally important to be compassionate -- to care for people and listen to them. You have to put yourself in their position and try to understand their challenges, their hopes and their dreams.



## Quiz

- 1 Read the sections "What are your favorite and least favorite parts of your job?" and "Do you have any advice for kids who are interested in a career like yours?"

Select the paragraph from the sections that shows one of the harder parts of being a city planner for Lindsay Woodson.

- (A) I most enjoy traveling to new places and meeting new people. I like to listen to them, step into their shoes and think about their lives. I also really love dreaming of better and more beautiful places to create. That's the really fun part.
- (B) Sometimes it can be challenging to receive criticism or negative feedback on a job. Designers put their feelings and emotions into the design. When community members criticize your ideas that isn't so fun, but it's a part of the job. You can't let your feelings get hurt.
- (C) In terms of hard skills, I would say it is important to learn how to be a good communicator. It also helps to read and learn about the history of cities. You should also have a background or interest in art, science, math and computer science. It's important to be curious and ask a million questions.
- (D) You need some creativity to be an urban planner, but it's equally important to be compassionate — to care for people and listen to them. You have to put yourself in their position and try to understand their challenges, their hopes and their dreams.

- 2 Read the section "What is the process for developing these types of projects?"

Which sentence from the section shows how Woodson and her colleagues gather more information about projects?

- (A) First, officials put out a request for proposals for a project — for example, a plan for a new park.
- (B) If my firm's idea is selected, we start gathering information.
- (C) Usually this means we visit the site and talk with community members.
- (D) The second step is drawing out design solutions.

- 3 Read the section "Do you have any advice for kids who are interested in a career like yours?"

How does Woodson try to be more compassionate with people?

- (A) by giving them the artwork that she creates
- (B) by trying to put herself in their position
- (C) by learning the languages they speak at home
- (D) by designing parks and buildings for free

- 4 What effect did Hurricane Katrina have on Woodson?

- (A) It made her take some time away from city planning to travel the world.
- (B) It made her want to take on a new challenge working in the Philippines.
- (C) It made her decide to change the presentations she gave to other people.
- (D) It made her want to build spaces that could help people in disasters.