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The Top Ten Things You Should Do to Get Your First Job (or a New One)

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Positions for librarians are becoming ever more competitive—and getting your first professional position can be challenging. While the ten suggestions below aren't a guarantee, they are tried-and-true suggestions for setting yourself as going above and beyond your peers.

1. **Be an intern.** If you live near a large public or academic library or an organization with a special library, explore the possibilities of interning, particularly as part of a project (as opposed to ongoing). As national volunteer and intern opportunities, like Americorps, dry up, organizations are in need of volunteers and interns skilled in librarianship. Focusing on an internship where you are part of a clearly defined project will give you the opportunity to have completed work in your portfolio.

Work with your library school to try to arrange an internship, or contact the Human Resources department of the organization where you would like to work as an intern. An internship might not get you a leg up on a job in the organization, especially if the organization uses the civil service process to screen candidates, but it can give you a listing on your resume that will get noticed at other organizations.

2. **Volunteer.** Look outside of internship and long-term volunteer opportunities to add to your resume. State library organizations, student-focused professional organization chapters, library consortiums and cooperatives, serving on a Board of Trustees, committee work, and non-profit volunteer work in similar fields all provide experience and perspective, additional material for your resume and cover letter, and, importantly, the opportunity to network.
3. **Network.** Through your internship and volunteer opportunities, you should focus on expanding your network. Who is leading the group or project where you are volunteering or interning? Who participates fully in that group? Who has a lot of energy and ideas? Who volunteers often for the work of the group? Who does staff look up to, or



talk about often? These are the people you should work to get to know—and, importantly, to get to know you. Once you have established a relationship, let them know you are looking for a job. Chances are, they'll have suggestions for you.

4. **Network.** Social media is a great equalizer. People you might have never emailed or dreamed of leaving a phone message—and who would certainly have not returned your email or phone call—may reply back to you on Twitter. Use Twitter to keep up with what is happening in the library world, and, importantly, who is taking part in the areas in which you are interested in. Who is presenting at your state conference? Who is presenting at ALA, or in one of the webinars that *Library Journal* or ALA and its divisions sponsors? Follow these folks on Twitter, and interact with their postings. The same would be true with a blog, Tumblr, or other public-facing service. You'll never know when you'll make a connection.

Other social media options can also be useful, although they are, by their nature, less public than Twitter. If your contact has a LinkedIn page, try that; if you can gauge from a contact's friends list on Facebook that they have a mix of friends and professional contacts, it might be worth sending a friend request. Tread carefully, with Facebook especially, as people have their own rules.

5. **Network.** In your internship, volunteer experiences, or through networking, find a mentor. A mentor can be someone who helps you in the short term, or it can be a long-term relationship. Determine what kind of mentor you need, and seek the person who would be the best fit for you. This person can be a wonderful support in your job hunting process—they might be able to connect you with a job opportunity, can review your materials, can act as a sounding board, and/or serve as a reference.
6. **Network.** Did I say network? You should do it. The library world is a small one.
7. **Be willing to relocate.** Sure, you love where you live, and don't want to move—but chances are, there are other librarians, probably with more experience than you, who would like to live and work there, too. Leaving your current area for a job can often provide you with a broader range of experiences than you will find in your current area. If you are willing to look at—and can afford to live in—a rural area, your first job might provide you with a lot more responsibility, as you are likely to be part of a smaller staff. If you can't relocate, being willing to spend a year or two commuting a greater distance than you might otherwise like can provide you with similar opportunities.
8. **Learn about the culture of the place you want to work.** In some libraries, the organization loves professional staff that have worked their way up through the system—starting as a page at such an organization will get you not only a foot in the door, but the inside ability to know when recruitments will open or positions will post. Other organizations look for professional staff from outside—starting as a page or on-call staff here might relegate you to those roles and be passed over for promotional opportunities.



9. **Know the organization's hiring processes.** The goal of the hiring process, particularly at the beginning, should be, in part, to make yourself memorable—and memorable in a good way. Demonstrate that you have researched the organization you are interested in working for by understanding their hiring processes. A bold move in one organization—contacting the Director or other staff person directly—might be your downfall in another.

You will have to work to find out how to walk the fine line between keeping quiet and keeping yourself on the organization's radar; here's where some of the people you have met while networking should be very useful. Learn about the civil service process, if you are applying to a large organization, and follow it to a T. In a smaller organization, learn what kind of skills the organization is looking for, if possible—especially if you are looking to a position where you would be a replacement for a staff person who has left. Highlighting how your skills are similar (if the person was well-liked) or what you bring to the table that is different (if not) can set you apart from the pile of resumes. No matter what, your awareness of these processes should be invisible and integrated into your cover letter, resume, and packet materials.

10. **Present yourself professionally.** When you are moving in the world in which you would like to work, be sure you are always showing your good side. You never know when the person leading your interview panel might be someone you have met previously. Better to have them remember you for your poise, your awareness of what is happening in the library world and/or with local issues, your dedication to your volunteer organization, or your professional attire than for being the person who came to class in pajamas, drank too much at the professional mixer, has an embarrassing picture of themselves up on Facebook or who was an unreliable volunteer. 

