

Career Planning for Geographers

A resource developed by the AAG's EDGE Project (www.aag.org/edge)

What is career planning?

Career planning entails a mix of strategic planning to enhance our employability and self-awareness to create spaces for those unexpected developments that may lead to new or alternative job prospects. Effective career planning begins when we know ourselves, when we understand the conditions of the job market, especially with respect to geography, and when we work to identify ways to mesh these factors.

Learn about yourself

- Think about your personal characteristics and how they might relate to the kinds of work and working environments that would be conducive to your job satisfaction. But don't forget that your defining qualities, as you may see them, do not have to dictate your career. Staying open to different possibilities can enhance your employability.
- Many geographers have positions that do not contain the words "geography" or "geographer." Because many employers are unfamiliar with geography as a discipline, it is essential that you recognize and articulate the skills that you have acquired and honed through your background and training in geography. Examples include thinking spatially, comprehending the complexities of nature–society relationships, and thinking holistically.

Learn about the job market

- Gain practical or supervised experience with one or more firms or organizations. Internships, whether paid or unpaid, remain among the most valuable ways to gain "on the job" experience. A good way to prepare for work with a nonprofit or non-governmental organization (NGO) is simply to volunteer your time and skills to the organization.
- Consult academic advisers or faculty to learn where recent graduates are presently employed. Contact individuals who have the kinds of jobs you seek and arrange an informational interview to learn more about their work.
- Read job announcements to become familiar with coursework, skills, work experience, and other qualifications necessary for specific jobs. Consider performing a "gap analysis" to compare your qualifications with those specified in a position advertisement.
- Use your networks. The people whom you know personally and professionally are often a primary source of information about job opportunities; some estimates suggest that more than two-thirds of job openings are not advertised publicly.



You've got to know what you're talking about when you get to the job interview. Internships are a great way to get your foot in the door.

-- Carmen Tedesco
Senior Spatial Planning and
Development Specialist,
Development Alternatives, Inc.

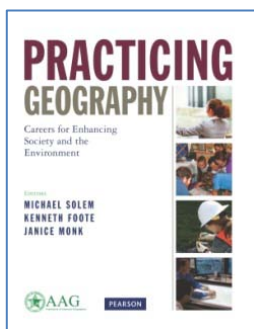
Put yourself "out there"

- Develop cover letter and résumé templates for each type of position for which you intend to apply. These templates should be customized to reflect the requirements outlined within each individual job advertisement. Résumés and cover letters are often regarded as writing samples so always carefully edit and refine these materials prior to submission.
- A personal web page can provide a comparatively inexpensive, easily accessible, and highly visible way to showcase examples of your professional creativity and competencies. Along with your résumé, consider posting materials that convey your interests, qualifications, and accomplishments.
- Your profile on Facebook, LinkedIn, or YouTube is probably not enough to make you visible, but social media can complement more traditional strategies. Don't forget that employers also use social networking, so be sure to carefully manage your online presence.
- Direct contact with employers can get you noticed. Career fairs sponsored by colleges and universities as well as the government and other organizations provide a venue for one-on-one contact with recruiters.
- When deciding whom to use as a reference, ask yourself: "Who can best assess my qualifications for this particular job?" The best reference is not necessarily the highest-ranked person you know within an organization.

Make career planning a lifelong endeavor

- To enhance your employability and increase your value to an organization, remain open to taking on different roles. Career advancement will likely involve your taking on additional leadership responsibilities and gaining broader awareness about business and legal issues that affect your employer.
- Once you are hired, continue seeking information about other jobs and agencies as you begin to interact with a larger number of colleagues. Canvassing the market is good practice for future job searches and helps you stay apprised of employment trends.

Career planning and career practice are interconnected. How you plan affects what you do career-wise, and, in turn, the jobs you take shape the nature and goals of your ever-evolving career plan. Geography's broad and integrative nature and its unique focus on geospatial methods and perspectives mean that graduates will enter the workforce with competencies to navigate and advance within a wide range of career pathways.



Material adapted from: *Practicing Geography: Careers for Enhancing Society and the Environment*, eds. Michael Solem, Ken Foote, and Jan Monk. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2012.

- Chapter One, "Part strategy and serendipity: A candid guide to career planning for geographers " by Alyson L. Greiner and Thomas A. Wikle.

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