

# ENHANCING YOUR RESUME



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Targeted Volunteering, Internships,  
and More

Ideas from a recent MLS grad on how you can make the most of professional and student organizations, networking opportunities, course projects and more.

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# Enhancing Your Resume

## TARGETED VOLUNTEERING, INTERNSHIPS, AND MORE

The job market for MLS grads may seem daunting, but there are things you can do to kick start your job search. Whether you're still in school or looking for a mid-career move, the same things apply: volunteer, network, and target your efforts. Here are some tips that worked for me.

### VOLUNTEER FOR PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

#### Networking, new skills, so many benefits!

Join professional organizations, attend networking events, but most importantly, volunteer for committees and don't hesitate to take on leadership positions. These organizations exist to help you develop your career potential, and the people you meet through them will help you in your job search.

You can join professional organizations at any point in your career, including while you are in graduate school. Be sure to join their list serves... many job openings get posted on list serves and nowhere else!

#### **But They Cost Too Much!**

If you are on the job market, you can't afford not to join professional organizations. Many offer discounts for students and for people between jobs. ALA offers students a discount on both ALA membership and joint membership with most state library associations. SLA student membership is discounted, and regular membership is based on income, so if you're between jobs, you will have a lower rate. I can't emphasize it enough: if you are looking for a job, the professional membership dues are worth every penny... so join any and all that are of interest.

### **Don't Just Join... Participate!**

Become an active member of one or more professional organizations. Networking and volunteering are intertwined. Volunteer for committees and offer to take on leadership positions. While you're in graduate school, volunteer for student chapters of national organizations like American Library Association and Special Libraries Association. Also, check into local chapters of national organizations and ask how you can get involved. This sets you apart as someone with energy and ambition. This is one of the best things you can do for your job search.

### **What's in it for you?**

- **Professional involvement:** looks great on your resume and scholarship applications
- **Expand your network:** enables you to build friendly working relationships with people in hiring positions
- **Develop new skills:** focus your volunteer work on areas where you need to grow your skill set which will give you bullet points for your resume and products to point to in your portfolio
- **Gain leadership skills:** build self confidence

### **I Have No Time for This!**

Find the time. The benefits are so great that it is worth the effort to reprioritize things and make time for volunteering for professional organizations. It does not have to take over your life to be hugely beneficial to your job search. Remember:

- **Volunteer work is flexible:** you can work in your free time, often from home
- **It is low stress:** if you take on too much, ask for help!
- **Be professional:** meet deadlines and follow through on commitments, but realize that deadlines for volunteer work can sometimes be flexible
- **Improve your time management skills:** important for every job you'll ever have, and a not insubstantial benefit of volunteering for professional organizations!

## **Virtual Volunteering**

When attending in-person meetings is a barrier, try to find creative work-arounds. Much can be accomplished virtually. Committee meetings can be held via Skype or Google Hangout, group work shared in Google Drive or Dropbox, most communication can be done via email, text, social media, blog, or list serv. *Virtual volunteering* is completely feasible and very flexible.

## **Showcase Your Talents**

Volunteering provides you with a perfect vehicle for showcasing your awesomeness. Be creative, come up with new ideas and solutions, show them your stuff!

Don't cut corners or procrastinate just because it's volunteer work and you are not getting paid. The pay off comes later... when you knock the socks off everyone with your fantastic follow through. Do not underestimate the value of any contribution you make; people will take notice and it will be worth your while.

Also, be flexible and friendly... demonstrate to people how easy you are to get along with and happy you are to help out. Ask for suggestions and be a good listener and willing to incorporate others' input – demonstrating what a great team player you are.

On the other hand, you should also use volunteer opportunities to let your confidence shine through... do not hesitate to voice your own opinions and work independently when the ball is in your court. Take full advantage of this opportunity by doing your best work and dazzling everyone with your efforts.

## **How Does This Help Me Find a Job?**

Volunteering for professional organizations provides you with opportunities to shine – to impress people in hiring positions and get your name out there. They may not hire you directly, but people you meet can become mentors, they can connect you with people who are hiring, and they can write you great reference letters.

Volunteer work demonstrates your commitment to being active professionally, enables you to stretch and showcase your skills, and demonstrates your ability to work both independently and as part of a team. These are all great additions to your resume. You

can also accrue tangible products to showcase your skills in your portfolio... reports, blog posts, projects, web sites, artwork, etc.

Professional organizations are also a fantastic way to learn about opportunities (job postings!) that are not listed anywhere else. Becoming connected and known through your volunteer work gives you another leg up... people may contact you directly about opportunities. Never underestimate the power of networking and word-of-mouth.

### **Intangible Benefits to Volunteering**

Especially when you are a student or early career librarian, being active professionally sets you apart and starts your career off right. You can find mentors, network, and take advantage of opportunities for professional development early in your career when they can have maximum long-term impact. Of course, at any point in your career, these things are valuable.

Name recognition, buzz amongst key players, meeting people socially at networking events... people will know you by (good) reputation for the volunteer work you do for professional organizations. These intangibles are well worth the time you invest in volunteering.

### **How to Find Volunteer Opportunities**

Join student and professional organizations, join list serves and LinkedIn groups, respond to requests for volunteers, volunteer for committees, contact professional organization officers and offer to help. While in graduate school, offer to take on leadership positions in student organizations. This is a great way to network with other student leaders, become better acquainted with professors (great for reference letters!), and develop your leadership skills. Ask for advice from mentors and established librarians who may have ideas and connections for you.

## BEYOND VOLUNTEERING: OTHER WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR RESUME AND INCREASE YOUR NETWORK

### Internships, Informational Interviews, Scholarships, Real World School Projects, Online Portfolios, Contract Work

#### **Internships... They Can be Virtual, Too!**

Another way to boost your resume is through internships and practicums. For many people family obligations, jobs, and commuting distance can make an onsite internship difficult. So think about virtual internships—internships or volunteer projects conducted via telework. Much like virtual volunteering for professional organizations, these projects can be completed in a variety of ways using technology for work and supervision.

How to find these opportunities? Many libraries, including special and federal libraries, have needs that can be completed largely or completely offsite. Find these opportunities the same way you find volunteer opportunities... ask mentors, post on LinkedIn groups, ask people you meet through professional organizations.

A word of advice about internships—be sure you focus on a specific project with a tangible result that adds to your resume and portfolio... a presentation, a publication, a final project that you can point to.

#### **Informational Interviews: A Step Inside the Door**

Informational interviews are a great use of your time. Identify organizations that interest you and call or email them explaining your interest and asking for an informational interview and/or tour. Show eagerness to learn about the organization. This is a great way to increase your network, learn firsthand about organizations and potential employers, find volunteer opportunities, contract positions, and possibly even permanent employment.

#### **Don't Hesitate: Apply for Scholarships**

Of course, scholarships have monetary value, but these awards have huge intangible benefits. Scholarships look great on your resume and are also a terrific way for students to network—they open doors, as the organization offering the scholarship has an

automatic interest in you and your career. Keep your eye out for scholarship opportunities and application deadlines. They are often announced on list serves and it is easy to ignore them or think it's not worth your time to write the essays... but I encourage you to apply for all scholarships and awards that you might qualify for. These awards can have a lasting impact on your career.

### **Focus Library School Projects on the Real World**

Use your network (including people you know from volunteering, professional organizations, informational interviews, etc.) as resources for library school projects and papers. This helps you stay in contact and demonstrates your continued strong interest in their organizations and their work. In addition, you learn more details about libraries and library jobs, their challenges and solutions... it gives you a unique way of getting an inside view. Take advantage of these opportunities while in library school because people are happy to give you their time, answer questions, and help you out while you're a student.

### **Create an Online Portfolio**

Your LinkedIn profile is important, but an online portfolio gives you additional flexibility to demonstrate your creativity and showcase your talents in unique ways (and you can point to your portfolio from LinkedIn). Put your resume on your portfolio, but also use this space to describe your volunteer work, link to research papers or school projects that show your skills and expertise, describe library school classes and projects, link to practicum posters, etc. Use your portfolio to complement your resume and let your personality shine through.

### **Consider Contract Work**

The Federal hiring process is difficult to navigate. Many Federal libraries have contract positions and these can be an excellent way to get your foot in the door, gain experience, and make important contacts. Contracts may even eventually lead to permanent Federal employment... it worked for me!

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER: MY SUCCESS STORY

### Be Creative and Make Library School Work for You!

My suggestions here are all based on my own experience. I started networking early in library school... I asked for informational interviews at libraries so I could learn more about them. I participated in mentoring programs through professional organizations and connected with people at potential employers early on. I stayed in contact with them throughout library school, asking advice, tapping them as resources for projects and papers, and continuing to demonstrate my interest in their organizations.

I applied for scholarships through a number of organizations including the local SLA chapter and the ALA (Federal and Armed Forces Libraries Round Table) and won several of them. I volunteered for the student chapter of SLA at my university and held an officer position in the student chapter of the ALA. Through these groups, I organized speakers, seminars, networking events, and library tours at places of interest to me (and others!). This increased my network, gave me firsthand glimpses of potential employers, and was an outstanding way for me to demonstrate my organizational and leadership skills.

While still a student, I volunteered for a committee in my local SLA chapter and for a couple of ALA committees (New Members Round Table, FAFLRT). Through my networking, I have been asked several times to present at panel sessions; all great experiences, adding to my network and boosting my credentials. I also did two virtual internships... both were rewarding and worked well with my busy schedule.

It paid off for me. Soon after I graduated from library school in 2013, a networking contact told me of a contract opening at a federal library that was at the top of my interest list. I landed the contract, applied for a permanent position, and landed that as well! I recently completed my first year as a federal librarian. It's an innovative library where I work with wonderful colleagues. I have a flexible work schedule and telework options that help immensely with my work/life balance... federal libraries are the best!

I hope this information helps others find their niche in the library world. I am happy to answer your questions... contact me any time.

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