

# Career Resource Manual

*Everything you need to get started*



PEACE CORPS  
*Office of Third Goal and  
Returned Volunteer Services*



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## **Section One:**

# **Life After Peace Corps**

# 1

## Is There Life After Peace Corps?

Yes, there is. And the thousands of Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) who preceded you have proved this point.

Many returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) found coming back from the Peace Corps was more complicated than they had imagined. Most anticipated a difficult cultural adjustment when they went overseas, but few were prepared for the challenges of readjusting to the United States. Their readjustment and their importance to the United States and to the Third Goal of the Peace Corps prompted the formation of the Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services. In response to the transition needs of RPCVs, Returned Volunteer Services developed the Career Resource Manual and other career materials to assist RPCVs during this period of readjustment.

The Career Resource Manual is designed to help you develop a clear picture of your background, skills, and interests to move you closer to establishing career goals. It builds upon the experiences and suggestions of RPCVs who preceded you and was developed with the help of top career-planning experts.

Many of you will resume your education or continue the career path you were on prior to Peace Corps service. Some RPCVs will use their Peace Corps experience to launch a new career. And others will look for additional volunteer service opportunities. Regardless of where you are in life, this manual will help you define your skills, interests, and values—all

of which will help you on the path to a lifetime of rewarding work.

Career planning is no easy assignment, but this manual will help you get started. When you complete the exercises in this book, you will be further ahead in planning for your future than many others with whom you will be competing for jobs, schooling, and service assignments.

**Please visit**

**[www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv) for the most up-to-date career and transition resources for RPCVs.**

# 2 Ten Career Myths

“We had two Volunteers apply for our jobs and hired both because of their dedication, enthusiasm, and professionalism.”

— Child Development Institute director

While it's almost unavoidable to make some mistakes in your job-search efforts, careful planning will help you achieve your goal—a rewarding career. By being aware of the following myths, you will be sure not to waste time because of them.

**MYTH 1: To succeed in a career, you should have a good picture now of what you want to do.**

Few people can predict where they want to be, or what they want to do, five or even 10 years from now. Often the best we can do is to develop a reasonable job objective each time we are in the job market and launch the best possible campaign to get that job.

Most people change jobs many times in their lifetime and most, in fact, have multiple careers. As the old Chinese proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” You need to determine today the best direction to move, and take that first step. Later, your career goals may be more refined, or radically changed. Many RPCVs end up in exciting jobs they never knew existed.

**MYTH 2: By studying your interests, abilities, and values, you should be able to pinpoint the type of job that is just right for you.**

Like ready-made shoes, most jobs are only going to roughly fit your interests, abilities, and values. Even those “dream jobs” can have negatives, such as employers who decide on Friday at 4:30 p.m. that you must work on Saturday.

Everything you have done in life has probably included an element of compromise. Your goal is to find the

career field, the employer, and the job that offers the most pluses and the fewest minuses—for you.

**MYTH 3: My career field will probably be related to my past experiences and contacts.**

Many of us will end up in fields that are unfamiliar to us today. Contacts, chance work assignments, new technology, and likes and dislikes on early jobs may move you far from your original goals.

You might, for example, end up managing a state foundation for the arts, helping a famous person write his or her memoirs, or developing new markets overseas for American products.

**MYTH 4: Without a firm career goal in mind, it's impossible to launch a job campaign.**

Ask a hundred Americans if they have a career goal, and 70 will probably fumble before they admit “no.” Most of us, however, have some ideas about what we like to do. These preferences should guide your general career objectives and the types of job interviews you seek.

Employers, however, expect applicants to verbalize their plans in a clear and convincing manner. You should be able to cite logical career objectives—closely related to the job in question. If, for example, you were exploring jobs in bilingual teaching, international banking, or overseas marketing, you would need to explain for each position how your skills, experiences, and interests are closely related to the targeted job.

**MYTH 5: Hard work is the key to finding the best job and advancing in your career.**

We can hardly call this a myth, but hard work alone is not the key. The real key to success is working smart, doing the important things well, and not wasting time on insignificant activities.

How do you learn to work smart? By using common sense, by learning what your potential employer's needs are, and by educating yourself about successful job-hunting strategies. Books such as *What Color is Your Parachute*, by Robert Boller can help you in your job search.

If you are looking for a federal job, for example, be sure to understand the special hiring status of returned Volunteers. See the chapter in this manual which discusses your non-competitive eligibility (NCE) status. Many agency representatives are not familiar with this regulation, which can greatly increase your chances of being hired, so it is up to you to educate them. The chapter discusses the details.

**MYTH 6: Unemployment is such a problem these days. I'll never get a job.**

Even when national unemployment figures are relatively high—at eight to 10 percent—most people do have jobs! And you can be one of them.

Keep this in mind: Nobody owes you a job. If you want one, it's up to you to get one. You've already achieved so much as a Peace Corps Volunteer. And you're just as capable of finding a job if you maintain a positive attitude, work smart, and stay the course!

**MYTH 7: Employers react negatively to the Peace Corps experience.**

Many employers are impressed by Peace Corps experience. What they may find difficult, however, is the relevance of your Peace Corps Volunteer experience to their jobs.

To overcome this perceived gap, you must break down your Peace Corps experiences into career skills that are relevant to the employer. This means citing tasks such as planning, managing, expediting, selling, reporting, motivating, developing, organizing, etc. It is your responsibility to translate your Peace Corps experiences into skills and language appropriate for employers. The next two chapters will explain how to do this.

**MYTH 8: You'll never really gain a good understanding about a job unless you actually go work for the organization, so it doesn't make sense to be so selective about prospective employers.**

Through research, you can get a lot of information about an organization before you ever walk in the door. Look at reports and newspaper articles, talk with customers or those served, and see if you know anyone who already has contacts with the organization. The information you glean will make you a much stronger job candidate.

If you receive a job offer, you can always ask to revisit the organization and talk with prospective supervisors and colleagues before you make up your mind.

**MYTH 9: The best person gets hired for the job, so why interview in places where my qualifications are only average?**

The best person does not always

get the job. The person who best demonstrates knowledge of the organization and its needs, who verbalizes a clear career goal related to those needs, and who is most liked by the interviewer gets hired. Remember, organizations do not make hiring decisions—people do.

That is why it is so important to work at the process of career planning and why, we repeat, if you follow the exercises in this manual you should be ahead of most job seekers in the United States.

**MYTH 10: Because I have so little experience, I can't impress employers.**

Employers know that at one stage in life all of us are young and lack much job experience. But regardless, no one who has served overseas with the Peace Corps falls into the “no experience” category.

If you had little prior experience before joining the Peace Corps, your best strategy may be to impress employers with your sincere interest in their organization, a good sense of where you are going, and an understanding of how those two things fit together.



# 3

## Career Planning and Job-Search Elements

“The most important thing is to be able to translate what you did in the Peace Corps into words that mean something to an employer.”

— Micronesia RPCV

### 1. Start with the following factors:

#### Assessment

*What are your...*

- experiences?
- accomplishments?
- skills?
- interests?
- values?
- goals?
- fields?

#### Additional Qualifications

*To get where you want to go, do you need...*

- more education?
- short-term training?
- interim or preliminary jobs?
- apprenticeships or internships?
- initial employment in a related field?
- licensing or certification?

#### Initial Career Goals

*Develop preliminary career goals by...*

- studying skills and interests.
- identifying occupations or potential interests.
- evaluating fields against your own criteria.

### 2. As you proceed, both overseas and back home:

#### Refine Career Goals

*Sharpen career objectives by...*

- doing more research on occupations.
- informational interviewing.
- using knowledge gained from first job interviews.
- using online research.

### 3. Your COS conference will help with job-search techniques:

#### Develop and Use Job-Search Techniques

*Once you know what you want to do, and who may hire you, market yourself through...*

- networking.
- development of a prospect list.
- telephone cold-calling.
- application forms.
- employment services.
- letters of application.
- resumes.
- job interviews.
- civil-service hiring procedures.
- letters of reference.
- job fairs and employer open-houses.

## Identify Employment Opportunities

*Learn about specific job openings or employers of special interest through...*

- informational interviewing.
- job-service counseling.
- college-placement offices.
- family or friends.
- faculty members or advisers.
- employer directories.
- former employers.
- state employment offices.
- online and print-job ads.
- federal job centers.

## Final Steps

*Finish your job campaign with these steps:*

- follow up with potential employers.
- evaluate job offers.
- negotiate salary.
- accept best offer.
- notify other leads of your decision to keep the door open for the future.

# 4

## Your Personal Background Summary

You will likely fill out dozens of applications and design numerous resumes for potential employers and graduate schools. It is, therefore, important to develop a comprehensive background summary.

Begin by listing all relevant activities and accomplishments. Later, you will select from this information specific items needed for various purposes. This is called “slanting,” or

highlighting information that best supports your goals.

As you list items, emphasize those with strong career utility. Employers are more interested in your outstanding achievements than your normal experiences. For this reason, when you finish listing your activities, review your background summary and highlight your achievements.

### A. Education

Start with your Peace Corps training and then list details about college or university education, high school, and other training. Include any short-term training courses that may have been offered by nontraditional educational institutions.

#### Peace Corps Training

Location:

Dates attended:

Major subjects:

Language studies (and Foreign Service Institute scores):

Accomplishments:

**Other Training** (computer, CPR, mechanical, licensed pilot, first aid, etc.)

#### **College, University, or Other Institution Name:**

Location:

Dates attended:

Degree and date:

Major field(s) of study:

Minor field(s) of study:

Key courses:

Activities:

Honors and achievements:

#### **Foreign Languages** (spoken and written)

Indicate proficiency and include Foreign Service Institute or American Council on Teaching Foreign Language scores:

## B. Work Experience

List your Peace Corps job first, if it is the most recent. Then list all other jobs you have held (both paid and unpaid) in reverse chronological order.

Be specific and use numbers whenever possible to quantify tasks. Although some people may not be able to relate to your country of service or your cultural experiences, they can relate to numbers.

*Examples:*

- Supervised six sales workers covering 750 businesses in three regions.
  - Initiated campaign that increased donations by 50 percent in four weeks.
  - Provided technical support for irrigation project serving 10 villages with a population of 3,000.
- Managed fish farm, increasing fish survival rate by 75 percent, and providing protein for 200 people.
  - Consulted weekly with five nursing clinics and trained 25 public health workers who vaccinated 2,500 children in two months.

As you describe your activities, begin to use the same types of words you will use later in your resume. Try to use strong action verbs in describing your activities (such as developed, persuaded, increased) rather than weak ones (such as served, observed, participated). See the comprehensive list of active verbs in the chapter on resumes.

**Peace Corps Country/Project(s):**

**Name of organization:**

Work location:

Location:

Dates of service:

Dates of employment:

Job title or titles:

Job title or titles:

Problems (needs identified):

Problems (needs identified):

Actions (taken to resolve problems):

Actions (taken to resolve problems):

Results:

Results:

Names and titles of Peace Corps supervisors:

Name and title of supervisor:

Host country agency:

Contact Information:

Contact information:

Reason for leaving (worded as positively as possible):

“We measure the excellency of other men by the excellency we conceive to be in ourselves.”

— John Selden

## C. Other Activities

**Community service, social, or athletic activities** (include on your resume only if they relate to the job or demonstrate leadership or other relevant skills):

**Awards, honors, and other special recognition** (not already cited):

**Before proceeding to the next section, review the items under “Work Experience” and “Other Activities” to be sure that you have included significant part-time or summer jobs (if a recent college graduate), military service, and unpaid or paid work with community, religious, and educational organizations.**

## D. References

Eventually, you will need to make a list of people to call upon for references. The names in each situation will vary, depending on the job or opportunity. Before you name a reference, you should, of course, ask permission. It is wise to forward a copy of your current resume so the reference is kept abreast of your recent achievements and so that s/he can easily and confidently reference the years and nature of work you did.

Remember, you will be judged on the basis of whom you know as well as what they say about you. Teachers, supervisors, and Peace Corps staff members who have seen your work often make the best references.

Since Peace Corps officials and host country supervisors may be difficult to locate after you get home, you might request a general letter of reference before you leave your country, and try to get a personal email address in case they move on from Peace Corps.

Peace Corps staff are not required to write reference letters for Volunteers or employees. This also may be true for your supervisors in other organizations. However, if someone in a management position had ample opportunity to observe or review your work and made favorable comments about it, he or she might be willing to write a reference letter for you. Some host country staff may not want to write letters because it is not the custom in their culture. Be sensitive and courteous, even if your request is turned down.

Sometimes it helps to provide a draft letter to the potential reference to speed up the process and make it easier for the individual to write the letter. The sample provided on the next page may be helpful.

While you may feel awkward or embarrassed about writing a draft reference for yourself, this is not the time to be modest or humble. Use numbers, percentages, U.S. dollar amounts, or phrases about time saved. Employers usually are more impressed with results-oriented statements than with vague adjectives.

You can bring copies of your reference letters to interviews to strengthen your candidacy. Often, a prospective employer will want to speak directly with your references. Be sure to ask your references if they mind being called. Follow up by thanking your references in writing for their assistance.

Peace Corps staff must have directly supervised a Volunteer in order to use Peace Corps letterhead and their position titles in reference letters.

Reference's Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Name and Address of Specific Prospective Employer

RE: Reference for [insert your name]

Dear Mr./Ms. ["X"]:

I am writing regarding [your name]'s experience as a [job title] Peace Corps Volunteer in [country]. In my position as [reference's job title], I supervised [your name] (or I had the opportunity to observe [your name]'s performance) for [# of months or years]. [He/She] was initially assigned to perform [list three or more of your primary responsibilities]. [Your name] reported to [host country national name and job title] and was part of a local team of [# of people] that [explain what you did with co-workers or villagers in quantifiable terms: for example, taught ORT techniques to 500 mothers in 10 villages in a 200-square-mile region].

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, [your name] identified some additional needs of the people in [his/her] place of assignment. [Mention what these were]. [He/She] wrote well-documented proposals according to [Peace Corps/USAID/UN, etc.] guidelines. After careful review by [agency name] officials, [your name] was awarded [# percent] of the funding for [project name]. He/She demonstrated initiative and creativity in completing [your job and/or projects]. [Your name] also showed sensitivity to the culture of the [\_\_\_\_\_ people] in implementing and directing this project. [He/She] recruited, trained, and evaluated [#] local staff to work on this project. Now those [# villagers/local officials] are successfully managing/using the [results of the project]. [or [He/She] has successfully turned over the project to [his/her] Volunteer replacement or host country supervisor.

[Your name]'s project is a fine example of the contributions that resourceful and dedicated Peace Corps Volunteers make during their service. While Peace Corps staff do not formally evaluate Volunteer performance, I believe that [his/her] extra efforts would be described as exceeding job requirements in many organizations in the United States. I personally regard [your name]'s work to be [appropriate adjectives for the performance level].

If I may be of further assistance regarding the qualifications of [your name], please contact me at [phone, fax, e-mail].

Sincerely,  
Reference's Name

# 5 How to Present Your Accomplishments

Accomplishments are what set you apart from the crowd. They can make your resume interesting and help your job campaign immensely. Accomplishments may be awards for high academic success in high school or college, competitions you entered and won, successful projects or campaigns for community organizations, or innovations you introduced in a job or other situation.

**Your Peace Corps activities should contribute to your list of accomplishments. Here are examples cited by other PCVs to help you identify your accomplishments:**

- Taught farmers how to combine milking and feeding times, resulting in a 20 percent increase in milk production.
- Organized a series of five one-day workshops for teachers to teach them more about learning theory and effective TEFL techniques. Within one year, student pass rate on national exams increased 15 percent.
- Set up a nursery to grow 500 palm trees to replace those cut to make palm wine.
- Helped three barrio families set up businesses to provide previously unavailable goods and services. All businesses were profitable in 12 months.
- Helped coach the country's first Olympic team.
- Augmented nursing duties by teaching disease prevention. Persuaded hundreds of children to wear shoes to reduce the chance of getting worms. Trained 50

mothers to boil water before drinking.

- Obtained 100 percent funding from a Rotary Club partnership program to demonstrate chicken-house construction. Increased chicken production, improved locals' diets, and generated income for 250 villagers.
  - Helped eight farmers prepare applications for new loans worth \$35,000 to buy breeding stock, equipment, and seeds for beans and other nutritious crops.
  - Developed a chamber of commerce to help 35 entrepreneurs communicate with—and learn from—each other.
  - Planned and raised funds for an outdoor recreation facility for 500 students.
  - Helped university research team identify and capture on tape four dying languages among native peoples.
  - Set up three fish-farming operations to help compensate for lack of protein in the local population's diet, which created a cash source for 10 farmers.
- Return to your *Personal Background Summary* and list your achievements related to each education and work activity. Try to quantify your accomplishments, if possible, such as “Set up tutoring program that resulted in 25 percent more students passing the national examinations” or “Our cooperative grew at a rate of 30 percent annual-

“Ideas won't keep. Something must be done about them.”

- Alfred North Whitehead

“Don’t tell employers, ‘I was a Peace Corps Volunteer.’ Rather, tell them ‘I designed an accounting system, organized 10 well-digging projects, etc., while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer.”

— RPCV Tunisia

ly for three straight years.” Don’t forget to include the outcomes of your efforts, the ‘so what’ of your duties (i.e. ‘why was it important, what did it result in, who and how many did it effect?).

If you need more space, or had

more jobs, add additional sheets. List accomplishments from as many activities as possible. Remember, the prizes in life go to those who do things well, and no one knows better than you what you have done well.

**Educational accomplishments:**

**Peace Corps accomplishments:**

**Accomplishments in last job before Peace Corps:**

**Accomplishments in job before that:**

**Other significant accomplishments (non-work-related):**



# 6 Your Special Skills

“Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason so few engage in it.”

—Henry Ford

Each of us has a unique combination of skills. Skills are areas of special knowledge or expertise, abilities, aptitudes, or other capabilities. You can't understand yourself—in the career sense—until you are thoroughly familiar with your skills. Knowing them will also help you market yourself to an employer.

Some people are born with an aptitude for developing certain skills, such as musical, artistic, or athletic ability. But many more skills are developed as a result of life experiences.

**List your special skills on the right.** Recall skills from any phase of your life and your activities, including the Peace Corps, employment, education, training, community service, trade and professional association memberships, hobbies, family responsibilities, etc.

Check the following section for skills you forgot to cite. With the aid of a checklist, you should get a more comprehensive picture of your skills.

## My Skills

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## Skills Checklist

Here are some skills with career-planning implications. Circle the ones that apply to you.

### Artistic

- design graphics
- develop exhibits or shows
- draw or paint
- illustrate publications or talks
- lead musical groups
- make pottery
- paint or sculpt
- play musical instrument
- sketch charts or diagrams

- speak or sing well
- take photographs

### Analytical

- analyze and critique information
- analyze data
- classify data
- compile statistics
- develop evaluation criteria
- integrate data from many sources
- summarize well

**Accounting**

- apply accounting principles
- audit financial records
- develop budgets
- keep detailed financial records
- proficient with computer programs
- track how funds are acquired and spent

**Communications**

- advocacy
- building a sustainable community
- building trust
- check materials for accuracy
- collaboration with target audience
- confidence building
- conflict resolution and mediation
- cross-cultural mediation
- cultural awareness & sensitivity
- diplomacy
- edit publications
- empowerment
- establishing trust
- facilitating discussions and workshops
- foreign language skills
- good telephone manner
- leadership
- listening
- mentoring
- motivating
- negotiations
- networking
- persuasive skills
- place information with media
- proofread well
- public relations
- public speaking ability
- relationship building
- solicitation
- teambuilding
- tell jokes well
- write articulate memos
- write effective letters
- write clear reports

- write stories well
- writing/editing skills

**Expediting**

- arbitrate between diverse viewpoints
- attend to details as well as the big picture
- coordinate activities
- investigate problems
- monitor progress of others
- negotiate agreements
- resolve bottlenecks
- review programs
- schedule and follow up
- troubleshoot challenging problems
- work under pressure

**People/Interactive Skills**

- arrange social functions
- discretion
- effective team member
- friendly, warm manner
- good judge of personality
- good judgment
- good listener
- initiate contact easily
- interested in other people
- kind to others
- like to help others
- maintain contacts
- offer support to those in need
- sensitive to others' viewpoints
- share credit and provide praise
- willing to follow directions

**Instructing**

- counsel
- delegate responsibility
- develop training modules
- explain things clearly
- instill confidence
- lead groups
- make presentations
- motivate others
- patient with slow learners
- set up demonstrations
- stimulate learning

- teach
- tutor

### **Innovating**

- ability to forecast
- good imagination
- imagine new solutions
- inventive
- make first move, don't just follow
- think "outside the box"
- visualize relationships
- willing to take chances

### **Numerical**

- accurate with numbers
- calculate data
- easily visualize relationships among numbers
- estimate sizes, weights, etc.
- multiply and divide quickly
- understand mathematical principles
- add and subtract quickly

### **Organization/Planning/Management**

- administer programs
- assume responsibility
- break down projects into manageable tasks
- develop policies
- effective decision-making
- establish standards
- establish work assignments
- evaluate activities
- interview applicants
- organize people and tasks
- supervise others
- willing to make hard decisions
- backstopping (project support)
- building infrastructure
- coalition building
- designing budgets/proposals
- developing sustainable projects
- event planning
- inter-organizational networking
- integrate past experiences into tomorrow's objectives

- logistics
- NGO development
- planning/executing projects
- planning/leading meetings
- preparing expense reports
- prioritize projects
- project management
- recruitment
- resource identification
- resourcefulness
- scheduling of events
- set goals and formulate plans to reach them
- small business development
- supervision
- system building & sustainability
- time management
- training/capacity building
- working independently
- adaptability
- plan effectively

### **Personal**

- calm in troubled settings
- can work with minimal supervision
- confident
- determined
- endure long hours
- forthright
- honest
- loyal
- meet deadlines
- physical strength
- reliable
- risk-taker
- sympathetic
- tolerate interruptions
- well-coordinated

### **Learning**

- analyze reports
- learn foreign language
- listen well
- note-taking
- plan study activities
- read efficiently

- read for comprehension
- remember information
- understand relationships
- willing to question

### **Mechanical**

- assemble apparatus
- construction skills
- fix machines
- good finger dexterity
- maintain equipment
- operate equipment
- read mechanical drawings
- use tools

### **Persuading/Selling**

- ability to recruit top people
- contagious enthusiasm
- convince others of the merits of my point of view
- powers of persuasion
- promote events
- raise money
- sell ideas
- sell products or services
- write effective sales materials

### **Research**

- capacity evaluation (PACA)
- classify information
- conduct surveys
- curriculum development
- design data systems
- draw conclusions
- environmental knowledge
- establish record files
- evaluate reports
- familiar with library systems
- flexibility
- foundation researching
- fundraising
- GIS/GPS
- grant writing
- initiative-seeking opportunities
- interview people
- investigative reporting
- know basic reference sources
- lesson planning
- locate hard-to-find information

- manual development
- market identification
- marketing
- needs assessment
- networking
- organizing workshops
- presentation assembly
- project monitoring
- record scientific data
- survey development/reporting
- translating/interpreting
- troubleshooting
- working with limited resources

Add any other skills that weren't listed. Also, add skills that a former employer or Peace Corps leader or staff member might cite when asked to list your greatest strengths or most significant skills.

Did your skills seem to cluster? If so, you may be better prepared for the world of work than you imagined. For example, if your top two skill areas are expediting and interactive/people skills, you may be well-suited for a production control job. If you were high in communicating and persuading/selling, you might like advertising, publishing, or merchandising. If a number of your skills were in research, numerical, and accounting, you might like market research, auditing, or statistics.

# 7 Your Interests

“Few ever drop from overwork, but many quietly curl up and die because of undersatisfaction.”

— Sydney Harris

Mark Twain said that the “luckiest people in the world get to do all year long what they like to do on their summer vacation.”

This may be too much to hope for, but you are going to be happiest—and probably most successful—if you find a job that is closely related to your interests.

What you do in your free time can often help you select career options. Many people don’t realize that hobbies, leisure activities, and skills used in interest areas can be integrated into a job.

**Look at the following statements and cite some of your interests.**

**In school or college, my favorite courses were:**

**When I have free time, I most enjoy:**

**The happiest days of my life have been:**

**In the Peace Corps, my favorite interests have been:**

Another way to look at interests is to assume that you worked out a special deal with some divine power. This power has decided to give you an extra day in each week for the rest of your life. Call it Leap Day, if you wish. The only stipulation about Leap Day is that it can’t be used for earning extra money, travel, or doing practical chores around the house. Leap Day is designed solely to help you find time to meet your special interests.

**List some of the things you would do with this extra time:**

# 8

## Work Values and Preferred Work Environment

Values are standards we use to judge situations and guide our actions and reactions.

For career-planning purposes, values related to work goals and to the work environment are particularly important. But remember that values are only meaningful if developed in a realistic setting. Some of us, for example, would not opt for a job with a

high amount of clerical work. Yet, most jobs involve clerical tasks.

Obviously, many returned Volunteers have values that emphasize service to others. Making decisions about what kinds of jobs to pursue is easier if you know what is important to you. Think about what you value in a job or career.

**In the following list, check those areas that you value or that are important to you. If more than one option is available, circle the one that applies. If there are other values that are more important to you than those listed below, add them to the list.**

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> work in an office/outdoors  | <input type="checkbox"/> independent work style                | <input type="checkbox"/> laissez-faire/informal/hands-off  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small/mid-sized/large organization  | <input type="checkbox"/> teamwork                              | <input type="checkbox"/> particular geographical location  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> small, developing organization  | <input type="checkbox"/> manage others                         | <input type="checkbox"/> nonprofit group   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> travel opportunities 25/50/80 percent of the time                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> strong, well-known employer           | <input type="checkbox"/> advancement opportunities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> opportunity to relocate/not relocate  | <input type="checkbox"/> good training in a field              | <input type="checkbox"/> work with things/people/numbers/computers/scientific and technical equipment/line organizations/staff departments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> much contact/minimal contact/no contact with people outside my immediate department | <input type="checkbox"/> work as a highly skilled professional | <input type="checkbox"/> willing to return to college/take a cut in pay/change fields  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> work alone/with people  | <input type="checkbox"/> work as a technical person            | <input type="checkbox"/> willing to improve skills or acquire new ones to start new career   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> high/average income   | <input type="checkbox"/> employment security                   | <input type="checkbox"/> maintain large career network   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> prestigious profession/work   | <input type="checkbox"/> challenging assignments               | <input type="checkbox"/> lead, plan, and give directions   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> service to others   | <input type="checkbox"/> decision-making options               | <input type="checkbox"/> relaxed atmosphere  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> variety in work   | <input type="checkbox"/> work overtime/work regular hours      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unpredictability in work or daily activities  | <input type="checkbox"/> short commute to work                 |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structured environment  | <input type="checkbox"/> time for family allowed               |  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> options for vacations/time off        |  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> chance to see the results of my work  |  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> commute by bus/car/bike               |  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> high-risk assignments                 |  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> boss who is organized/                |  |

Later, you will be asked to write in your three most important work values and your three most important work environment elements.

Now, in the space provided below, list the things you would most like to do during the rest of your life:

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“Your future vocation will be found at the intersection of what you most want to do and what this country most needs to have done.”

Richard Bolles,  
author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*

# 9 Preliminary Career Choices

Your work to this point has identified experiences and achievements, skills, interests, and values. Now it's time to look at actual career choices to identify some that might best fit you.

If you want to help people, you might find it hard to work as a screener for a loan company or as a collection agent for a credit card company. Be realistic about the opportunities in certain fields. Many Volunteers say they want to work in "international development." But as one career counselor observed, "What they really want is to be a well-paid PCV." These Volunteers should identify specific jobs for which there is a demand overseas and equip themselves for them.

A list of possible careers appears below. It is designed to stimulate your thinking—not to restrict it to the positions mentioned. You may find it helpful to mark those of potential interest and cross out those that are clearly of no interest. Then, go back and circle the 20 or so fields of most interest.

The process of studying career options is not going to end today, this month, or even during your current career change; it will continue for most of your working lifetime. To find employment data for specific industries and occupations, visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics' website: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov).

## Career Fields

Accountant	Biologist	Computer programmer
Actor	Bookkeeper	Computer service technician
Actuary	Botanist	Computer software/hardware engineer
Administrative assistant	Camp director	Congressional aide
Admissions director	Carpenter	Construction worker
Advertising specialist	Caterer	Consultant
Affirmative action specialist	Chamber of Commerce manager	Consumer protection worker
Agricultural extension agent	Chef	Copywriter
Animal care worker	Chemical engineer	Counselor
Anthropologist	Chemist	Criminal investigator
Architect	Child care worker	Customs worker
Archivist	Civil engineer	
Artist	Clothes designer	
Athletic trainer	Coach	Dancer
Auditor	Commercial artist	Database administrator
Automobile salesperson	Communications specialist	Dean of students
	Compensation specialist	Dental hygienist
Bank manager	Computer and information specialist	Dentist
Bank teller	Computer operator	Designer
Benefits consultant		Desktop publisher
Bicycle shop owner		Detective

“When you have a choice and don’t make it, that in itself is a choice.”

—William James

Dietitian	Insurance adjuster	Occupational therapist
Disc jockey	Insurance salesperson	Oceanographer
Diver	Interior designer	Office manager
Doctor	International program specialist	Optometrist
Drafting worker		
Dressmaker	International trade specialist	Packaging engineer
Drug counselor	Interpreter	Painter
	Investment counselor	Paralegal
Ecologist		Park ranger
Economist		Parole officer
Editor	Job analyst	Pathologist
Education administrator	Journalist	Performing artist
Electrical engineer	Judge	Personnel officer
Elementary school teacher		Pest control worker
Employment counselor	Labor relations worker	Pharmacist
Engineer	Labor union official	Photographer
Environmental specialist	Landscape architect	Physical education teacher
Entertainer	Lawyer	Physical therapist
Entrepreneur	Legal aide	Physician
Epidemiologist	Legislator	Physician’s assistant
	Librarian	Physicist
Family service worker	Linguist	Pilot
Farmer	Loan officer	Placement director
Fashion designer	Lobbyist	Planning officer
Financial planner		Playwright
Firefighter	Machine tool operator	Police officer
Fishing worker	Machinist	Political campaign consultant
Food service manager	Mail carrier	Post office clerk
Foreign service officer	Management consultant	Preschool teacher
Foreign student advisor	Management trainee	Press officer
Forester	Marine biologist	Prison guard
Funeral service director	Market researcher	Probation worker
Gardener	Marketing manager	Professional athlete
Geologist	Materials engineer	Property appraiser
Government worker	Mechanic	Psychiatrist
Grants manager	Medical assistant	Psychologist
Guidance counselor	Mental health worker	Public health specialist
	Merchant marine	Public housing manager
Health worker	Metal worker	Public relations specialist
High school teacher	Military service member	Purchasing officer
Historian	Mining engineer	
Home economist	Motion picture director	
Hospital administrator	Museum worker	Radio or television broadcaster
Hotel/motel manager	Musician	Railroad worker
Human resources manager		Real estate agent
Hydrologist	News reporter	Recreation worker
	Nuclear technician	Recruiter for new employees
Illustrator	Nurse	Rehabilitation counselor
Industrial designer		Religious worker
Industrial relations worker	Nursing aide	(minister, rabbi, nun, etc.)
Information technology specialist	Nutritionist	





# 10 Evaluating Prospective Careers/Jobs

## **Determining a career that is right for you means...**

- ... selecting the kind of work that fits your skills and interests.
- ... selecting a field or fields where you can launch a job campaign with enthusiasm.
- ... selecting a field in which your qualifications are likely to be such that you can become a top performer.

Job satisfaction is usually greatest when we are in situations in which we do well. But performing well sometimes leads people to advance in their careers to such a point where they are no longer effective. For example, many esteemed college professors end up as frustrated college administrators; and many good bench chemists become lackluster research directors.

This shouldn't inhibit you from striving for advancement, but instead argues for a clear, ongoing understanding of your abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and tolerance for various kinds of problems and stress.

You probably have identified many careers of interest to you—maybe even a diverse list. Your job now is to review these fields more closely using the evaluation process that follows. As you identify those with the highest ranking, you may wish to modify or refine your evaluation criteria. Later, as you interview for actual jobs, you may end up discarding some potential career fields and adding others.

As you examine fields, think about your qualifications. If you are

not qualified for the position, what do you need to do to become qualified? Are you willing to put in the time or should you consider something else?

Where you work, the kinds of people with whom you will associate, and the lifestyle built around your work situation are all important and will vary with your career choice. You want to be satisfied with your work role; after all, you may spend about 10,000 days of your lifetime at work.

You'll learn more about an occupation from informational interviews. (See chapter on informational interviews.) You can add to this knowledge by speaking to employers during job interviews.

Remember, there is likely no one 'perfect' job for you—just a lot of good jobs that you will like clearly better than others. The trick is to understand fully the positive and negative aspects of prospective work situations and to weigh them accurately as you make career and job decisions.

Studies show that you are probably going to change jobs or careers 6 to 10 times in your working life. Knowing what you want to do, and the direction in which you wish to move, will help you make better career decisions at all key junctures.

### Key questions in evaluating prospective careers:

- Does the field satisfy most of your career interests?
- Are the chances for advancement, service, or personal growth challenging enough to sustain you throughout your career?
- Do you have the skills and interests to be a greater-than-average success in the field?

- Will the position meet your work-value and work-environment concerns?

On the next page is a sample completed career evaluation form. This example rates 10 fields—with foreign service officer, high school teacher, and minister ranking highest on the scale.

## Career Evaluation Form

This form uses four general criteria:

**Growth**—Does the field offer opportunities for expansion and career growth?

**Financial requirements**—Does the combination of salary, fringe benefits, retirement plan, and other financial compensation meet your needs?

**Qualifications**—Are you qualified for the field or can you acquire necessary qualifications without undue effort, retraining, etc.?

**Competitive recruitment**—Are you likely to get hired without facing a long and difficult job hunt?

**Write in your three top work values and three top work-environment criteria. (Which are most important to you?)**

### Rating Scale:

- 5 = high degree of importance
- 4 = moderate degree of importance
- 3 = somewhat important
- 2 = slightly important
- 1 = of little or no importance



# 11

## Brainstorming Your Way to a Career

Brainstorming is a good way to identify job or work situations that might fit your special interests. This is often true for people who are more interested in lifestyle or geographical location than a particular kind of work. Some people, for example, want to own a business and really don't care what it is as long as they can set it up quickly. Others want to explore their interest in animals or seek non-demanding jobs, with just enough money coming in to pay the bills, so that they will have plenty of time to write the "great American novel."

These people, and you may be one of them, can use brainstorming to help pick their career—or at least to suggest some great ideas.

### Brainstorming Illustrated

Suppose you decide that you would be happiest living in Maine, doing almost anything. Maine presents a difficult career environment as few national firms are located in the state. It is generally an economically challenged area with a heavy influx of tourists—and jobs—in the summer months, but few available jobs the rest of the year.

Determined to live in Maine, you brainstorm and come up with a list of job ideas that might help you find work. Some are short-term and others long-range, but most are realistic in terms of your skills and interests.

#### Your list might look like this:

- *Engage in subsistence farming/living*
- *Start a summer-only food service*
- *Prepare for high school teaching*
- *Work for a hotel and later try to buy one*
- *Set up a summer business of special interest to tourists*
- *Establish or work for a travel company*
- *Get into summer-camp management*
- *Set up a wood-carving business, possibly to make Scandinavian-style furniture*
- *Publish travel guides or books about Maine*
- *Develop family entertainment parks near tourist centers*
- *Set up an employment service for summer-only jobs*
- *Acquire homemade goods and market them through a mail-order catalog*
- *Develop a business catering to summer homeowners, such as a protection service or a pre-season renovation firm*
- *Set up a bike or moped rental or sales business*

"The striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man."

—Viktor E. Frankl

## Another approach

Suppose your goal is to use your interest in writing in a career. The problem is that you have little experience.

### These thoughts came from brainstorming:

- *Work for a professional association, in any capacity, and move into its newsletter or directory departments*
- *Start night courses in journalism while working in the field*
- *Turn to employment agencies in New York City that specialize in editorial jobs*
- *Submit articles to newspapers or magazines for writing practice; maybe some will be published*
- *Talk with the editors of the local paper to get their ideas*
- *Sell advertising space for a neighborhood paper and write on the side*
- *Write copy for a local mail-order house*

“Former Peace Corps members have an excellent track record as foreign service officers. Obviously, the Peace Corps provides its Volunteers with an excellent opportunity to develop such qualities as understanding of foreign countries, adapting to foreign cultures, working long hours to ensure the success of the mission, and developing survival instincts in rough situations.”

— Former Director,  
U.S. Foreign Service

Maybe you left retirement to join the Peace Corps and want another service opportunity when you return.

### You might come up with these options:

- Ask hometown clergy to suggest worthy groups in the community
- Talk with local organizations about social and other needs they have
- Look into domestic volunteer programs
- Look in the local phone book under “Social Service Organizations” to identify groups that may have needs or visit ‘www.serve.org’ to find local volunteer opportunities in your area of passion
- Contact Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), which assists entrepreneurs and small businesses
- Look into the foster grandparent program or other opportunities through AmeriCorps Senior Corps and share your wealth of experience with specific populations in need



# 12

## Where Are You Now?

“Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome.”

—Samuel Johnson

In his famous “Fireside Chats,” President Franklin D. Roosevelt always told his listeners what he was going to tell them, then he told it, and finally, he told them what he had said. Let’s do the same here.

If you have taken the time to complete the exercises in this section, you have assembled an impressive file of information about yourself and about careers of interest to you. Chances are, you already know much more about yourself and fields of interest than most with whom you will be competing for jobs and other opportunities. This body of information, if kept up to date, will help you in future job or career changes.

This section showed you how to study yourself—and may have led you to a single, well-defined career goal. If so, great. But, more likely, it has helped you develop a list of possible career options that you will study in more detail as you begin to research jobs and employers.

Coupled with materials to be covered in your close of service conference, the information you have assembled should make you a top-flight career searcher.

**Now you’re ready for Section Two.**

**Good luck!**



## **Section Two**

# **Career Planning and the Job Search**

# 13 Life and Work Planning

As you approach the end of your Peace Corps service, you are faced with the necessity of deciding your next steps. Not only must you decide where to live, but you must determine what type of job, educational program, or service opportunity you will pursue. Making these decisions can be stressful and unsettling.

Take your time and don't panic. Not everything has to be determined at once. Sometimes setting short-term goals helps in planning for long-term ones. Establish your priorities and handle each in a methodical fashion. This is especially important in making career and life decisions, as pressures come from anxiety, financial needs, or concerned family and friends.

The rest of this chapter presents a useful, nontraditional approach to assist you with career and life decisions.

## **A Different Look at the World of Work**

The working world traditionally is viewed as a number of occupational fields, each having its own set of distinct jobs. For example, jobs in social service are seen as completely different from jobs in agriculture or international relations. A more realistic approach, however, is to think in terms of functions: All jobs are functions to be performed with people, data (verbal or numerical), and tangible things. Many functions—for example, research, budgeting, program development, training, and supervising—are necessary in a variety of occupational fields. Those functions are simply performed with different people, data, or things.

With this approach, you can broaden the range of jobs suitable for you. If you are good at planning and organizing programs, you can do this as a consumer safety advocate, recreation leader, preventive health specialist, or in many other positions, depending on what other skills and interests you have.

To use this nontraditional approach to the working world, you need to know your skills. Your technical skills—those acquired through formal education or on-the-job-training—are easy to identify. Functional skills, since you developed them informally, are harder to identify. Once you have inventoried your transferable functional skills, you can develop a range of possible career options.

## **How to Identify Your Functional Skills**

The first step in identifying your functional skills is to make a list of your achievements—the things you have done well and enjoyed doing. It doesn't matter whether you were paid or recognized for these achievements. Some examples of achievements might include planning and organizing a backpacking trip, developing a credit cooperative, teaching basic nutrition to rural villagers, and campaigning for a state senate candidate.

After completing your list of achievements, select seven that you consider most important. Describe each on a piece of paper in a detailed chronological account. Include only what you, not others,

actually did to make the achievement happen. For each step that you describe, try to identify the skills that you demonstrated. For example, if you convinced others about an idea, you have shown persuasive speaking skills; if you established a program to teach several farmers about fertilization techniques, you have demonstrated educational program development and training skills.

Upon analyzing the skills demonstrated in all seven achievements, you will notice that certain skills are used frequently. These are the functional skills that you would most likely want to use on the job.

### Important Interest Areas

After you have identified your strongest skills, decide in what areas or occupational fields you would like to use them. If you are uncertain about this, there are introspective exercises to help you recognize main interest areas. Two suggestions:

1. List 10 problems, large or small, that exist in the world today that you would like to address. For each problem, consider the following:
  - What occupational interest areas are indicated by the problem?
  - How do you imagine yourself working to solve the problem?
  - Which of the categories—people, data, or things—do you prefer?
2. List all the occupations you can remember considering, either seriously or as a passing fancy. To analyze this list, there are a number of questions to answer:
  - Does this exercise confirm your people, data, or thing

orientation?

- What career fields are suggested by the list?
- Do you seem to want power and influence over others, or approval from and affiliation with them?
- Do the occupations involve risk-taking or security?

### Determining Your Values

Some people find it easier to identify what they don't want in their work situation rather than what they do want. The following exercise will help you determine the positive values behind the negative reactions to past work situations you may have had.

Imagine yourself in a past work, academic, or social setting. As you picture that situation, list the things you don't like about it. After completing your list, write the positive values implied by each negative. For example, "I don't like routine" might be stated positively as "I value a job with a variety of functions." "I don't like punching a time clock" implies "I value working for an organization that has flexible work hours."

Other issues about which you may have strong feelings include: level of job responsibility; pace of work; geographic location; professional growth possibilities; salary; co-worker characteristics; status and recognition; values, goals, and structure of the organization; and the contribution you could make. Consider your stand on each of these and other issues you might raise. Rank your values in order of their importance to you so you can see clearly which ones you are willing to compromise on and which ones you are not.

Other exercises to help you identify skills, interests, and values are presented throughout this manual.

The outcome of a thorough assessment of your skills, interests, and values is a tentative career-goal statement. A sample statement might be: “I want to use my skills in educational program planning, research and public speaking in the area of preventive healthcare or consumer safety. And I want to work near a large city in the Midwest.”

Notice that this statement is based solely on you and does not mention specific job titles. Now you are ready to consider appropriate career options by investigating which kinds of occupational fields, organizational settings, and jobs relate to your skills, interests, and values.

### Career Research

As a Volunteer, you can begin researching career options by using the career information manuals and online services available from Returned Volunteer Services. The Peace Corps also has a full-service career center on the first floor of Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C.

### Job Research Checklist

Consider the following when exploring a career field or specific job:

- What are the experience requirements?
- What are the educational requirements?
- What are the specific skill requirements?
- What is the general work environment and what are the levels of formality?
- What is the job availability and outlook for the next 5 to 10

years?

- Is the field or job growing or declining?
- Is the unemployment rate in this field or job decreasing or increasing?
- What training is offered by employers for workers in this field or job?
- What is the impact of foreign competition on this field or job?
- What economic or demographic trends in your area affect this field or job?
- How safe is the job?
- What are the job duties?
- Is there job satisfaction among current employees?
- How are the promotion opportunities?
- What is the salary range?
- Are there technology requirements for the job, and is there potential impact from changing technology?
- With respect to transportation, what are the costs, accessibility, and length of commute?

### Ways to Find Information

Observe workers and workplaces. Check out an organization’s location before an interview. During an interview or networking meeting, pay attention to the way you are treated by a receptionist or secretary. What are the general atmosphere and working conditions?

**Read** journals, periodicals, books, annual reports, marketing brochures, etc.

**Talk** with people in that field or job by networking.

**Surf** the Internet for career fairs, job descriptions, and company information.

# 14 Resumes

A resume is a job-hunting tool designed to provide an employer with pertinent screening and qualifying information in an organized and easy to read fashion. Latest statistics show that hiring officials today spend an average of 8-12 seconds in the initial review of a resume, so it is especially crucial to have a well written and easy to read/scan resume if you hope to make it into the ‘to be considered further’ file vs. the ‘circular’ file (aka ‘trash can’). Remember, your resume is a written sales pitch; your resume should describe your qualifications and experiences in the most impressive terms possible. The purpose of a resume is not to get you the job; rather, it is to get you the interview at which time you will have to prove your skills and qualifications for the job.

This chapter provides general resume-writing guidelines and includes resume samples to help you create an effective one of your own. Also included is a “Rescue Kit” to help you determine the effectiveness of your resume.

## Basic Guidelines

Your resume should be tailored for each job you apply for to ensure that it addresses as many of the job requirements listed in the job announcement as possible. Though more work, a targeted resume will increase the chances that you will be called for an interview. Build a master (or comprehensive) resume, including ALL your skills and experiences and then copy/paste from that to create your tailored

resume for any specific job. Be sure to save a copy of the resume version you used for each job.

Make a list of your relevant experiences, paid and unpaid. Considering the job you are targeting, decide on the strengths you want to highlight (e.g., a particular work experience, the skills you have developed through experience, or academic training) and the weaknesses you want to minimize (e.g., an unimpressive job title, limited academic training, a deficiency in one kind of experience). Focus on your accomplishments and the results of your work.

Choose a resume format that will enable you to present your strengths and minimize or omit your weaknesses.

Edit your resume carefully. All your information should relate directly to, and support, your job focus. Your aim is to promote your candidacy as concisely and effectively as possible. Most often, this can be done in one page; a standard resume should rarely be longer than two pages. The exception with length of a resume is federal resumes which are on average 2-5 pages long as they must contain much more detailed information including salary, supervisor’s name and contact information, etc.

A writing style that uses brief “choppy” phrases or sentences, written in the first person but without the pronoun “I” will help make the resume easy to read (e.g. “Designed and implemented nutritional

training programs for 200 Ecuadorian health educators”). Choose your layout (margins, italics, bolding, spacing, etc.) carefully and make it consistent. Have your resume printed on good quality paper or create a PDF for easy emailing. Visual appeal will favorably influence a potential employer.

## **Kinds of Resumes**

Though resume formats and styles vary, two resume formats, chronological and functional, form the basis for subsequent variations.

In a chronological format, experience is presented in the reverse order of occurrence, i.e., your current or most recent position is listed first, your prior job second, etc., with your oldest significant position included last. This style is effective if your current career field and your past and present work experience are relevant to your career objective. This is by far the most traditional format of resume which is most familiar to employers.

Conversely, in a functional resume, your experience is described according to the areas of expertise and functional skills that demonstrate your qualifications for a job. This format of resume is generally used if you are changing career direction, have held jobs in a number of career fields, have had gaps in your work history, or have limited related experience. A brief section on employment history should also be included at the end but it is simply a listing of the organization, location, title and dates, without any description.

## **Qualifications Summary vs. Job Objective**

At the top of the first page of your resume, start with a concise, well-written “Qualifications Summary,” “Career Profile,” or “Key Qualifications.” What you call it is not as important as what is included in this section. A bulleted or brief summary at the top works better than a “Job Objective.”

It is certainly important to have a job objective in mind, but don’t put it on your resume! Job objectives generally turn off human resources and hiring managers, especially since they tend to be vague or so tailored to each position that it’s obvious that you change it for each resume. However—depending on your field—a job objective may be appropriate in certain situations. If you are applying for a university, teaching, or research position, employers may still prefer to read a job objective. Ask those in your network about this.

A better alternative is to consider using “key qualifications” or a “qualifications summary” as a way to attract attention and emphasize the unique skills you’d bring to the job. Put yourself in the shoes of a hiring manager and ask yourself which one you would rather read: a “job objective” that tells an employer what you want from a job or career, or a “qualifications summary” that tells an employer what you can do for him or her based on what you’ve already done.

If your goal is to work in international development, computer systems, or business, then using a “qualifications summary” is essential to your success in landing a job. Many employers in these fields find

summaries helpful as a memory aid. They enter them into their electronic resume data banks to scan and pre-screen them for keywords. Even if your goals are in other career fields, it is still a good idea to use a “qualifications summary” or “key qualifications” and not a “job objective.” Bulleting your key qualifications can increase the readability of your resume.

Here are two models to consider in writing a qualifications summary. Other examples are included on the model resumes.

**If you have more than two or three years of relevant experience:**

Qualifications Summary: Dedicated professional with X years of \_\_\_\_\_ experience concentrating in “A,” “B,” and “C,” overseas and in the United States. Background also includes \_\_\_\_\_. Fluent in \_\_\_\_\_.

**If you have only two or three years of relevant experience:**

Qualifications Summary: Dedicated professional with experience and training in “A,” “B,” and “C” internationally and in the United States. Educational background in \_\_\_\_\_. Proficient in \_\_\_\_\_ and conversational in \_\_\_\_\_. Skilled in Microsoft Office Suite, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

## Chronological Resume

### Experience

- Using the heading “**Experience**” or “**Professional Experience**” instead of “Work History” frees you to include paid and unpaid experiences that support your targeted job.
- **Start each new work description with the following information:** Job title or role/function and the name of the organization, location & dates. If space permits, break this information onto two lines with organization and location on the first line, followed by job title and dates on the second line (or vice versa if your title is more impressive/related to the position you’re applying for). The important thing is to be consistent with the formatting for all entries, be certain to use your specific job title, such as “agricultural extension agent” or “science teacher,” instead of “Peace Corps Volunteer” in describing your Peace Corps assignment). Incorporate the purpose of the organization or project in one brief phrase/bullet and then concentrate on describing what you did. You do not have to include everything. Select and describe most relevant functions first and tailor your descriptions to the job you’re applying for. Omit or summarize other responsibilities. Use action-oriented verbs (e.g., planned, organized, coordinated, advised) to convey your primary activities. Focus on accomplishments.
- **Use quantifiers** (e.g., numbers

of people, length of report, time involved, size of budget) and qualifiers (e.g., kinds of people or programs you worked with, how you did something) to distinguish your experience. This is key to writing an impressive resume.

- **Include outcome statements in your descriptions if the results of your efforts were successful**

(e.g., "...resulted in the recruitment of 36 volunteer tutors"). Emphasize those functions and accomplishments that support your targeted job, even if they were only a small part of the total experience. Dates can be included after the name of the organization or at the end of each description.

### Examples:

#### Poor

- Wrote reports
- Served as receptionist
- Responsible for family-health planning programs

#### Better

- Wrote five major reports on the status of natural resources in the region which resulted in...
- Independently handled information requests, problems, and appointment scheduling for more than 30 walk-in clients on a daily basis.
- Designed, promoted, conducted, and evaluated over 30 group family-health planning programs, ranging from two-hour workshops to 12-session seminars, for students and community participants.

## Functional Resume

### Experience

- Title the experience section "Relevant Skills and Experiences," "Skills and Abilities," or "Areas of Expertise." The headings to describe your functional skills and experiences either can repeat the phrases you used in your qualifications summary, or be composed of other skill/knowledge terms that relate to the work functions you have performed. Some possible headings are Administration, Teaching and Training, Curriculum Development,

Management, and Counseling. (The headings are, of course, tailored to the job you are applying for.)

- When writing your paragraphs under each of the headings, choose your most impressive experiences (i.e., the ones that involved the most people, time, budgets, results, etc.). If you have a number of relevant experiences to draw upon, separate each according to your functional headings, and describe each where appropriate on the resume.



## Employment History

As mentioned earlier, employers who are more familiar with the traditional chronological resume format may be wary of the functional resume, since candidates with gaps in their work experience often choose the functional format. A section titled “Employment History” can ease any concerns. It lists your work history—but only the basic info of organization, title, location and dates, without any details, but only after you have highlighted your relevant skills and experiences.

### Examples:

There are alternatives to listing simply your employment dates, organization name, and titles:

- When your job titles have been unimpressive, use the name of your department instead: XYZ Corporation: Accounting Department  
May 2011 – June 2013
- When your work experience is dated or there are gaps in your employment record: Program Manager, XYZ Corporation, 3 years
- When you have had a wide range of jobs or a number of short-term jobs: While clarifying my career goals, have supported myself through a variety of clerical positions with the following companies: XYZ Corporation, Jones Company, ELS Incorporated, Smith Associates

## Key Words for More Effective Resumes

Sample “punch” words to *begin* sentences in your resume:

Accelerated	Directed	Planned
Accomplished	Effectuated	Programmed
Acquired	Eliminated	Proposed
Adapted	Established	Provided
Administered	Evaluated	Recommended
Advised	Expanded	Reduced
Approved	Expedited	Reinforced
Assessed needs of	Generated	Reorganized
Authored	Guided	Revamped
Built	Implemented	Reviewed
Collaborated	Improved	Revised
Completed	Increased	Scheduled
Conceived	Influenced	Secured
Conducted	Interpreted	Set up
Conferred	Launched	Simplified
Created	Led	Solved
Cross-trained	Maintained	Streamlined
Delegated	Managed	Strengthened
Demonstrated	Obtained	Structured
Designed	Performed	Supervised
Developed	Pinpointed	Trained

Sample words to describe your personal qualities:

Active	Discreet	Realistic
Adaptable	Efficient	Reliable
Aggressive	Energetic	Resourceful
Alert	Enthusiastic	Respected
Ambitious	Hardworking	Self-reliant
Analytical	Imaginative	Sincere
Bilingual	Logical	Systematic
Conscientious	Loyal	Tactful
Constructive	Methodical	Talented
Creative	Objective	Willing to relocate
Dependable	Practical	Willing to travel
Disciplined	Proficient at	

## Resume “Rescue Kit” for RPCVs

Returned Volunteer Services developed this self-help kit to assist you in evaluating the effectiveness of your resume as a marketing tool. Follow the directions below.

### Resume Check

1. Check off the items you have completed.
2. For unchecked items, or for more information on how to make changes in a particular area, review the “Resume Writing Tips” at the right.
3. Request feedback from those in your network, and make changes accordingly.
4. Review, edit, and critique again.

### Resume Writing Tips

**The tips below will help you address the criteria listed on the left.**

### PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

- You have researched career fields and/or employers’ job requirements.
- You have learned buzz words commonly used in the industry.
- You have a clearly defined objective.
- You know the three main problems, needs, or requirements of the specific job you want.
- Research, read ads, and ask those in your network for as much information as possible about targeted organizations, job requirements, and employers’ needs. List three main problems or needs in order of importance to the employer. Your resume should focus on what you’ve done to solve these problems.

### GENERAL COMPONENTS

- Your name and contact information are at the top of the page.
- Your qualifications summary or career profile follows your contact information.
- Your professional experience summary follows the qualifications summary.
- You include your education and training.
- There are four key components of a resume: contact information, qualifications summary, experience (paid and unpaid), and education/training. Keeping your resume simple and organized enables the reader to skim it easily.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

- Your name is in bold type and the font size is 14 points or larger.
- You included:
  - Your address, city, state, and zip (plain instead of bold text and include a local/temporary address in the same geographic location where the job is located, if at all possible)
  - A phone or voice mail number (preferably one only you answer)
  - Your e-mail address (professional-sounding personal email, perhaps one you use only for job search).
- Your name should always stand out.
- Make sure the phone number you include is reliable (a non-local cell phone number is fine)

## QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY/OBJECTIVE

- You've omitted a "Job Objective" unless the career field, specific organization, or contact requests or prefers it.
- If you've listed an objective, it is brief, well-defined, and indicates the position, title, possible area of specialization, and level of responsibility sought.
- Your qualifications summary (QS), career profile key qualifications, follows the contact information.
- Your QS highlights your accomplishments and skills that are relevant to the position for which you are applying.
- You've included your language skills and computer skills in your QS.
- Objectives are important to define in a job search, but not always needed on your resume. A job objective tells an employer what you want, but the QS tells employers you have what they want. Keep in mind that many experts say resumes get only 10 to 20 seconds of attention. If the employers only read the QS, they should have a good idea that you are qualified for an interview.
- A QS is a three- to five-line description of your relevant experience. The QS should be just below your name, address, and phone number. Use the summary or profile to set up a thematic outline for your resume. The first line may read: "X" years' experience in "A," "B," and "C." The second line might say: Background also includes "D," "E," and "F." Then mention your computer and language skills.

### QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY/OBJECTIVE (cont.)

- There are variations of the QS. RPCVs with significant experience may choose to write one or two lines to begin the QS and then bullet (in two columns) relevant skills but avoid a laundry list of skills.
- Review your list of the three needs or requirements of the employer. This should give you ideas on what to emphasize in the first and second lines of your summary.
- Be sure to include computer and language skills in the QS. Both are valued by employers.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Both categories are listed at the end of the resume unless you are applying for a position in academia.
- The highest level of education is listed first.
- The degree list includes the degree, institution, and date granted. (List the date only if it's within the last 15 years.)
- High school and education prior to degree are omitted, unless the education is relevant or unless it's a federal resume.
- Extra information, such as courses, G.P.A., or college activities is omitted, unless it is relevant to the position for which you are applying. If you wish to include honors and awards, do so as a bullet followed by listing of a few of the key ones, (e.g. 'Honors & Awards: Presidential Scholarship awarded for academic excellence and leadership; magna cum laude graduate)
- Kinds, locations, and dates of relevant training, such as Peace Corps training, are listed.
- List educational information at the end (after your experience category), unless your career field requests or requires it at the top (i.e., the education field). Most hiring managers want to select people with experience, and listing education first gives the misperception that you are either a 'new grad with no experience' which is definitely not the case for RP-CVs, or that your education is more relevant than your experience. If you have a graduate degree and want to emphasize that up front, consider placing a reference to your degree in your first Key Qualifications bullet. [i.e. "Dedicated professional with MBA and 2 years of international development experience in West Africa."]
- Include your Peace Corps training (technical, cross-cultural, and language) and other relevant training. This is especially important if do not have a masters degree as often in today's competitive environment, there tends to be a 'preference' for advanced educational degrees, even for some basic entry level professional jobs! So, listing additional educational experiences such as Study Abroad programs can be helpful. [Hint: when listing additional educational experiences, list the organization first, NOT your degree or training.]

## ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT

- You use a chronological format, unless you made a justifiable decision to use the functional format.
  - You begin each chronological or functional block with your most relevant and impressive accomplishment.
  - You list your education and training at the end of the resume, unless your career field demands otherwise.
  - You format your resume so that your dates of employment are to the right of the job title and other identifying information.
  - Your resume does not exceed two pages.
- Most employers still prefer the chronological resume. If you're not sure about this, ask the people in your network. If you feel strongly that a functional resume best represents your skills and accomplishments, consider writing a functional resume and then transfer the same experience statements, with a focus on the functions or skills, to a chronological format. Decide which one works best.
  - List dates of employment after the title and location of a job, unless you're trying to stress the length of time you spent with a particular employer.
  - Always lead from strength. Begin with your strongest and most relevant accomplishments.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- You describe your experience in terms of skills, accomplishments, and results.
  - You include result statements in your job descriptions. These include efficiency, productivity, quality of work, time or money saved, improvements made, publicity gained, and other contributions.
  - You include relevant paid, volunteer, intern, and cooperative education experiences, and all transferable skills.
  - You use quantifiers, including numbers of people, lengths of reports, time involved, sizes of budgets, etc.
  - You begin each new work description with your job title, role, or function; organization name and location; and employment dates.
  - You use specific job titles (“Agricultural Extension Agent” instead of “Peace Corps Volunteer.”)
  - Optional: You gave experience headings functional titles to help the reader focus on your relevant skills (e.g., “Management and Related Experience”).
- Keep in mind that employers look for experience relevant to their needs.
  - Be sure to list your experience in terms of accomplishments, skills, and results of your work. Merely listing duties and responsibilities weakens your resume. Employers will want to know what you’ve done with those duties and responsibilities. Sometimes significant accomplishments come from events or duties that you spend little time on.
  - If you are having a tough time determining your accomplishments, ask another RPCV to help you. Often, a different perspective helps us recognize our accomplishments.



## WRITING STYLE

- Begin phrases and sentences with active verbs (preferably ‘-ed action verbs’).
  - Use bulleted phrases (one-two lines maximum each) or very short paragraphs.
  - Don’t include pronouns.
  - Don’t use qualifiers like “extensive experience” if you have less than 8-10 years of relevant experience.
  - Don’t use passive expressions.
  - Avoid repeating verbs (use the ‘thesaurus’ tool to find good alternatives).
  - Don’t use phrases such as “responsible for,” “in charge of,” or “accountable to.”
  - It’s OK to break the standard grammar rule of ‘less than 10, spell it out’. i.e., “7 years’ vs. ‘seven years’ to help it ‘pop’ and increase readability
  - Make certain that your finished resume is typo-free, consistent in style, and written succinctly.
- Instead of separating your phrases with semicolons, break down the phrase or sentence into two or more sentences. Semicolons tend to make phrases or sentences longer and more awkward for a reader.
  - Use verbs from the list in this chapter. There are similar lists in many resume books. Make certain the verbs match the requirements of the job and/or sound like the ones used in vacancy announcements. Vary your verbs to show the breadth of your experience. Use past tense for all completed tasks or previous jobs. You may use present tense for your current work only.
  - Double and triple check to ensure your resume is free of typos. Ask someone to review it before you send it out. **A resume with even one typo may make the difference between being considered and being rejected.**

## CONTENT

- You quantify as much as possible using numbers, percentages, dollars, and “time-saved” phrases in describing your most relevant accomplishments.
- You list roles in professional associations or extracurricular endeavors that are relevant to the employer.
- You left out or removed:
  - All personal information, such as age, marital status, hobbies, sports, interests, or social affiliations.
  - Your list of references and “References Available Upon Request.” [Put references in a separate document]
  - “Resume” or “Curriculum Vitae” at the top of the page.
  - Peace Corps jargon or acronyms that others would not understand.
  - The date of resume preparation or the date of your availability.
  - Semicolons separating phrases.
  - Your Peace Corps description of service (DOS).
  - A photograph of yourself.
- Use quantifiable terms to describe the breadth and depth of how, where, and for whom you did your most impressive work. For example: Conducted two-month assessment that determined the primary health-care needs of 1,000 people in five villages in rural Gabon.
- Do not include any personal information that could possibly be used for discriminatory reasons.
- Avoid providing information about your interests and hobbies, unless they add real value to your resume.
- Do not list your references or use the phrase “References Available Upon Request.” Most employers will assume you will provide references if you want the job so save the space for more relevant information.
- Do not write that you have extensive international development experience after only two years’ Peace Corps service. “Extensive” usually applies to more than five or 10 years’ experience.

## MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS

- You asked an RPCV to proofread and critique your resume.
- You asked someone in the same field to critique your resume.
- You are pleased with the final product.

Your finished resume:

- Represents you well, given your training and experience.
- Accurately reflects your training, education, accomplishments, and experience.
- Is easy to read and draws the reader in.
- Presents your experience and education in a manner that supports your career goals, job objective, and the employer's needs.
- Is written as a marketing tool or an advertisement to pique the employer's interest enough to call you for an interview.

- Be sure to have a professional in your field of interest review your resume to provide constructive feedback. Ask another RPCV to review your Peace Corps experience to ensure it is in understandable language for U.S. employers and represents your accomplishments as a PCV.
- Make sure your personal objective is taken into account in your resume, even if it is not written there.
- You can ask a hundred people for advice on how to write a resume, and each will give you different feedback. Therefore, you need to make sure that you are happy with the final product. Base your decisions on the research you've done, the feedback from those in your network, and the knowledge that you have crafted the best possible resume you can. Being proud of your accomplishments and your resume will be evident to potential employers.

## DESIGN AND APPEARANCE

Your resume:

- Is printed on white or cream-colored, quality bond paper. The printout is letter quality.
  - Is one (preferably) or two pages long.
  - Does not have graphics or lines, if it will be faxed.
  - Is appealing to the eye.
  - Is created with a clear, easy-to-read serif typeface in a point size of 10 to 12.
  - Has margins wide enough so that the reader can hold it without obscuring words.
  - Is inviting to read and not text-heavy.
  - Contains enough white space to allow the reader to skim it easily. A reader will be drawn to a resume with a clean, crisp layout. (Recommend 1” margins)
  - Does not have any underlined text.
- White and cream-colored paper looks professional and fax best if you are asked to fax your resume. Use a quality bond paper so that your resume exemplifies professionalism.
  - A resume should rarely exceed two pages, unless your network tells you otherwise. Most RPCVs should be able to write a resume on one page. In some fields, three- to 10- page resumes—or CVs—may be acceptable. Those fields include teaching or research positions, high-level international development consulting jobs, most United Nations jobs, and most European jobs. CVs often include lists of publications and speeches. If your resume is longer than one page, be sure to include page numbers (preferably at bottom of first page and at top of second page.
  - Your resume should not be too “gray” or dense with words. It should look as good as the information it contains.
  - When laying out your resume, it is best to set the text in a serif font such as Garamond or Times New Roman, rather than a sans-serif font such as Arial or Helvetica. (Serif fonts have small strokes on the ends of the characters. Sans-serif fonts do not.) You may choose to use a sans-serif font for headlines or section subheads.
  - Use plain, not decorative type, and avoid italics.

## DESIGN AND APPEARANCE (cont.)

- Use bold type for your name, headings, and job titles. Set your contact information (at the top of your resume) in plain text.
- The best point size range to use for body copy is 10 to 12 points, depending on the font. You may vary the size to copyfit or for a certain look, e.g., 12-point for headings and 10- or 11-point for body copy.
- Type only one space after a period. This keeps white spaces evenly distributed throughout the resume and avoids “rivers” of white through the text.
- In general, a reader skims the page from top to bottom, gradually moving from left to right. Therefore, be sure “buzz” words are on the left to catch the reader’s eye immediately.

## Sample Functional Resume

This RPCV’s functional resume was designed to obtain a job in the United States in community development. John didn’t have enough room to have three separate functional blocks, so he combined two. He had less than 10 years’ experience, so a one-page resume was appropriate. This RPCV also prepared a chronological resume, in case prospective employers asked for it during the interview.

# John B. Good

1234 Main Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90266

Ph: 415-555-1212  
email: jgood@gmail.com

## QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

Dedicated professional with more than five years' experience in organizational support, including coordination of numerous community-development projects. Computer skills include Excel, Word, and PowerPoint. Fluent in Spanish and English.

### Community Development

- Established a successful village-based water-supply and health project. Wrote a training manual to demonstrate the value of self-help development. Taught 20 people how to plan and execute a community-based project.
- Selected to train 23 development workers by identifying their practical skills and experiences.
- Fostered the sweat-equity rehabilitation of three abandoned multifamily properties.
- Facilitated the planning and financing of 15 low-income homeowners' efforts to adhere to building codes and make general improvements to their properties.
- Conceived and set up two weekend urban festivals for 5,000 people.
- Created master plans for state and local school systems, hospitals, and prison facilities.
- Developed various graphic methods to communicate planning and architectural concepts to clients and public bodies.

### Management and Administration

- Directed a team of 12 in the building of seven 2,000-gallon cement water tanks.
- Elected as commission chairman to manage a 25-member body that disbursed \$250,000 annually to more than 200 university-student groups. Reorganized the commission by introducing rolling hearing and funding procedures.
- Provided a full-meal plan for 40 university students. Delegated duties to students and two full-time staff persons.
- Contracted to process a backlog of 100 personnel security clearances.
- Recruited prospective volunteers by responding to more than 50 phone inquiries a day.

### Professional Experience

- Staff Assistant, Peace Corps, Washington, DC, February 2003–present
- Training Consultant, Peace Corps, Ecuador, September 2002
- Rural Community Development Volunteer, Peace Corps, Ecuador, 2000–2002
- Assistant Project Architect, Stecker LaBau Arneill McManus, Hartford, CT, 1995–2000
- Planning Consultant, Hartford Downtown Council, Hartford, CT, 1999–2000
- Housing Coordinator, Apartment Improvement Program, Hartford, CT, 1998–2000
- Housing Assistant, Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Service, Ithaca, NY, 1997–1998
- Chairman, Cornell Student Finance Commission, Ithaca, NY, 1996–1997
- Vice President and Steward, Psi Upsilon Fraternity, Ithaca, NY, 1996–1997

### Education and Training

- Peace Corps Pre-Service Training: Community Development and Spanish Language, Ecuador, 2002
- Cornell University, Ithaca, NY B.A. in government, minor in architecture,
- Honors: Quill and Dagger Senior Honor Society
- Special Program in Developing Affordable Housing, Harvard GSD, Cambridge, MA, 2000

## Sample Chronological Resume

Myrtle was looking for a recruiting and counseling position in a youth-services nonprofit organization. She used a chronological resume because her job history generally demonstrates relevant experience.

### Myrtle Beach

1234 Ocean Way, Atlanta, GA 30303  
Ph: (404) 545-1987 | email: mbeach@aol.com

#### QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

Five years' recruitment, counseling, and training in community organizations serving culturally diverse populations. French and English fluency. Proficient in Microsoft Word and Excel.

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

##### **Community Health Educator, Peace Corps, Togo, West Africa, 12/01–11/03**

- Conducted assessment survey in 21 villages to identify healthcare priorities.
- Recruited, trained, and supervised 23 village health workers in disease surveillance, treatment, and prevention to conduct regular health talks in their communities.
- Managed the distribution of more than 1,500 cloth filters, resulting in significant reduction of water-borne parasitic disease.

##### **Trainer, Peace Corps, Togo, West Africa, 9/02–11/02**

- Developed curriculum and designed educational materials to conduct 13-week health-training program based on experiential and participatory teaching methods.
- Instructed 21 Peace Corps trainees in primary healthcare and community mobilization strategies in preparation for their field assignments.

##### **Tutor, Boston Adult Education Center, Boston, MA, 2/01–8/01**

- Tutored students preparing for the GED exams in reading, writing, and mathematics.

##### **Administrative Assistant, Bay Bank Boston, Boston, MA, 12/00–8/01**

- Managed logistical and administrative affairs of high-volume branch office.
- Provided customer service to corporate clients in person and by telephone.

##### **Peer Counselor, Berkeley Programs for Study Abroad, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 9/88–5/90**

- Recruited prospective applicants and provided counseling on academic, vocational, and travel opportunities abroad.
- Coordinated, publicized, and directed orientation sessions to discuss cross-cultural awareness, foreign language study, and integration into university systems abroad.

##### **Editor, Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 1/00–8/00**

- Transcribed and edited texts for oral history publications.

##### **Health Volunteer, Over 60 Health Center, Berkeley, CA, 10/99–8/00**

- Conducted hypertension screening, explained test results, and directed patient-flow and triage.
- Honored with Human Task Force Community Service Award.

#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- B.A., French and Political Science, 1990 University of California, Berkeley.
- University of Paris and University of Pau, Junior Year Abroad, France.

# 15

## Cover Letters for the Job Hunt

During your job search, you will write several kinds of letters, including cover letters, approach letters, and thank-you letters. Samples and the rules for writing each kind follow.

**It is important to apply the following principles of business correspondence to your letters:**

- Use an outline to plan and organize what you will say.
- Know your purpose and plan the elements accordingly.
- Communicate your message logically.
- State your purpose in the first sentence.
- End your letter by stating what your reader can expect from you next.
- Use short paragraphs and sentences; avoid complex sentences.
- Punctuate properly and use correct grammar and spelling.
- Use simple, straightforward language.

### Cover Letters

The cover letter helps market you. If you want the reader to examine your resume, your cover letter must have impact. The letter should advertise your resume, not regurgitate it. It must capture the reader's attention, stress the employer's needs and your value, and invite the employer to read your resume in depth. Including a cover letter is highly recommended regardless of whether one is specifically requested or required. Although you might hear select hiring officials say "we don't really look at cover let-

ters", indeed many do and in fact, some will overlook people simply because they didn't take the extra time and attention to include a cover letter with their application. So it's best to err on the conservative side. A well crafted concise cover letter can help set you apart from the masses, and make the difference between your resume getting read or not. Create a separate document for your cover letter vs. including it within your resume document, unless specifically requested to do otherwise. Although some people choose to incorporate their cover letter content within the body of the email, a better option may be to attach the cover letter as you do your resume, thus allowing you to maintain the professional business format of the cover letter. If you choose to do this, simply write a sentence or two referring them to the attached resume and cover letter for the XYZ position and thank them for their consideration. Another alternative is to copy the contents of the cover letter into the body of your email (in case they don't open the attachment) and also attach the nicely formatted version. Follow these cover letter writing guidelines:

- Address it to a particular person by name and title (if possible). If you are uncertain who this is, call the organization (unless they indicate in job announcement 'no phone calls please') and tell the receptionist, "I'm sending some cor-



respondence to the head of the department. Could you please tell me to whom I should address these documents?” Get the correct spelling and title. If you are absolutely unable to secure contact information, consider using “Dear Selection Committee” or “Dear Hiring Official” vs. the overly generic “To Whom it May Concern” or the old-fashioned and out-of-date “Dear Sir or Madam.”

- In your opening line, write something that is uniquely associated with the person, department, or organization that will communicate your interest.
- Answer the employer’s question, “Why should I see you?” Establish your value.
- Your writing style should be direct, powerful, and error-free. Eliminate extraneous words.
- Keep the letter short and to the point. Cover these three points:
  1. State your interest and purpose—the first paragraph should be short and include why you’re writing (include the job you’re applying for, and if referred by someone, their name).
  2. Highlight your enclosed resume by stressing what you will do for the employer.
  3. Request an interview and indicate that you will call for an appointment.
- Use appropriate, active language.
- Always be positive. Stress your accomplishments and skills as well as your future value.
- Do not indicate you will call to follow up unless you have a direct number and contact person for the position and know you

will be able to get through. Otherwise, it will show a lack of follow through. Ask them to contact you to set up an interview at which time you can further discuss your skills and qualifications.

- Use quality bond or laser-compatible paper if submitting manually vs. via internet. Use the same paper for the resume.
- Keep copies of your letters for follow-up and tracking purposes.

### **Approach Letters/ Emails (for informational interviews)**

Approach letters are used to gain access to individuals who may provide you with contacts, leads, and information that will assist you in career decision-making or job-hunting. They are used to obtain informational interviews and to build a network of contacts. Follow these guidelines in your approach letters:

- Start with a personal statement to connect you to the reader. If you have a referral, you might start with: “Dr. Evan Jones suggested that I contact you....” If you lack a personal referral, you might open with: “I am writing to you because of your position as ...,” or “because of your experience in ...,” or “Since we are both alumni of ..., I thought....”
- Tell the reader your purpose. Explain that you do not expect her or him to know of any current job openings, but you would like to learn more about their own experience and would welcome any advice, suggestions, or guidance re-

garding a particular occupation, your career plans, your resume, or future work possibilities. Explain your current situation.

- Close the letter by requesting a brief meeting at a convenient time. Indicate that you will call in a few days to arrange one, and follow through on this.
- Always address the letter to a name, not to a position or title.
- Be brief.
- Make your letter warm and personal. Avoid language with stereotypes or jargon.

## Thank-You Letters

Career counselors are unanimous in stressing the importance of sending thank-you letters to almost everyone who helps you in the process of getting a job. The person you met at an informational or job interview, the secretary who helped arrange an appointment, the personnel worker who gave you a job lead—all these people should be thanked. In addition to basic courtesy, a thank-you letter is an opportunity to present yourself as someone with good interpersonal skills.

Thoughtful people are remembered. A thank-you letter helps you stand out from other jobseekers. Write your thank-you letters within 24 hours of your interview; in the age of email, it is appropriate to send an email thank-you immediately as it shows your professionalism, and can be especially important if they are making their decision quickly. Consider following up with a short hard-copy thank you note in the mail as well but don't regurgitate the same exact information. This can set you apart from the masses and gets your name in front of the hiring manager twice. Highlight your interview dis-

cussion, reiterate your qualifications and continuing interest, and express your gratitude for assistance. Write thank-you letters after job interviews, informational interviews (even if conducted by phone), after being rejected for a job, and after accepting a job.

Note: Much of this section is derived from *High Impact Resumes and Letters* (Impact Publications, Manassas, VA) by Ronald L. Kranich and William J. Banis; and *The Perfect Resume* (Broadway Books, NY) by Tom Jackson.

## Thank-You Letters

### Accepting a Job Offer

2589 Jason Drive  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
Today's Date

Ms. Celeste Rebus  
Personnel Director  
New York State Department of Labor  
Administrative Division  
819 Winthrop Avenue  
Albany, NY 11081

Dear Ms. Rebus:

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the New York State Department of Labor. I am pleased to accept the position as a research and data analyst with your planning unit. The position requires exactly the kind of work I want to do, and I will work hard and effectively in this role.

As we discussed, I shall begin work on November 16, 2012. In the meantime, I will complete the required physical examination and locate housing.

I enjoyed my interviews with you and Mr. Lhotse and look forward to working at the New York Department of Labor.

Sincerely yours,

Jacqueline Armstrong

### Responding to Rejection

1949 Robin Avenue  
Williamsburg, VA 23517  
Today's Date

Ms. Kim Wong, President  
Language Learning Center  
6849 20th Street  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Wong:

Thank you for interviewing me for the English instructor position with your company. I appreciate your consideration and interest in me.

Although disappointed to have not been selected for your current vacancy, I appreciated the courtesy and professionalism shown to me during the selection process and wish you the best with your selected candidate. I enjoyed meeting you and the other members of your staff. My meeting confirmed that the Language Learning Center would be an exciting place to work and build a career.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for you. Please keep me in mind if another position becomes available in the near future.

Again, thank you, and best wishes to you and your staff.

Yours truly,

Jack Smith

## Approach Letters

23 North Bismarck Street  
Arlington, VA 22207  
Today's Date

Ms. Sharon T. Moody  
Vice President  
Global Friends, Inc.  
529 Georgia Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20011

Dear Ms. Moody:

I am writing to seek your advice on how I might prepare for a career in international development.

For the past two years, I have served as a community organizer and health worker with the Peace Corps in the Philippines. Prior to that, I obtained a B.A. in Asian studies from the University of Pennsylvania and held a variety of jobs, including research assistant and program coordinator.

Before beginning my job search, I'd like to try to gather as much information and advice as possible. May I take a few minutes of your time next week and have you share your experience with me? Perhaps you could suggest how I can improve my resume—which I am now drafting—and which organizations might be a good match for my qualifications. I will call your office on Monday to see if such a meeting can be arranged.

Your consideration is greatly appreciated, and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Brynn Jacobs

1845 Vienna Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 13792  
Today's Date

Ms. Juanita Fernandez Garcia, Director  
Cooperative Network of the Americas  
1962 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 11912

Dear Ms. Garcia:

John Sayres suggested that I write to you regarding my interest in the cooperative movement. He thought you would be a good person to provide career advice based on your wealth of XYZ experience and insight into the field.

For the last two years, I have worked with the Peace Corps as an organizer and advisor to several handicraft cooperatives in Senegal. This experience, combined with my education in business and several years' experience managing my own small business, has convinced me that entrepreneurial growth within the cooperative movement offers much to the developing world. Mr. Sayres mentioned you as a leading authority in this field.

Over the next few months, I will be conducting a job search, and I am certain your counsel would provide valuable insight and assist me in identifying opportunities. Would it be possible for us to meet briefly at your convenience? I will call your office next week to see if your schedule permits such a meeting.

Sincerely,

Haras Xuorg

## Cover Letter

The purpose of a cover letter is to motivate the reader to read your resume or federal application. Keep the letter short (definitely well under a page) and to the point. The cover letter should serve as a ‘hook’ to draw the reader in and entice them to look at your resume. Do not simply repeat everything on your resume. Some employers disregard cover letters, so do not run the risk of saying something important that is not included in your resume. Tailor your resume for each job you apply for and emphasize only a few key points in your cover letter.

Your Street Address  
Your City, State, Zip Code  
Today's Date

Name of the Manager or Human Resources Director  
Job Title of the Person  
Organization's Name  
Street Address or PO Box Number  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am writing to apply for the position of “X” as advertised in the June 1 edition of “Good Jobs R-Us” newspaper. Having four years’ experience as a “Y,” I am confident I would be a good match for your requirements.

Enclosed is my resume for your review. As you will see, my background includes “a,b, and c” [skills or experiences asked for in the ad]. My strengths are in the “x, y, and z” areas you need. [These are the “preferred” or “desired” items listed in the ad.]

I would welcome the opportunity for an interview at which time we can further discuss my skills and experiences related to this position, and how I can contribute to the continued success of “Organization’s Name.” You may reach me at [insert phone number] or by email at [insert email.] Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Your Telephone Number

## Cover Letters

555 Firebird Ave.  
Sacramento, CA 67342  
Today's Date

Ms. Roberta Waring  
Vice President  
Agrotech Marketing Corporation  
122 Haymarket Square  
Sacramento, CA 67340

Dear Ms. Waring:

Richard Hardy, director of research at Bristol Seed Company, informed me that you are looking for someone to develop the francophone African sales division of your company. Enclosed is my resume for your consideration.

During the past two years, I served as an agricultural extension agent with the Peace Corps in Togo where I promoted small business development, helping local artisans increase accounting practices and improve the marketability of their diverse products. I am fluent in French, familiar with the cultural diversity of West Africa, and highly knowledgeable about agricultural equipment. I have a B.S. in horticulture from the University of Michigan and proven sales experience prior to serving in the Peace Corps.

I would appreciate an opportunity to visit with you to further discuss my suitability for this position. Please contact me at xxx or by email at xxx to arrange an interview.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Peter Stewart

49 Old Home Place  
Heartland, IA 92352  
Today's Date

Dr. Elizabeth Waters  
Personnel Director  
Communicare, Inc.  
Boston, MA 41207

Dear Dr. Waters:

I am enclosing my resume in response to your announcement in the January 10, 2013 posting of RPCV Career Link for the research assistant position. Because of my related background and experiences in XYZ, I am well qualified for and most interested in this position.

I have a B.A. in journalism, with emphasis in writing and communication, and I just completed two years of duty with the Guatemalan Ministry of Education and the Peace Corps. This service not only provided me with the Spanish fluency you require, but also allowed me to sharpen my communication skills. Also, your agency's community focus and self-help philosophy closely parallel my own beliefs.

By bringing in my oral, planning, writing, and organizational skills, as well as my technical background and leadership experience, I feel I will be able to make a positive contribution to the future of Communicare. My proven commitment to performance and accountability, I am certain, would also be an asset to the position.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss with you how I might best meet your needs. Please contact me at xxx or by email at xxx to discuss the possibility of an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer Sellig

## Thank-You Letters

Write a simple thank-you letter after an information interview or job interview. Most people do not do this and miss another opportunity to show the interviewer how interested and professional they are. Many RPCVs have become good letter writers while overseas. Put these skills to use in your job search!

Your Street Address  
Your City, State, Zip Code  
Today's Date

Name of the Interviewer  
Job Title of the Interviewer  
Organization's Name  
Street Address or PO Box Number  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you so much for meeting with me today to discuss the "X" job opportunity. I enjoyed our conversation and found the information that you shared most helpful.

The "X" position sounds challenging. I think I could contribute to your organization (or department) because of the "A, B, and C" results I achieved in my last job as a "Y." After meeting with you, I am more enthusiastic than ever about working at (Organization's Name).

Thank you once again. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Your Telephone Number

## Thank you Letters (cont.)

### After Informational Interview

1492 Columbus Circle  
Ft. Worth, TX 77542  
Today's Date

Mr. Scott Dobbs, President  
Food for the World  
6160 Rice Avenue  
Dallas, TX 76530

Dear Mr. Dobbs:

Jan Winkle was right when she said you would be most helpful in advising me on a career in nutrition.

I so appreciate that you met with me. Your advice was most helpful, and I have incorporated your suggestions into my resume. As we discussed, I will send you a copy next week.

Again, thanks so much for your assistance. As you suggested, I will contact Robert Russell next week regarding career options.

Sincerely yours,

Rick Martin  
Phone Number

### After Job Interview

1066 Hastings Court  
Syracuse, NY 72205  
Today's Date

Dr. Alvin Z. Tolleson  
Personnel Department  
Myrtle Corporation  
17 Hatfield Drive  
Syracuse, NY 12291

Dear Dr. Tolleson:

Thank you for interviewing me yesterday for the management trainee position. I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about Myrtle Corporation. I was especially impressed with your progressive stance regarding XYZ issues.

The interview confirmed my initial positive impressions of Myrtle Corporation, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for you. My experience managing a small-business cooperative in the Dominican Republic and my training in communication would enable me to progress steadily through your training program and become a productive member of your management team.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need additional information, please feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

Al Garrett  
Phone Number



# 16 The Informational Interview and Networking

Did you know that only 15 to 20 percent of all jobs are announced? Most jobs are obtained through contacts and networking.

## Informational Interviewing vs. Networking

As a PCV, you established relationships with host country counterparts, Peace Corps staff, and PCV colleagues. You sought out those who could provide organizational, structural, or financial support. You purposely—and many times instinctively—cultivated relationships for job and personal survival in nearly unknown territory. **You successfully built a network.**

At some point, following initial contact or following up on a referral, you felt comfortable enough to contact a person you thought might be helpful in providing information regarding a particular project, interest, or personal need. Most likely, you didn't ask him or her to contribute money directly to your proposed projects, but you asked many questions about his or her work, skills, and ideas. You did this to identify the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your project or future projects. **You conducted informational interviews.**

As you search for a job, you may hear the terms networking and infor-

mational interviewing used regularly—as well as interchangeably. But they are not quite the same thing. The chart on the following page illustrates their differences as well as how these job-search strategies are related.

Be aware of your actions, reactions, and interactions. A contact should always be respected. How one shows respect is culturally based, so know your audience. Making plans to meet for a cup of coffee in some Peace Corps countries can mean for an hour or two, but in the United States it usually means 15 minutes. If, following an informational interview, the contact says to “stop by anytime,” the culture in many Peace Corps countries may allow you to do just that, but in the United States it's a pleasantry that needs to be interpreted with caution.

Study the chart on the next page to begin, or to continue building, a solid network—gather lots of information to help you make careful and meaningful career and job decisions.

## Networking

## Informational Interviewing

### WHY?

Only 15-20 percent of all jobs are posted publically. Many studies indicate the majority of jobs are obtained through contacts and networking.

Many people are not sure of what they want to do next or where they want to do it.

Use informational interviewing to:

- Gain a real-world picture of the jobs and occupational fields that interest you.
- Develop a data bank of information about the jobs and occupations that will assist you later in your job hunt.
- Get feedback on your resume.
- Most importantly, develop contacts to establish a network of professionals involved in your field.

### WHO?

Contact friends, parents, friends of parents, members of professional associations related to your interests, former co-workers, workers at current or future organizations of interest, people who are doing the job you want to do, college professors and alumni, neighbors, other RPCVs, Peace Corps staff, etc.

Try to arrange meetings with contacts you make through networking.

### WHAT?

Develop relationships with people who may be able to help you with your job search or in your career.

Gather information to get a clearer idea of the kind of job or career you want and/or where you want to work. This process helps you make well-informed job and career decisions and tap into the job market.

### WHEN?

Now and always. Maintain relationships with these contacts even after you are employed. Networking is not only important during your own job search. It is important to maintain these relationships, in a give and take manner, so you should think about ways you can help those in your network as well.

Be sure to limit the amount of time you're asking for—request 15 to 20 minutes (no more) at their convenience, to respect their time. Avoid asking a contact you do not know well to meet you before work, after work, or during lunch—unless he or she makes the suggestion.

### WHERE?

Maintain a network of contacts throughout your professional life: in meetings, conferences, conventions, and some social gatherings.

Meeting in a contact's office works best as it gives you an inside look into their organization and work environment. Indicate your willingness to come to their office if that is most convenient for them. If this isn't possible, ask him or her to meet you in a common meeting place, such as a coffee shop near his or her place of business.

## Networking

## Informational Interviewing

### HOW?

Various ways. Use online networking tools like LinkedIn to search and connect with people who are working in fields that you are interested in. Or you can go about it the old fashioned way and strike up brief conversations with people you may want to contact now or in the future. Exchange business cards or phone numbers and follow up as soon as possible to set up an appointment for a brief informational interview or, if employed, to discuss briefly issues of mutual career-related interest. If a contact refers you to somebody else, follow up with a phone call and be clear and specific as to the reasons you are calling.

Ask people in your network who are doing the kind of work you want to do to meet with you to learn more about their work. You may also want to meet with people who are working in the kind of organization that interests you. Arrive on time, professionally dressed, and prepared with a list of specific questions. Focus first on them, and their experiences, how long they've been in the industry, etc. Then move into asking any tips they might have for a professional such as yourself looking to get into the field. Do not ask for a job! This is a common mistake among jobseekers. You are meeting with your contact for information only. At the end of the interview, you may ask your contact if they know two or three other people in the field who might be as gracious as they have been in meeting with you briefly to provide further information and assist in expanding your network. Although you should bring a copy of your resume in case they request it or offer to review it for you, do not force it upon them or expect feedback. You may leave a copy of your resume for his or her information but consider following up with an electronic version for convenience in the event they hear of other opportunities. Follow up the same day with a thank-you note. (Handwritten on a note card is a nice touch and can go a long way in a job search.)

## **More on Informational Interviewing and Networking**

Informational interviews differ from traditional interviews in that you are not interviewing for a particular job but rather, are gathering information that will help you decide if what you think you want to do is indeed what you want. Combined with the research methods described in previous chapters, informational interviewing provides the data needed to help you make informed decisions. It also can help you form a firm base from which to launch your job search and, if done correctly, can be instrumental in helping you expand your network which is another vital part of the job search process.

### **Who Do You Interview?**

You can interview anyone who is involved in an occupational field or organization of interest to you. As you get a clearer idea of the kind of job you want, you should interview both the people who hold the jobs you're interested in and supervisors. The people who are actually doing the job you think you might want to do can give you a realistic idea of what that job involves and specific information about the skills needed. They may provide inside information about their organization, such as what jobs might be available and who you should get to know. Supervisors can offer an overview of their organization, give information about qualifications for specific jobs, advise about other kinds of work in the organization or field of interest, and make referrals.

College professors in a related academic field can often provide useful information, including a general

overview of the field and referrals.

Take advantage of your in-country contacts from Peace Corps. There are probably many persons working for the U.S. embassy or private companies who would be happy to answer your career-related questions. Ask your overseas contacts for referrals to appropriate professionals back in the United States. PCVs can often interview for information while overseas via phone, Skype or other technology.

Once home, you can network through a variety of ways including the National Peace Corps Association, your local RPCV group, or your country-of-service group. Some of these organizations have mentorship programs. If you have access to the Internet, you may be able to network electronically with some of these groups. In addition, friends, colleagues, and former professors can be valuable resources for informational interviewing.

### **How Do You Set Up an Informational Interview?**

The easiest and best way to set up a formal informational interview is through a referral. Your family, friends, former employers, RPCVs, Peace Corps staff, college alumni, and contacts from social organizations or religious groups are all resources that can refer you to individuals in your chosen career field. Don't feel that you're imposing on your friends. It's perfectly acceptable to ask for an introduction to someone you can talk to about employment opportunities. Your friends may ask the same of you one day.

If you can't get a personal referral to someone or to an organi-

zation you are interested in, try calling to make a brief appointment. A receptionist may think you want to apply for a job and may refer you to the personnel department, so be sure to emphasize that you want only to talk with someone for informational purposes. When you do make contact, be honest and communicate what you want. For instance, “I’m interested in the work you’re doing and would like to talk to you about it” will usually elicit a positive response—and a time for at least a brief informational interview.

Asking for a stranger’s time can be difficult. One RPCV suggested that a caller requesting an informational interview without a referral should try to cover four points before the person being called can say no:

1. Your name and why you chose him or her to interview;
2. What kind of information you are seeking;
3. Something complimentary about the person that is skill- or experience-based; and
4. A request for a 15- to 20-minute meeting at his or her convenience.

Your opening line might go something like this, without pauses: “My name is Jane Doe and I am calling because I am considering a career change to (career field). I am seeking information about (the organization) and I have heard that you (are a well-informed, would be the most helpful, are the most knowledgeable, etc.) person in (his or her work setting). May I have 20 minutes of your time next week at your convenience to seek some advice?”

Remember, you are not asking for a job, but for information about a field you are interested in and for which you think you might be qualified.

### **How Do You Conduct the Informational Interview?**

You are responsible for conducting the informational interview. You must know what information you are seeking and what kinds of questions to ask. Obviously, this calls for preparation and thought.

You want to first learn what a person does in his or her job, how he or she feels about the work and the organization, and what he or she likes and dislikes about the job. You also need to eventually direct the discussion to your skills, interests, and job needs. If you let the other person spend the entire interview talking about his or her job, you will not get information about other job options, other departments or organizations to investigate, ways to get around job-qualification barriers, and other referrals. But starting by asking the person about themselves and their organization, later leading into any advice they have for a professional such as yourself will help ensure a successful experience.

### **How to Get Referrals**

You could ask: “If you were in my position, who are the three people and organizations YOU would connect with?” After asking this question, follow up by asking for their contact information or whether they might be willing to forward your information on to that contact. Or, “Can you think of other departments or organizations that might be of interest to me, given my background?” If the answer is yes, ask if there is a specific person to whom he or she could refer you. Ask if you may use his or her name when you make contact. If you follow all the leads you get through this method,

your network of contacts will expand exponentially.

After the interview, write a thank-you letter. Include some specific information that was especially helpful to you, or mention one suggestion that you are planning to follow up on. Stay in contact, by phone or pre-arranged visits, every three to four weeks. Not staying in contact with these persons is one of the biggest mistakes job seekers make. After all, these professionals will have a vested interest in seeing you succeed as they have given you advice and such so your failure might be interpreted as a reflection on them.

### **How Will This Lead to a Job?**

At this point, you may be saying “Okay, I’ll talk to all the experts in my field, but I want more than just information; I want a job!” The overwhelming majority of jobs are found by people who have created a strong network of contacts.

Everyone you speak to can give you the names of other people from whom you can get more information, more leads, and even job interviews. Remember, you are speaking to the people who are working in your chosen field; they (or their friends and colleagues) are the ones who will eventually be doing the hiring.

As you become more sure about and gain clarity on what you want to do and where you want to work, you should begin asking more direct kinds of questions in your informational interviews. Examples are: “Where can I find out about specific openings at this time within your organization or similar organizations?” or, “Can you think of any of your colleagues, internal and external, whom I might contact as I pursue possible employment

opportunities?” The person you are interviewing may ask for a copy of your resume to give to a friend. You may provide them with a hard copy but definitely send an email version which can be transmitted to other contacts much easier and quicker.

### **What About the More Traditional Job-Hunting Methods?**

Don’t totally discount the more traditional job-hunting techniques. If your college or university has a placement service, sending a resume to keep on file just might lead to a job offer. You also may see the job that’s perfect for you announced in a want ad. The important point to remember is not to become one of the many Americans who rely solely upon these traditional job-search methods. The information from these sources can help with your informational interviewing. Once you decide what career you want to pursue, sit down with a pile of old want-ads and start contacting the companies that have announced positions similar to the one you are seeking. Call the director of your college placement service and set up an informational interview.

## 27 Possible Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview

1. In general, what credentials (degrees, licenses, majors, etc.) are required in your line of work?
2. How did you get into this field?
3. Why did you choose it?
4. What do you find most and least rewarding about this field?
5. What kinds of employers generally hire people in this line of work?
6. What is a typical career path?
7. What is the future outlook in this field?
8. Do companies in this field tend to promote from within? What is the turnover rate like?
9. What would you do differently, if you could begin your career search again?
10. What other jobs did you have before this one?
11. What is a typical day and week like?
12. What skills and abilities are needed to be successful in this field?
13. What other career areas are related to this job?
14. What are the entry-, mid-, and senior-level salaries?
15. What is the financial potential?
16. Are there opportunities to travel in this field or in your organization?
17. How much variety is involved on the job?
18. Are there peak hiring seasons?
19. What advantages and disadvantages are there for liberal arts graduates who want to enter this field?
20. What is the best way to conduct a job search in this field?
21. How do you keep on top of the trends and changes in your field?
22. Do you recommend any relevant associations or organizations with which I should affiliate?
23. May I keep in touch with you to let you know how my job search is going?
24. Do you know anybody else who might be willing to speak to me about this topic?
25. Would you be willing to give me feedback on my resume?
26. If you were in my shoes and doing a job search in this field, who are the three people you would definitely connect with to learn more about opportunities? [Follow up with “Would you by chance have their contact info and if so, might you be willing to connect me with them for possible follow up?”]
27. What are the most important challenges facing your department/industry at present?

## Networking

Since well over 50 percent of jobs are attained through networking, you should spend at least half your job-search time doing just that. The other half should be spent identifying positions through other means.

Many people are reluctant to do networking because they feel networking is schmoozing and they want to get a job because of ‘what they know, not who they know’. Rest assured, networking, when done properly, is not at all schmoozing, nor is it difficult. It’s simply spreading your alliance of people who know who you are and what skill set you have to offer. Networking is especially important in today’s world where a large majority of jobs are never even formally advertised anywhere! If you don’t network, you are missing out on an abundance of job opportunities and perhaps setting yourself up for a much longer and more frustrating job search.

Networking can take place in a variety of settings, both formal and informal. Attending a professional happy hour or conference can provide excellent networking opportunities, but so can going to a dinner party or any other event where you interact with new people! Here in the States, one of the favorite first (or second) questions asked in any social environment is ‘So, what do you do?’ While people in the job search may hate this question as they feel uncomfortable disclosing that they’re unemployed or looking for a job, this is actually the best question for any job seeker looking to network as it provides the perfect segue into your ‘elevator pitch’ or verbal resume, allowing you to concisely state that you’re recently returned from Peace Corps (a great

conversation starter) and you are looking to explore opportunities in the [\_\_\_\_\_] field. You never know who might know someone from your field of interest and/or have a contact with whom you might be able to do an informational interview to gather more insight and even job leads.



# 17 The Job Interview

A job interview is a showcase for presenting your talents. During the interview, an employer judges your qualifications, appearance, and general fitness for the job. The employer wants to know if you can do the job, if you will stay for a reasonable period of time, and if you will “fit in” (be productive and work well with the rest of the staff). The interview is your opportunity to convince the employer that you can make a significant contribution. Equally important, the interview gives you a chance to appraise the job and the employer. It enables you to decide if the job meets your career needs and interests and whether the employer fits your requirements.

## Preparing for the Interview

### Know Yourself

- To prepare for the interview, find out as much as possible about the job, the organization, and the ways your own experiences and interests relate to the job’s requirements.
  - Analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Make a list of both as a pre-interview exercise and prepare to address them in the interview.
  - Avoid discussing weaknesses, but if you are directly asked, pick an unrelated weakness, couch it in the past and explain what you’ve done to address/work towards overcoming that weakness or challenge. For example, an interviewee might say he or she didn’t know how to use a particular computer program, such as Access, in his or her last job, but has since taken classes or done some self-tutorial to expand his or her comfort with the program. Whatever you do, do NOT use the ‘perfectionist’ weakness, even if it is truly a weakness of yours as too many before you have overused that one to the point of exhaustion.
- Review the record of work experience and education you have submitted to the organization on your resume or job application. Be ready to talk about the skills you have acquired and how they relate to this job.
  - List the three most important or difficult problems you have solved on the job as a Peace Corps Volunteer, in other jobs (or at school, home, or as a community volunteer), individually or as a team member. Employers prefer people who can solve problems and achieve results. Briefly describe your actions that overcame the problems. Describe the results in numbers, percentages, dollars, or in the amount of time you saved. For example, a salesperson might say he or she called on five new customers and closed sales averaging \$25,000 per week. An RPCV might say he or she conducted one-day health or cooperative extension workshops for groups of 30 to 100 villagers every two

months. Another RPCV might describe how he or she wrote two proposals and secured 100 percent of the necessary funding for a project.

- Think through your career objectives. How would this job contribute to your overall aspirations?
- Review your values. Would your personal values conflict in any way with those of the organization?
- Identify people who could serve as references, and have their names and addresses with you. Make sure they will offer positive recommendations.
- If you have been fired from a job, be prepared to state the reasons. Have something positive to say about that job and never bad-mouth a former employer. Focus on what you learned from the experience and/or how you've grown or changed as a result.
- Know your basic salary requirements. Be prepared to negotiate, but do not accept a salary offer that does not meet your minimal needs. Do not discuss salary in the first interview unless specifically asked by the employer and, even then, be somewhat vague if you do not know the projected salary so as not to over or under price yourself. You might respond to the salary requirements question with something to the effect of "I'm looking for a salary that is commensurate with my [educational background] and [XYZ] experiences. I'd be happy to provide more details upon learning the projected salary range for the position."

## Know the Organization

- Research the agency or company. Find out as much information as possible (using LinkedIn or other online networking sites) about them and the particular position for which you are applying.
- Read literature from the organization, such as annual reports and brochures.
- Check the Internet, the chamber of commerce, and the Better Business Bureau for in-depth information about the agency or company.
- Read the job description carefully. Know the duties and qualifications, and prepare to articulate how your experience matches the organization's needs.
- Contact someone who has the same job in another organization to find out how they view the position.

## Putting It All Together

- Carefully analyze all the information you now have about yourself and the agency or company. Be able to state clearly how your skills, experience, education, and values dovetail into the needs and expectations of the organization.
- List four or five questions about the job or organization to ask the interviewer. It is a good idea to include a few extra questions in case they answer some during the interview itself, but do not bombard them with too many questions. Remember, an interview is a two-way street. The interviewer gets to ask you questions and

make a decision about offering you a job. You also get to ask questions and possibly make a decision about accepting or rejecting an offer. The best time to ask questions is before you start the job!

- Confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. Being on time is very important. Don't be late; yet arriving too early could give the impression of over anxiety or desperation. Plan to arrive 15 minutes early so you will have time to relax and rehearse your selling points while waiting. If necessary, make a practice run to the location to ensure you don't get lost the day of your interview.
- Richard Bolles, author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, says that people who have had highly successful interviews typically spend 50 percent of the interview talking about themselves and their background and 50 percent of the interview talking about what they can offer the organization.
- Prepare your interview outfit. Dress for success. For most hourly or temporary clerical jobs, it is appropriate to wear clean and ironed casual slacks along with a sport shirt and tie or a skirt and blouse or dress. For salaried, administrative, technical, management trainee, supervisory, or managerial positions, wear a suit and tie, dress or suit, as appropriate. Wearing ethnic attire from your country of service or from a place you visited, jeans, running shoes, sandals, very short or floor-length skirts or dresses, large or clanking jewelry, and loud ties to an interview are not

appropriate as they may send a negative message or distract the interviewer. You should always look professional and business-like, even if interviewing at an employer with a 'casual dress' policy.

### Interview Questions

Returned Volunteer Services strongly recommends that you spend time developing answers to the following frequently asked interview questions. Verbalize the answers or, even better, role-play your responses with a friend acting as an employer. Even if you are already a good speaker, the practice will help you project a knowledgeable and confident image.

A mock interview tape may seem dramatic, but watching yourself in a practice interview may be helpful. You might be both pleased and shocked with how you come across.

The first question is almost always a variation of 'Tell me about yourself/your experience and why you're interested in this job.' Be sure to craft a well thought out response that provides a brief overview of your background and skills as related to this position. Try to end your response by sharing why you're interested in this particular position (i.e. '...and that's why I'm so interested in this opportunity. It seems a perfect fit given my proven commitment to [\_\_\_\_] and my 2 years of related field experience...")

Other frequently asked questions generally fall into the following categories.

### Career goals

- \_ What are your short-term ob-

jectives? Long-term?

- What are you looking for in a job?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- How much money do you expect to be earning in five years? Ten years?
- How do you describe success for you?
- Why have you chosen to enter this field?

#### Qualifications

- What can you do for us that someone else cannot?
- What are your three most important accomplishments?
- Are you creative? Analytical? Are you a good manager? Give examples.
- What qualifications do you have that will make you a success in this field?
- How have your education and training prepared you for this position?
- How has your experience in the Peace Corps prepared you for this job?

#### Past work experience

- Why did you join the Peace Corps?
- Tell me about your job in the Peace Corps. What did you like most about it? Least?
- What did you like most about a previous job? Least?
- What was your favorite job? Why?

#### Knowledge of the organization

- What do you know about our organization?
- How did you learn about us?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- How will you make the transition from the Peace Corps to working

here?

#### Interpersonal style

- Tell me about preferred working style?
- Describe a situation in which your work was criticized. How did you handle it?
- What kind of people rub you the wrong way?
- How have you dealt with difficult customers? Co-workers? Bosses?

#### Motivation

- What interests you most about this job? Least?
- What other kinds of jobs are you considering? With which organizations?
- How long do you think you would stay in this job?
- How does this job fit in with your career plans?

#### Work style

- How have you worked under pressure? Under deadlines? Alone? With others?
- How do you feel about routine work? Regular hours?
- How have you taken criticism without feeling upset?
- What have you done that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- What kind of supervisor do you prefer?

**Avoid answering questions about salary expectations. If asked, avoid locking yourself in to a specific dollar amount by remaining somewhat vague, or say you would prefer to defer that question until learning more about the complete benefit package.**

## Interview Tips

### Presenting Yourself at the Interview

- Give the interviewer a firm handshake at the start of the interview and smile.
- Look the interviewer in the eye, or at the bridge of his or her nose, as you begin your answers. But don't feel that you have to stare at the person. Try doing three - five second 'eye clasps' before breaking eye contact (only very briefly) before looking back. If addressing a panel, give the person who asked the question the most eye contact, but be sure to glance occasionally at the other panelists as well.
- Maintain a positive attitude and speak with enthusiasm.
- Answer all questions accurately and to the point. Preface your responses to help keep you and the interviewer on point, and do not ramble.
- Tell the interviewer why you want to work for his or her organization and what you can contribute to the success of the specific department.
- Make only positive or neutral comments about any of your past employers, jobs, bosses, schools, or teachers. An interview is not the time to vent grievances. If you make any negative comments, a hiring manager might worry about what you may say about him or her in the future.
- The interviewer might question what you've said. He or she really wants to understand you. Don't back down on your beliefs and statements. Consistency is important.
- Keep your conversation to job-related information; don't phi-

losophize or tell your favorite stories about your Peace Corps experience, unless they illustrate something relevant to the interview.

- Discuss the organization's services or products positively.
- Wait for the interviewer to bring up the subject of salary and benefits. Wait for a job offer before negotiating pay or asking questions about it.
- Be prepared to describe your plans (1, 5, 10 years from now) and say that you hope to be in "X" job at that organization.

### Interviewing the Employer

Have some thoughtful questions ready for when the interviewer asks if you have any. A lack of questions may indicate that you are unprepared or uninterested; too many questions might be an annoyance. Consider working in a question based on the research you've done in preparation for the interview, and reference that research in the question itself (e.g. 'In reviewing your website, I noticed reference to the XZY project, Can you tell me more about...') Be sure to respond to the questions, if appropriate, rather than simply diving in to the next question. Examples of good questions include:

- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- What is your projected time frame for filling this position?
- What's the organizational culture like in this department/agency?
- Do you have a training program?
- What specific responsibilities are trainees given?
- What percentage of your man-

agement is a product of your training program? Holds a graduate degree?

- What are the promotional possibilities within your firm?
- Does your company have any additional benefits, such as cost-of-living adjustment, group life and medical insurance, or company-paid retirement plan? (Typically, this should be asked only after a second interview.)
- How does your company's size and growth compare with others in the industry?
- What specific issues or challenges are facing the department right now that I could help with?
- What is your company doing with regard to public service?
- How does your employee turnover rate compare with that of other companies?
- Why did the last person holding this position leave?
- How would you describe your management style?
- Tell the interviewer that you want the job. End the interview by saying something like, "I think I am a good fit for this position with my skills and my values. I hope you agree. When might I expect to hear from you?"
- Smile and thank the interviewer for his or her time.

#### **After the Interview**

Send the interviewer a brief thank-you note. Repeat an important point you made in the interview about what you think you could offer this company. Stress that you are very interested in the job and hope to hear from the organization soon.

If you haven't heard anything in a week or so, call to find out what the employer's decision was. In the pri-

vate or nonprofit sectors, if you call more than once or twice, the employer might feel you are a nuisance, and that will hurt your chances. For jobs in the federal government, it pays to be persistent. Do not accept a job that you feel is not right for you; take time to think it over.

# 18 Salary Negotiation

Congratulations! The job is yours. It's the job you want—but is it the salary you deserve?

Though you may not feel comfortable discussing salary with a potential employer, or think that salaries are predetermined, the truth is, most salaries are negotiable—even those that don't seem negotiable, such as those of teachers and public-sector jobs.

By adhering to the principles discussed in this chapter, you'll be able to negotiate salary with greater confidence and may well get the salary you deserve.

## Salary Negotiation in the Private Sector

Jobseekers typically spend many months searching for a job, but little time researching and calculating their market value—or determining how and when to present such information to a potential employer. If you neglect these important activities, you'll pay the consequences—literally.

Successful salary negotiation in the private sector embraces five principles: prepare through research, display confidence, recognize your and your employer's needs, calculate timing, and communicate and evaluate. These principles are based on the concept that your starting salary and future increases will be determined by your perceived or demonstrated value to an organization.

### Prepare Through Research

Don't expect an employer to meet your demands just because you think you deserve a higher salary. It's up

to you to justify why you deserve it. To do this, you'll need to spend time researching your market value. Such information can be found online and via trade journals, trade associations, professionals in the field, career counselors and consultants, and various periodic reference manuals available in your local library or career resource center. Knowing the current salary range for the kind of job you are seeking will give you more leverage with which to negotiate. There are a variety of free 'salary calculators' available online, including [www.salarycalculator.com](http://www.salarycalculator.com) and [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com), which provide insight on salary levels by sector and region.

From your research, you also should determine whether the employer will be in a negotiating position. Then consider whether it will be the employer's role to discuss salary or that of a higher authority—or someone in the personnel department.

### Display Confidence

Confidence is a necessary skill for any self-directed activity. But it is crucial for an interview—and for salary negotiation. By knowing yourself, and what you want and what you deserve, you'll be in a better position to display confidence during salary negotiation. How will you know? Research. Research. Research.

### Recognize Your and Your Employer's Needs

The needs of the employer are

as important to understand as your own. Recognizing these needs and calculating them into your negotiation strategy will help you gain empathy, realism, and negotiating power.

To determine your financial needs, make a list of your basic monthly expenses. Carefully calculate how much money you need to cover your rent or mortgage, car expenses, utilities, student loans, food, child care, credit cards, and incidentals. This becomes your bottom line for any salary. Next, determine how much salary you think you deserve. To do this, you should list your skill level, salary history (particularly in related work), work history, educational background, and other areas that make you marketable to an employer (such as language abilities and computer skills). Ask yourself: What salary am I worth? What salary would I need to live the lifestyle I want?

The needs of the employer are equally important. It helps to understand the employer's interests and what he or she hopes to accomplish by filling the position. Will the employee help the organization save money? Generate revenue? Provide better customer service? Solve a serious problem? Try to determine the employer's perception of you. Initially, the employer values the open position much more than the interviewee. It is up to you to show that your value is equal to—or exceeds—the value the employer places on the position.

Thoughtful probing during the interview will help you determine the employer's valuation of the job. Self-confidence and good communication will help you illustrate your value to the position and to the organization.

### **Timing Is Everything**

As a rule, salary should never be discussed before the employer makes a formal offer. If you divulge your salary expectations too early, you risk being screened out. The employer may consider your desired salary unreasonably high for the position or too low, indicating that you don't understand the workload, the company, or your own qualifications. It's a difficult situation.

During an interview, if the employer asks you about salary, try to avoid the topic with a sincere response such as: "I am certain you'll offer me the best salary based on my value to your organization."

However, it may not always be possible to avoid discussing salary. So be prepared to discuss your salary interests and expectations in terms of salary range as opposed to one figure. Try not to finalize your discussion on salary until you know that they are interested in hiring you and that you want the job. When asked about salary requirements, consider replying with something to the effect of "I'm looking for a salary that is commensurate with my X years of [fill in type of related experience] and my educational background which includes an MBA [or whatever advanced degree you hold]. I'm happy to provide more details upon learning the projected range for this position."

A job offer opens the line for salary discussion and possible negotiation. You have been selected above the other candidates, so you are in a position to negotiate. This is the time to evaluate the situation and communicate your interest, qualifications, value, and fee for services.



### Communication and Evaluation

In most cases, salary discussion should be initiated by the employer. Try to get him or her to mention salary first. Once the employer opens the discussion, you can address the issue based on your research. You should be assertive, but thoughtful. Say something like: “From my research, I’ve determined that a person with my qualifications in a position similar to this is paid from \$40,000 to \$45,000 a year. What can you do in that range?”

Also check into the benefits offered by the organization, and consider them when negotiating salary. If an employer cannot meet your salary request, perhaps he or she can increase the compensation package. Perks can sometimes far outweigh an extra \$5,000 a year in salary. Benefits could include computer training, continuing education, health and life insurance, contributions to retirement accounts, an expense account, profit sharing, travel, professional and club memberships, vacation, relocation expenses, and bonuses for high performance.

Before accepting any job, take time to re-evaluate the situation, even if the employer has met your requests. Most employers will allow you time to think about the offer before giving them an answer. After all negotiating is done, state your enthusiasm for the job, such as, “I’m very excited about this opportunity. May I take a little time to think about everything we’ve discussed? Can I get back to you tomorrow (or Friday)?” It’s fine to ask for a few business days to consider an offer.

### Salary Negotiation in the Public Sector

When it comes to salary negotiation in the public sector, careful research and thorough preparation can improve your chances of obtaining a salary level close to what you think your knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience warrant. The government determines salary with charts and scales based on qualifications and experience, so public-sector salaries may appear locked and inflexible. But you may still be able to negotiate salary—it will just be more difficult.

What can you do? Let’s look at teachers’ salaries, for example. If you taught as a Peace Corps Volunteer, supply the personnel office with a copy of your description of service (DOS), which documents your training hours as well as your teaching hours. Some school districts will give credit for your Peace Corps teaching time. This can affect your salary. Make sure you have been credited for all academic work, including a master’s degree or a master’s degree that required 30 credit hours more than the usual teacher’s master’s degree. Further, you may be able to earn more by becoming a student council advisor, a drama coach, or an after-school activities supervisor. In most cases, teachers become involved in many of these activities anyway, so offering up front to take on the added responsibilities could possibly increase your compensation package.

Dealing with the personnel office can sometimes be the most intimidating part of the process. The amount you think your experience merits and the amount the personnel office will offer can be two differ-

ent figures. Remember that the public sector applies more of an objective approach to salary determination than the private sector.

The major criteria that determine salary in the federal system include relevant experience; education; level at which the position was advertised; knowledge, skills, and abilities specific to the position; and salary history.

Once you understand the federal pay scale and how it works with the established criteria, you can assess your grade level. It is equally important to understand the manager's limitations in this process. Many cannot discuss salaries with potential employees, and they will inform you that these decisions are made by the personnel office.

If you can prove you meet the minimum qualifications for a particular grade level, you then have a stronger argument with which to negotiate for that grade. If your negotiation for a higher grade is not successful, you might try to negotiate for a higher salary step within the lower grade. One way to justify a step increase is by presenting a written competing job offer from the private sector if you have another offer. The job for which you were given the offer should reflect similar responsibilities and qualifications.

Once you are part of the federal system, step increases are generally based on performance and can be granted annually.

When employers need to fill a position immediately, RPCVs may have a bargaining chip. One RPCV said, "When my employer said he needed me to start in two weeks, I knew I had a bargaining point. I let the manager, instead of the personnel office, know

what salary I needed and why I thought I deserved it. He then went to bat for me at the personnel office because my request was justified, he wanted me, and he needed me right away."

Providing competing job offers, or negotiating a job offer based on a manager's needs, may work in some situations, but proving your value to an employer begins with a detailed explanation of your work history. Describe your experience, salary history, and number of hours a week worked accurately and completely on your public-sector resume and/or application.

Preparation is critical! Whether negotiating in the private sector or public sector, thorough preparation will give you the facts, skills, and confidence necessary to successfully negotiate the salary you deserve.

### **Salary History Requests**

RPCVs often ask Returned Volunteer Services for advice regarding salary history requests from prospective employers. Usually a short narrative within your cover letter is all that is needed for a salary history. Applicants sometimes ignore these requests because they may be uncomfortable disclosing how little they've made in the past. This is a mistake as not replying with requested information gives the appearance of you not following directions. Employers use salary history as one component (along with knowledge, skills, and abilities) to determine at what level the applicant fits in the organization.

Something like: "As a Peace Corps Volunteer, my salary was an allowance that permitted me to live as the people of my village in (your country of service) lived, approxi-

mately “X” U.S. dollars a month. In my position as (title) at (organization where you last worked before the Peace Corps), my final salary was “X” a year plus (whatever benefits you had).”

Don’t be intimidated by a salary history request. RPCVs with only PCV work are in a good position to state salary history; given that you were earning so little as a Volunteer, a prospective employer cannot have preconceived notions about your qualifications based only on past salary. A final note: Employers will double-check the information you provide. Be certain to be accurate.

# 19

## Federal Employment, Noncompetitive Eligibility, and the Federal Application Process

The federal government is the largest employer in the United States and one of the largest in the world. It employs people in hundreds of occupations and in nearly every field. Contrary to public opinion, most federal job opportunities are actually found outside the Washington, D.C., area. And though the federal employment hiring system is often complicated and confusing, efforts to simplify and speed up the process have been made.

The first section in this chapter provides basic information about employment with the federal government. The second section explains noncompetitive eligibility and what specific benefits are awarded to returned Peace Corps Volunteers. The third section discusses how to apply for federal positions.

### 1. Seeking Employment With the Federal Government

While entire books have been written about how to seek federal employment, this section offers RPCV-specific advice only.

#### What is a GS level? Where do I rank?

Most federal white-collar positions fall under the auspices of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and are known as general schedule (GS) positions. All GS positions are classified according to a nu-

merical career series, and each job within the series is assigned a grade to reflect the level of duties and responsibilities. Grades range from GS-1 to GS-15; the higher numbers reflect higher-level positions with commensurate salaries.

Peace Corps positions are designated as foreign personnel (FP) rather than general schedule. Grades of FP positions are derived from the same standards as GS positions. However, contrary to the GS scale, the lower numbers in the FP system reflect higher-level positions, and therefore, higher salaries.

Most recently returned Volunteers qualify for positions at the GS-7 or above levels, depending on the amount of their relevant experience and education level. Generally, the minimum qualifications for each level are as follows:

**GS-5 (FP-9):** Three years of general experience that provided basic knowledge of the principles of organization, management, and administration or any bachelor's degree.

**GS-7 (FP-7):** A year of experience related to the position or a bachelor's degree with superior academic achievement or one year of related graduate study. The Peace Corps is an excepted service agency and does not apply the provision for

Getting a job with the federal government can be a lengthy process. If you plan for this ahead of time, you can avoid becoming discouraged.

superior academic achievement.

**GS-9 (FP-5):** A year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-7 level or a related master's degree or two years of graduate study.

Keep in mind that the hiring process is market driven and that a particular job may require more than the minimum qualifications. RPCVs with a college degree and two years of service as a Volunteer are usually hired at the GS-7 level.

#### **How can I determine where my experiences and interests fit?**

The following resources can help you determine the best fit for your experiences and interests.

- *U.S. Federal Government Handbook* provides general information about all government agencies.
- *Federal Yellow Book* lists the major employers and divisions of every agency.
- *USA.gov* is the U.S. government's official Web portal. It is a gateway to government information and includes an agency index and a job-search function.
- *Office of Personnel Management* is the federal government's human resource agency. It provides information and details about the diverse federal workforce, including federal forms, news, human resources tools, publications, products, and services. The website is [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov).

From these four resources, make a list of the agencies most appealing to

you based on your interests, experience, and knowledge. Then make another list of the most appealing subdivisions. For example, at the U.S. Department of Commerce, you might be interested in the International Trade Administration (ITA), but not in the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Further, within the ITA, you might be more interested in trade development than in import administration. Use this method to devise a list of offices where you might like to work.

Once you have an idea where you want to work, your next step is to gather as much information as you can about the agencies you have identified. Search the Internet for agency websites and related materials. Call or email for publications about the office or agency. Personnel offices, libraries, and public information offices are other resources for printed materials.

For RPCVs with noncompetitive eligibility (NCE), Returned Volunteer Services suggests that once you have determined the agencies and job titles of greatest interest to you, make appointments with people in these agencies and divisions, and inform them of your special hiring status. (See the section in this chapter about NCE and visit [www.peacecorps.gov/nce](http://www.peacecorps.gov/nce) for more information.)

### **How do I determine where there are job vacancies?**

This is an excellent question for an informational interview. But the most comprehensive and up-to-date resource for federal job listings is the Office of Personnel Management, which has an online job information center. This website contains a list of current federal job openings, a general information page, and an application page. The website address is [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov).

### **What is an SF-50, and do I have one? Do I have a performance appraisal from the Peace Corps that I can use in the federal hiring process?**

Federal employers sometimes ask RPCV applicants for a federal personnel form called an SF-50 (Notification of Personnel Action). Since Peace Corps Volunteers are not federal employees, they do not receive SF-50s.

The description of service (DOS), which describes your Peace Corps work, is an account of your service. For RPCVs, your DOS is your proof of NCE but it does not evaluate your work. Most federal job applications ask for a performance appraisal from applicants who worked at a federal agency. A letter of recommendation can be used in lieu of a performance appraisal. It may be difficult to obtain a letter or recommendation if you wait too long, so request it from an overseas Peace Corps staff member familiar with your work before you leave or shortly after you return from overseas. Be sure to keep in touch with such references and request their non-work email as well in the event they change jobs.

### **How important are informational interviews and networking?**

Many studies show how important networking can be in the job search. It is estimated that 75 percent of the employees hired in the United States each year are hired through networking or contacts. Although the government hiring process focuses more on the applicant's qualifications, networking is still extremely important to even get into that stack of candidates to be considered further. One of the biggest mistakes that RPCVs make is that they expect employers to hire them simply because of their Peace Corps experience or their noncompetitive eligibility.

Begin your federal job search by conducting a few informational interviews to ensure that your field choice is what you think it is. Be prepared for these informational interviews so that you can maximize the opportunity to gain valuable information and advice.

Ask the people you interview if they can refer you to others in the field who might have information on employment opportunities. Getting a job with the federal government can be a lengthy process. If you plan for this ahead of time, you won't become as discouraged. Incidentally, a good way to begin making contacts is to join an RPCV group. Many of the job postings in RPCV Career Link ([www.peacecorps.gov/rpcvcareerlink](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcvcareerlink)) come from RPCVs who are looking to hire other RPCVs.

Noncompetitive eligibility is not a guarantee of a job. An agency is not required to hire a noncompetitive-eligible RPCV. You must always meet and, more often than not, exceed the minimum qualifications for a position.

## 2. Noncompetitive Eligibility (NCE)

Most returned Peace Corps Volunteers have an advantage over the general public when searching for a government job: noncompetitive eligibility.

### What is noncompetitive eligibility?

Noncompetitive eligibility is a special mechanism through which RPCVs can be appointed to federal positions without competing with the general public. RPCVs with noncompetitive eligibility may find that, at some agencies, their applications will not be rated by a panel prior to being invited to interview.

Federal agencies sometimes seek out noncompetitive RPCVs for employment. The primary advantage to the agency is the speed with which the candidate is hired. Peace Corps itself has a special program that allows RPCVs with NCE to be considered for multiple opportunities through one easy application. For more information, visit [www.peacecorps.gov/nce](http://www.peacecorps.gov/nce) and click on the “Peace Corps RPCV Noncompetitive Eligibility Program” link where you can apply to have your name and resume added to a special NCE roster for future consideration. You must update your information every three months to remain active on the roster.

Noncompetitive eligibility is granted to RPCVs for one year following the successful completion of their planned tour of duty.

To get more information on noncompetitive eligibility, be sure to check out the NCE one-stop-shop at [www.peacecorps.gov/nce](http://www.peacecorps.gov/nce).

### Can noncompetitive eligibility be extended?

Yes, NCE can be extended by the

hiring agency for up to two additional years (which would equal a maximum of three years from your close of service date) for three reasons. They are:

1. If you enter the military after Peace Corps service.
2. If you study at a recognized institution of higher learning as a full-time student.
3. If you engage in another activity that the hiring agency thinks warrants an extension. The Federal Personnel Manual states: “Generally, work experience which is pertinent to the position being filled, and which can be expected to enhance the candidate’s performance and value to the agency, could be an appropriate basis for extension. Extensions should not be granted routinely, but should be reserved for situations in which the activity has truly enhanced the RPCV’s value to the agency.”

### Can noncompetitive eligibility be “used up” during the 12-month period?

The general answer to this question is “no.” You can use your noncompetitive eligibility more than once during the period of eligibility if the hiring agency permits you to do so.

### How do you prove noncompetitive eligibility?

Noncompetitive eligibility is officially granted through your description of service (DOS) and is proven by attaching a copy of it when applying for a federal job. The DOS will reference Executive Order 11103, which is the presidential directive that established noncompetitive eligibility. If you

#### Extensions:

Neither the Peace Corps nor OPM can extend your NCE. The hiring agency makes this decision. There is no form or document available to support a claim for extension. It is up to you to request an extension from the hiring agency. Attach a justification for the extension by explaining your situation and referring to the extension rules listed on these pages.

have misplaced your original DOS, the Peace Corps will send you a copy. Email Volunteer Financial Operations at [certifications@peacecorps.gov](mailto:certifications@peacecorps.gov) for a copy.

Many federal personnel staff and other employees are not familiar with noncompetitive eligibility. You should refer them to the text of Executive Order 11103, “Providing for the Appointment of Former Peace Corps Volunteers to the Civilian Career Services.” See the end of this chapter for a letter to federal employers about NCE. Please note: An area that sometimes causes confusion is the distinction between NCE granted to a Peace Corps Volunteer and NCE granted to a Peace Corps employee. Peace Corps staff are awarded noncompetitive eligibility for three years, but only after 36 months of full-time work, and staff NCE cannot be extended for any reason.

#### **Noncompetitive eligibility does not apply to state or local government jobs.**

Section three describes how to complete the federal application forms for government jobs. If you think that federal employment is for you, be sure to read that section carefully.

The federal hiring process is quite different than the hiring process of private industry, state government, or the nonprofit sector. Congress, through OPM, has established laws, policies, and procedures governing employment. This formal process is designed to eliminate discrimination and favoritism and to provide fair and open competition so that hiring and promotion are based on merit.

#### **What is merit-based ranking?**

Merit means that candidates are objectively evaluated against only

those things related to the performance of the job, such as job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and education. One of the most common mistakes that applicants make is not providing enough information about their relevant work experience, skills, or abilities. Be as thorough as possible when drafting your application and federal resume.

### **3. Preparing the Federal Application**

For most federal jobs, the vacancy announcement describes which kinds of applications are acceptable; use whichever you prefer but be sure that all the required information is included. In general, the federal application has to get you through several layers of evaluation before an interview. The federal application, regardless of format, is different from a traditional resume in that it is a very detailed account of your relevant professional experience (particularly in the last 10 years or since college graduation). If you had substantive work experience while a student, you should include that information as well.

Remember, in most cases, federal personnel officers and selecting officials see your application and qualify or disqualify you for positions based on its content. If you plan to seek federal employment, it is well worth your while to expend the thought, time, and effort necessary to develop a well-written application. Carefully follow the directions and suggestions listed below and refer to online resources such as [www.USAJobs.gov](http://www.USAJobs.gov) and [www.Govloop.com](http://www.Govloop.com) for additional information and helpful tutorials on how to pre-



pare a top-notch federal application.

### **What do I need in my application?**

Provide all requested information, including full addresses with zip codes, telephone numbers with area codes, names of supervisors, and dates of employment for each job. Respond to all items listed on the official vacancy announcement. Use the notation “N/A,” meaning “not applicable,” to respond to any items that do not apply. Using the resume builder (online application) will help ensure you include all required information and prevent you from being disqualified due to any minor oversight(s). However, consider uploading a nicely formatted version of your resume as well (if additional uploads are allowed) as a nicely formatted version of your resume will look much better than what the online application/resume builder will produce.

Indicate that you were a Peace Corps Volunteer and give your dates of service. However, do not use “Peace Corps Volunteer” as the title of your position when describing your service. Instead, use your job title, for example, “Agribusiness Advisor” or “Science Teacher” or “Health/Nutrition Education Instructor.”

Emphasize your accomplishments rather than concentrating on your duties. Also include relevant church, community, or club work outside of your regular employment. Be sure to indicate dates and average hours a week of service.

Note all relevant training, including the Peace Corps’ pre-service and in-service training, seminars, and workshops. Additional training can help to qualify you for positions where your education and experience are not sufficient. Remember that “other training” means any kind

of training you received that is not directly part of your high school, undergraduate, or graduate degree. Give titles of courses, dates attended, and the number of hours.

High academic achievement, such as the award of scholarships, election to the dean’s list or to an academic honor society, GPA of 3.5 or higher, and graduation in the upper 10th percentile, can also enhance your qualifications.

List phone numbers, if possible, in addition to addresses for references. Make sure you get permission from those whom you list as references. Federal employers will sometimes call overseas to check references. Provide hiring officials with country codes, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, time-zone differences, and suggestions on the best hours to call. Make things as easy as possible for the employer.

If you are a recently returned Volunteer, attach a copy of your DOS. Remember, your DOS is not a substitute for a complete, detailed description of your Volunteer service, nor is it a substitute for a performance appraisal or letter of reference.

### **Are there any tips to get through this process?**

Due to the flexibility in the way one can apply for a federal job today, the format of the document is less important; the critical factor is what applicants say about themselves.

Traditionally, vacancy announcements have been used to describe not only the duties of the job, but the basic skills and abilities the employee will need. The vacancy announcement is now taking on an-

other role. To evaluate and rank competing candidates for a job, agencies must have comparable information about all applicants. To get this standardized information, agencies are using the announcement to establish how many and what kind of qualifications are needed. Take advantage of this opportunity. Read each vacancy announcement carefully and follow it closely.

There is no such thing as an all-purpose application. Tailor each application to the job for which you are applying. Have the application packet reviewed by a colleague, supervisor, or a career counselor to ensure your application is complete and well-worded.

Terminology is important. There are certain words you can use that strongly describe your experience. See the list of verbs in the chapter on resumes. Write in an active voice. Do not write about what others did; describe only your role.

### **What is the difference between quality ranking factors and selective factors?**

Selective factors are knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required. If selective factors are listed, you must show evidence that you possess all of those requirements in order to be found qualified. Quality ranking factors are knowledge, skills, and abilities that are desirable. Whereas in the past, this information was generally incorporated into the KSA narrative statements, with the new hiring reform it is important that you make sure your resume and online application incorporate the skill factors being requested.

### **What is the best way to respond to the occupational/skills questionnaire?**

For each skills questionnaire item, read all of the options carefully to determine which one best describes your own skill level. This can be tricky as often more than one choice seems appropriate. Note that words like ‘independently’ and, ‘complex’ will indicate a higher skill level than ‘under the supervision of’ or ‘routine’.

For example, one quality ranking factor on the occupational questionnaire might be: “Ability to analyze information and formulate policy” with the following ‘self-select’ choices to choose from:

- “I have served as a subject matter expert, training others on information analysis and policy formation.”
- “I have analyzed complex data and independently authored policies on diverse subject matters.”
- “I have conducted preliminary research analysis and drafted policies under the supervision of senior staff.”
- “I have received training in this area but have no experience doing these tasks.”
- “I have no experience or training in this area.”

In the above example, the choices are listed in order from highest to lowest skill level but be careful, that is not always the case. Choose the highest level you can justify and don’t be too humble—but never lie.

### **How are these responses evaluated?**

The occupational/skills questionnaire is a test, with your answers added up through an auto-

mated scoring system to determine your ranking as either ‘Best Qualified’, ‘Well Qualified’, ‘Qualified’, or ‘Not Qualified’. Generally only the ‘best qualified’ candidates have their resumes reviewed. After making sure the resumes match the skill levels identified in the questionnaires, the ‘best qualified’ candidates will be referred on to the hiring manager for further consideration and, possibly, interviews.

**Will my score change if I apply for a different job?**

Your score will depend on your answers on the occupational questionnaire for each job you apply for. Depending on the caliber of the competition for a job, you may make best qualified on one panel but not on another. If you do not make the best qualified list, do not be discouraged. Federal agencies are required to list an HR contact person for each vacancy announcement.

**How can I get credit for my Peace Corps service once I become a federal employee?**

Any RPCV employed by the U.S. government following his or her Peace Corps service is entitled to have any period of satisfactory Volunteer service credited for purpose of seniority, reduction in force, leave, and other privileges based on length of government service. The service period is from the day you were sworn in as a Volunteer until the day your Peace Corps service ended. The training period does not count. Once you become a federal employee, be sure to ask your personnel office to ensure that you get this credit. The Peace Corps can officially confirm your service if your DOS is not enough. Contact the Volunteer Financial Operations Office for an official verifi-

cation of service at [certifications@peacecorps.gov](mailto:certifications@peacecorps.gov).

**Summary**

Be patient, and be prepared for a long process. The federal government is just like any other large organization. It has its share of bureaucracy, and that includes the hiring process. You can avoid delays by following the advice in this chapter and by being meticulous throughout the application process.

Remember, your application and skills questionnaire are critical to securing a job interview. Give them the time and attention they deserve. Do not be afraid to seek help in preparing your application from a career counselor, trusted professional, or a friend (preferably someone who works for the federal government). Often, others can help you assess your strengths more objectively. Finally, edit and proof-read your work. After all, if you cannot properly, accurately, and thoroughly complete the job application, a hiring manager may doubt your ability to perform the job.



TO: Federal Employers

FROM: Peace Corps, Returned Volunteer Services

RE: Noncompetitive Eligibility

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who have successfully completed their service are granted one year of non-competitive eligibility for federal appointments, under Executive Order 11103. This special eligibility is of particular use to federal employers due to the special qualifications of RPCVs and the speed and ease with which they may be hired. The certification for noncompetitive eligibility is contained in the RPCV's "description of service (DOS)." This document is signed by the country director of the RPCV's country of service.

In order to assist you, Peace Corps' Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services would like to provide you with the following information:

- Noncompetitive eligibility allows you to hire a returned Peace Corps Volunteer as long as the minimum qualifications for a position are met. The RPCV need not be the most qualified candidate.
- Noncompetitive candidates need not be on a register.
- Noncompetitive eligibility can be used to fill both posted and non-posted vacancies, depending upon the individual agency's or department's personnel policies. What most personnel departments do, in the case of announced vacancies, is send the selecting official a ranked list of competitive candidates as well as a list of all noncompetitive applicants.
- Noncompetitive eligibility was detailed in the former Federal Personnel Manual, Section 6-7, Chapter 315. (Although no longer an official document, it does provide accurate historical information.)
- Noncompetitive eligibility may be extended for up to two years. Reasons for extension for an RPCV include: service in the military; attendance as a full-time student at a recognized institution of higher learning; or for another reason the hiring agency thinks warrants an extension.

If you have any further questions about noncompetitive eligibility, please write or call

**Peace Corps**  
**Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters**  
**1111 20th Street, NW**  
**Washington, DC 20526**  
**Attn: Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services**  
**855.855.1961, extension 1430**  
**202.692.1430**  
**Fax: 202.692.1421**

# 20

## Employment with the Peace Corps

Upon completing their Volunteer service, many RPCVs are interested in staff positions with the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is a comparatively small federal agency with headquarters in Washington, D.C. The agency uses the foreign personnel (FP) hiring system instead of the general schedule (GS) hiring system. Peace Corps staff appointments are for an initial 30 months, and most are subject to a five-year limit.

Peace Corps positions are like many others found throughout government and the private sector and include accountants, budget analysts, management analysts, managers, administrative assistants, program specialists, program analysts, writers, recruiters, IT specialists, and a variety of other professionals.

The positions below are examples of common vacancies at the Peace Corps. To apply for a job, you must submit a specific application for each announced position. (Do not send a federal employment application to human resources management asking to be considered for vacancies as they occur.)

### Headquarters Positions

Most positions at Peace Corps headquarters are announced and competitive. Vacancy announcements are available on the Peace Corps website at [www.peacecorps.gov/jobs](http://www.peacecorps.gov/jobs) and at [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov). Announcements are typically open for about two weeks. Other than the generic positions described above, the Peace Corps offers the following special-

ized vacancies, which reflect the Peace Corps' unique mission.

### Country Desk Officers

Country desk officers (CDOs) work in one of three region-specific offices at headquarters: Africa; Inter-America and the Pacific (IAP); and Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia (EMA). CDOs oversee all programmatic and managerial activities affecting the country or countries of assignment. Employment requirements include knowledge and experience of resource allocation, planning and utilization, administration, effective oral and written communication, and human assistance and social service program development. These positions involve administrative and clerical aspects as well.

### Volunteer Placement Specialists

Volunteer placement specialists work in one of four basic human-needs teams: agriculture, education, health, and professional and technical trades. These teams coordinate the placement of Peace Corps trainees based on requests from host countries. Applicants for these positions should have a demonstrated ability to evaluate recruitment-program effectiveness, experience in developing and establishing Volunteer skills requirements, experience with training techniques and requirements, skills in program planning, and experience in report writing and oral presentations.

## Recruiters

Peace Corps recruiters screen qualified applicants for Volunteer service in the Peace Corps. They also serve as point persons for building awareness of Peace Corps programs. Duties include assisting with media support and publicity; contacting community, professional, and academic resource people and organizations; and making oral and audiovisual presentations to classes and organizations. Applicants should be articulate, feel comfortable speaking publicly, and be committed to helping the Peace Corps grow by recruiting only the best possible Volunteers. These jobs often involve a great deal of travel. All regional recruiter positions are filled through the Peace Corps and/or OPM website.

**If you have current noncompetitive eligibility, be sure to submit an application to the ‘RPCV Noncompetitive Employment Program’ by visiting [www.peacecorps.gov/nce](http://www.peacecorps.gov/nce) and clicking on the “RPCV Noncompetitive Eligibility Program” link.**

## Campus Recruiting Positions

The Peace Corps occasionally places Peace Corps campus coordinators/graduate assistants (“strategy contractors”) at certain colleges and universities that are good sources for potential Volunteers. Strategy contractors are returned Volunteers who work half time on campus as Peace Corps recruiters while pursuing degrees. The recruiter is actually employed by the university, which has been awarded a contract by the Peace Corps for recruitment activities. If you plan to go back to school, contact the regional Peace Corps office responsible for the state in which your school is located to inquire about these posi-

tions. You can reach your local recruitment office at 855.855.1961.

## Temporary Positions

Because of high employee turnover, office managers are frequently forced to fill positions on a temporary basis. Temporary work at the Peace Corps can provide sound experience and excellent networking opportunities—useful for subsequent job searches. Another benefit: Temporary employees are often encouraged to apply for permanent positions as they open up, and they are eligible for internal agency employee only postings.

RPCVs may inquire about current temporary openings by contacting the specific office that interests them, or by visiting the RPCV Career Link site at [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcvcareerlink](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcvcareerlink).

## Overseas Opportunities

The most common international employment opportunities within the Peace Corps are Country Director (CD), Director of Programming and Training, and Administrative Officer.

Vacancy announcements for APCD positions are on Peace Corps’ website, [www.peacecorps.gov/jobs](http://www.peacecorps.gov/jobs). Please send one application for each vacancy announcement to which you want to apply. Country Director positions are announced under a separate application process.

In addition, Peace Corps contracts with physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants to serve as the primary health care providers for Peace Corps Volunteers and trainees overseas as Peace Corps Medical Contractors.

Peace Corps also contracts with

individuals with a variety of technical expertise for short term overseas training and assistance contracts. Further instructions and application materials are available at [www.peacecorps.gov/jobs](http://www.peacecorps.gov/jobs).

# 21

## Graduate School

[fellows@peacecorps.gov](mailto:fellows@peacecorps.gov)

Phone: 855.855.1961,  
ext. 1440

Fax: 202.692.1490

[www.peacecorps.gov/fellows](http://www.peacecorps.gov/fellows)

### **Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program and Other Graduate School Opportunities for RPCVs**

Many returned Peace Corps Volunteers seriously consider going back to school to obtain a professional degree or certificate. Their motivations vary. Some see additional training as a necessary steppingstone to employment in a professional field. Some seek advanced training to further explore interests developed during their Peace Corps experience. Others were considering graduate or professional training when they received their bachelor's degree, but decided to delay a decision until after their Peace Corps service. And many are interested in the intellectual challenge of graduate studies.

#### **How Do Graduate Schools View RPCVs?**

RPCVs are highly regarded in the academic world. Their broadened worldview, maturity, and commitment are widely recognized and respected. Returned Volunteer Services often receives inquiries from college and university department chairpersons concerning how they might bring their programs to the attention of current and returned Volunteers.

A good place to start your search for a graduate study program would be by exploring opportunities with the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program.

#### **Learning and Making a Difference: Peace Corps Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program**

Peace Corps' Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program is a program of partnerships between the Peace Corps and more than 70 universities nationwide. These institutions offer financial assistance to returned Peace Corps Volunteers who want to earn professional credentials or masters or doctoral degrees in a variety of subjects. Peace Corps Fellows combine graduate study with degree-related internships in underserved U.S. communities, where they gain valuable on-the-job training while helping to meet local needs. Additionally, Fellows fulfill the Peace Corps' Third Goal of helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. They do this by sharing their knowledge of other countries and cultures with university and workplace colleagues, local youth, and other community members.

#### **Benefits**

Through the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program, RPCVs earn degrees, establish their careers, and gain resume-enhancing work and networking opportunities. Depending on the institution, Fellows may receive scholarships, reduced tu-



“Being a Fellow means being a multifaceted citizen-ambassador, spreading goodwill and understanding among all peoples and contributing to the betterment of society.”

Jamal Nasafi, Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program alumnus, Illinois State University; Peace Corps Volunteer, Kyrgyz Republic, 1997-99

ition, paid employment, health benefits, and housing or living allowances.

Many Peace Corps Fellows programs teach concepts that are applicable in both domestic and international careers. For example, skills in teaching, nursing, or proposal writing are transferable to work in schools, healthcare facilities, and nonprofit organizations abroad as well as in the United States.

The program began in 1985 as the brainchild of RPCV Beryl Levinger, Ph.D., at Teachers College, Columbia University. Since its inception, nearly 3,000 former Volunteers have participated and thousands have benefited from their important work.

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program can help you shape your future by building upon the knowledge and experience you gained overseas. As one Fellow put it, “The program helped me pursue my graduate studies, gave me confidence in my skills, and put me on the path to my professional career.”

### Eligibility

To be eligible for a Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program, you must have satisfactorily completed your Peace Corps service. You have lifelong eligibility for Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Fellows Program if you have done one of the following:

- completed the full two-year tour of Peace Corps service, or the full tour minus up to 90 days of emergency leave;
- been granted “early close of service” or “interrupted service” status due to circumstances beyond your control; or
- been medically separated as a volunteer.

Volunteers may begin applying to programs midway through their Peace Corps service.

### Admissions Criteria

To become a Peace Corps Fellow, you must apply to and be accepted into a Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program graduate program at a partner university. Each program is structured differently in terms of financial benefits and internships. The number of fellowships awarded at each university depends upon many factors, including available funds, employment opportunities, and graduate program enrollment limits. Some programs are highly competitive, so we encourage you to apply to several. Fellows are typically selected on the basis of several criteria, including their ability to demonstrate commitment to both service and a career.

Before applying, check university requirements by talking to the campus Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program coordinator. Many programs require entrance examinations, such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), or another standardized test. Similarly, some states require that prospective teachers take the national teacher examinations, state tests, or other examinations before issuing a temporary or conditional teaching certificate. Many of these tests are offered only a few times a year. Be sure to allow sufficient time to take necessary tests and obtain letters of recommendation and college transcripts.

Your description of service (DOS) statement should also be included with your applications, even if the university does not require

it. The DOS is a certified document issued by the Peace Corps that describes the activities and duties of a Volunteer during service and details the training received and the work performed, including secondary projects in-country. It also lists language proficiency exam ratings. Some universities may grant credit or initial teaching certification or waive requirements based on the DOS. If you have not yet completed your service, submit a detailed description of your work to date, and follow it with your DOS as soon as it becomes available.

### **Academic Programs**

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program at each partner university is developed according to local needs, and it is directed by university faculty and staff, some of whom are returned Volunteers. Consequently, no two programs are identical in degrees offered, benefits, application requirements, or competition for admission.

Almost one-third of the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Programs are in teacher education. Specialty areas include: English as a second language, math, science, bilingual education, special education, and more. The other programs encompass many fields. Some partner universities allow RP-CVs to tailor degree programs to suit their own interests. Current fields of study include:

- American studies
- Anthropology
- Arts management
- Business
- Communication
- Community and economic development
- Criminal justice
- Economics
- English
- Environment

- Forestry
- Geography
- History
- International development
- Language
- Nonprofit management
- Nursing
- Philosophy
- Political science
- Public administration
- Public health
- Science
- Social work
- Sociology
- Teacher education
- Recreation, park, and tourism management
- Urban planning, and more

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program continues to develop programs in additional academic fields and locations to provide even more opportunities for you to further your education and maintain your commitment to service. Check the website for the most current listings at [www.peacecorps.gov/fellows](http://www.peacecorps.gov/fellows).

### **Internships**

In addition to course work, completion of a Peace Corps fellowship at each university includes an internship with a community partner. Each internship is directly related to your field of study and will engage you in meeting real-world community needs. You will work under the guidance of the community partner who is a dedicated professional in his or her field. Master's programs usually take two years to complete, including the internship, which varies from one semester to two years. Courses can be taken prior to, during, or after the internship. Many Fellows' internships lead to permanent positions.

## Application Process

1. Select several programs to which you wish to apply.
2. Contact university Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program coordinators to request program and application information.
3. Follow all the application instructions, submitting separate applications to each university. The program coordinator will check with the Peace Corps to verify your service record and eligibility.

The Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program is possible because of the generous support and funding by partner universities, foundations, government agencies, corporations, and individual donors. The Peace Corps does not fund the campus programs.

# 24

## Crossing Cultures in the Job Search

### Applying Cross-Cultural Survival Skills to Job and Career Transitions

“The Peace Corps has enlightened and affected my daily existence. I still feel as if I returned yesterday—after 37 years.”

— Roger B. Hirschland (RPCV, Sierra Leone, 1965-67)

Significant life transitions coupled with major career transitions are exciting, but can be difficult and sometimes overwhelming. Whether you are a newcomer to the job-search world, a seasoned professional, or a student planning to continue your education, several transitions are inevitable—each survived by accepting, adapting, and moving on.

So, what can you do to deal with the difficulties of a job search and career transition? Do what you have already learned to do so well! Adapt to the ever-changing job-search environment by applying the basic transition principles you used while adapting to your host country.

Following are a few reminders of what may have helped you in the transition to your host country, and how those skills may now help you in your transition to the United States.

#### Assess Yourself

First, know as much as you can about yourself. This was critical to successful cultural adaptation abroad, and is equally important in helping you focus and succeed in your job search. What do you value? What do you want to do? What can you do? What additional training will you need?

#### Make a Budget

You managed a minimal living allowance and often cut out the extras. Know what you need to survive while job hunting. Creative budgeting can

leave room for postage and resume paper, but remember to budget in some fun times, too.

#### Do Some Research

Most of you read quite a bit about your host country before departure and again in-country. The same approach applies to the job market. Read about your career field, job interests, and potential employers. Although you may think you already know about the job environment or an organization’s culture, the current climate may have changed while you have been overseas.

#### Be Resourceful

You learned as much as you could about what you were going to do as a Volunteer. You identified local resources and availed yourself of them. Similarly, find out where the job resources are in your area. Explore libraries, the Internet, and local RPCV groups. Visit [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv) for RPCV-specific job resources.

#### Learn the Language

You studied, practiced, and were eager to communicate properly in your host country. Appropriate language in the work world is equally critical for proper and professional communication. Learn the buzz words and communication style of your targeted industries. Highlight jargon in want-ads. Use these words

and phrases in your cover letters, resumes, and job interviews.

### **Dress Appropriately**

You dressed appropriately for meetings, social events, and work settings in your host country. The dress culture of the work world is just as important. In the States, it is best to err on the side of dressing more conservatively for meetings and interviews.

### **Be Prepared**

As a Volunteer, you prepared to present yourself to community groups, government officials, and numerous individuals. You had to know what you would say and how you would say it. Many of you developed a personal 10-second sound bite about who you are and why you were there. Get ready to do the same in a job search. These skills will be useful in both the informational interview and the actual job interview.

### **Network**

In your country of service, you identified and met with the key people in your city, town, or village. You most likely sought out and met with others in organizations that were related to the kind of work you did. Similar principles apply in the job search. Set up informational interviews with others in your field of interest and discover what insights they have to offer. Remember, it takes time to build contacts into a strong and sturdy network of relationships. Stay focused, set goals, and begin to plant the seeds.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

You were responsible for your

health at your site, and you are responsible for your health on your job search. Eat right, sleep well, and stay happy. Remember to take breaks, treat yourself, and connect with other jobseekers to share ideas and to remind yourself that you are not alone on the job search.

### **Keep a Positive Attitude**

Stay positive and be patient with yourself and with others. Adapting to your host country took time. Looking for work also takes some getting used to. The time schedule is different, expectations are different, and people may not give you the attention you may want or need. But stay positive; tomorrow is another day!



PEACE CORPS  
*Office of Third Goal and*  
Returned Volunteer Services

