

CARL M. WILLIAMS FUNERAL DIRECTORS, INC.

492 Larkin Street, SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30313

Located in Historic Castleberry Hill



CAREERS IN FUNERAL SERVICE

Significant Points:

Job opportunities should be good, particularly for those who also embalm; however, mortuary science graduates may have to relocate to find jobs.

Funeral directors are licensed by their State.

Advancement opportunities generally are best in larger funeral homes.

What Is A Funeral Service Professional?

A funeral service professional is one who is:

- (1) Interested in helping the bereaved through difficult times;
- (2) Is interested in the human aspect of the biological sciences;
- (3) Is interested in their community and the individuals who live there;
- (4) And wants to work in a professional and ethical business environment.

Funeral practices and rites vary greatly among cultures and religions. Although the U.S. population is diverse, funeral practices usually share some common elements—removing the deceased to a mortuary; preparing the remains; performing a ceremony that honors the deceased and addresses the spiritual needs of the family; and carrying out final disposition of the remains. Funeral directors arrange and direct these tasks for grieving families.

Funeral directors also are called morticians or undertakers. This career may not appeal to everyone, but those who work as funeral directors take great pride in their ability to provide efficient and appropriate services.

Related Occupations

The job of a funeral director requires tact, discretion, and compassion when dealing with grieving people. Others who need these qualities include [social workers](#), [psychologists](#), [physicians and surgeons](#), and other health practitioners involved in diagnosis and treatment.

What is involved in Funeral Service?

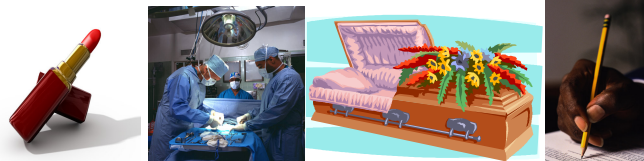
Funeral directors **arrange** the details and handle the logistics of funerals. They **interview** the family to learn what family members desire with regard to the nature of the funeral, the clergy members or other persons who will officiate, and the final disposition of the remains. Sometimes, the deceased leaves detailed instructions for his or her own funeral. Together

with the family, funeral **directors establish the location, dates, and times of wakes, memorial services, and burials.** They **arrange for a hearse to carry the body to the funeral home or mortuary.** They also **comfort the family and friends of the deceased.** Funeral directors also **prepare obituary notices and have them placed in newspapers,** arrange for pallbearers and clergy, schedule the opening and closing of a grave with a representative of the cemetery, decorate and prepare the sites of all services, and provide transportation for the remains, mourners, and flowers between sites. They also **direct preparation and shipment of remains for out-of-State burial.**



Most **funeral directors** also are trained, licensed, and practicing embalmers. **Embalming** is a sanitary, cosmetic, and preservative process through which the body is prepared for interment. **If more than 24 hours elapse between death and interment, State laws usually require that the remains be refrigerated or embalmed.**

When embalming a body, funeral directors wash the body with germicidal soap and replace the blood with embalming fluid to preserve the tissues. They may reshape and reconstruct disfigured or maimed bodies using materials such as clay, cotton, plaster of paris, and wax. They also may apply cosmetics to provide a natural appearance, dress the body and place it in a casket. Funeral directors maintain records such as embalming reports and itemized lists of clothing or valuables delivered with the body. In large funeral homes, an embalming staff of two or more, plus several apprentices may be employed.



Work Conditions

Funeral directors often **work long, irregular hours, and the occupation can be highly stressful.** Many are on call at all hours because they may be needed to remove remains in the middle of the night. Shift work sometimes is necessary because funeral home hours include evenings and weekends. In smaller funeral homes, working hours vary, but in larger homes employees usually work 8 hours a day, 5 or 6 days a week.

Funeral directors occasionally come into contact with the remains of persons who had contagious diseases, but the possibility of infection is remote if strict health regulations are followed.

To show proper respect and consideration for the families and the dead, funeral directors must dress appropriately. **The profession usually requires short, neat haircuts and trims beards, if any, for men. Suits and ties for men and dresses for women are customary for a conservative look.**

How to Start a Career in Funeral Service?

High school students can start preparing for a career as a funeral director by **taking courses**

in biology and chemistry and participating in public speaking or debate clubs. Part-time or summer jobs in funeral homes consist mostly of maintenance and cleanup tasks, such as washing and polishing limousines and hearses, but these tasks can help students become familiar with the operation of funeral homes.

Earnings

Median annual earnings for funeral directors were \$45,960 in May 2004. **The middle 50 percent earned between \$35,880 and \$60,860. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$26,470 and the top 10 percent earned more than \$85,910.** Salaries of funeral directors depend on the number of years of experience in funeral service, the number of services performed, the number of facilities operated, the area of the country, the size of the community, and the level of formal education. Funeral directors in large cities earn more than their counterparts in small towns and rural areas.



Requirements for a Career in Funeral Service

Funeral directors are licensed in all States. Licensing laws vary from State to State, but most require applicants to be **21 years old, have 2 years of formal education that includes studies in mortuary science, serve a 1-year apprenticeship, and pass a qualifying examination.** After becoming licensed, new funeral directors may join the staff of a funeral home. Funeral directors who embalm must be licensed in all States, and some States license only those who embalm. In States that have separate licensing requirements, most people in the field obtain both licenses. Persons interested in a career as a funeral director should contact their State licensing board for specific requirements.

College programs in mortuary science usually last from 2 to 4 years. The American Board of Funeral Service Education accredits about 50 mortuary science programs. A few community and junior colleges offer 2-year programs, and a few colleges and universities offer both 2-year and 4-year programs. Mortuary science programs include courses in **anatomy, physiology, pathology, embalming techniques, restorative art, business management, accounting and use of computers in funeral home management, and client services.** They also include courses in the social sciences and in legal, ethical, and regulatory subjects such as psychology, grief counseling, oral and written communication, funeral service law, business law, and ethics. **(Show Books)**

Apprenticeships must be completed under the direction of an experienced and licensed funeral director. Depending on State regulations, apprenticeships last from 1 to 3 years and may be served before, during, or after mortuary school. Apprenticeships provide practical experience in all facets of the funeral home, from embalming to transporting remains.

State board licensing examinations vary, but they usually consist of written and oral parts and include a demonstration of practical skills. Persons who want to work in another State may have to pass the examination for that State; however, some States have reciprocity arrangements and will grant licenses to funeral directors from another State without further examination.