

Career Advice

(From People Smarter Than Us)

General advice

How to become an aidworker?

- The Road to the Horizon

If you're just starting to think about making a career in aid/development, this post is a good place to start. It's a good read if you just have a vague sense that you want to work in this field, but aren't quite sure what that looks like.

Development Jobs: What You Need to Know

- Devex

This one includes good descriptions of the types of positions available (technical experts, project managers, researchers, other), as well as what's involved with each and who hires for them.

Getting a job

The bare bones of prepping for an international career

- Alanna Shaikh

Short version:

- 1) Get an office job while you're in school, because most development work is office work;
- 2) Study something useful at university;
- 3) Learn to write;
- 4) Study a second language to demonstrate a commitment to international and intercultural work; and 5) "Have a goal for what you want to do, that's specific but not too specific."

Getting a job in international development

- Chris Blattman

Chris follows up on Alanna's post with a few more:

- 6) Be prepared to volunteer your first couple jobs;
- 7) Pound the less-trodden pavement (e.g. try contacting program managers, country offices, etc. directly rather than applying through the front door);
- 8) Consider a private firm; and
- 9) Be willing to go to uncomfortable places.

What Recruiters Really Look For

- Piero Calvi

One word: experience. Connections and education are both secondary.

Finding a Job Overseas

- Michael Baer

Getting your first overseas position is first and foremost about networking. Second, volunteering or an internship can help; an organisation is more likely to accept an inexperienced person if they don't have to pay him/her. Third, going overseas on your own can allow you to find positions that you wouldn't find from afar. Finally, be persistent.

Finding a job

- AidWorkers Network

Key line: "Focus on fewer, more relevant jobs when applying. And work hard on selling your skills and abilities, not your desire to help."

Getting a job in development (UN edition)

- Chris Blattman

Chris featured commentary from a friend who heads a sub-national office for UNHCR in Africa. In summary form: getting a job at the UN is tough but possible. Connections help but they aren't necessary. To get in without connections, you need three things: a relevant CV (including at least 6 months, ideally a year +, working in development; second languages are essential for most UN jobs; as is a graduate degree), persistence (apply to hundreds of jobs), and luck/good timing. Networking helps too. Land an internship if you can.

Life in the field

Advice for First-Time Aid Workers

- AidWorkers Network

This includes tips for pre-departure research, including questions to ask and how to pack. Some are good general travel tips, while some are specific to aid work. The advice for what to do upon arrival (get a security briefing, even if none is being offered; visit the field; back up your files) is especially good.

Unsolicited Advice for New Aid Workers

- Matthew Bolton

Tips from a veteran aid worker on how to learn about the context on the ground: meet 'Key Informants'; try to learn the local language; read voraciously; and review your scope with locals.

AidSpeak & Tales From The Hood

- J.

Read anything by J for honest, critical and reflective accounts of working in the field. (Which... doesn't exist).

Studying development

So, you're thinking of studying an MA in Development Studies? Think again

- Brendan Rigby

Brendan offers unsolicited advice about what to consider when looking at degrees in development. He breaks it down into skills, competencies, curriculum, aid vs. development, mental health, value, equity and work-based learning.

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