MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION AND GETTING THE JOB
The Do’s and Don’ts of Applying for Public Interest Positions

APPROACHING ORGANIZATIONS AT PUBLIC INTEREST FAIRS

- Research the organizations you are interested in. If you do not know anything about the organization or are speaking with an organization that you did not expect to speak with, prepare some general questions.
- If you ask for a representative’s card, follow up – even if it’s a simple “It was great meeting you” email.
- Unless the representative asks, do not share your business card with them. The responsibility for following up and making contact is on you, not the representative, so very few representatives will actually use your card.
- Don’t be shy about asking representatives how to follow up with them.
- Feel free to ask representatives what the position you would be applying for really entails. Preface your question with what you read about the position and ask what the day to day responsibilities are, how work is assigned, etc.
- Don’t just drop your resume with a representative and walk away. Take the time to introduce yourself, ask questions about the organization and the position you’re interested in, and express why you are interested in working with that particular organization.
- It is your responsibility to follow up if you are really interested in the position. Don’t assume that an organization will call you just because you gave them your resume. Remember, most staff is overwhelmed with limited time to follow up so be comfortable taking the initiative.
- Show your passion for public interest work. Be ready to explain why you want a career in the public interest sector and why you are interested in a particular organization.

WRITTEN MATERIALS

- Proofread all resumes and cover letters before sending them out. Typos and other errors show a lack of attention to detail and can actually cost you an interview. Some organizations use resume typos as a way to weed out candidates.
- Personalize your cover letters to the organization and position, and address them to the proper person. Simplicity and most job postings frequently include the individual to whom the letter should be addressed. Also remember to double-check the spellings of names.
- Always have a member of your school’s career development office review your resume and cover letter. This is an important resource designed to aid students – use it.
- Respond to all e-mails from potential employers promptly. Confirm receipt of e-mails; it’s courteous.
• Even if you eventually decide that you are not interested in interviewing for a position, respond to the organization to let them know. Do not ignore people who are interested in you. Public interest is a small world; you are likely to run into people in the future. Leave a good impression.
• Proofread all e-mails before sending them. E-mails are professional letters. Treat them as such.
• Follow the organization’s website directions for submitting materials. If the website says to e-mail, then e-mail, don’t call.

ATTIRE

• The public sector does not require less of you in terms of professional dress.
• Dress in business casual when you attend public interest fairs.
• For interviews, a proper suit and closed-toed shoes are a must.

SOCIAL MEDIA

• Beware of how you present yourself on social media. Recruiters do check social media before they interview you and if they see posts disparaging prior employers or clients, or inappropriate photos, they take note.

TIME

• Whether it is a formal interview or an informal informational interview, show up on time.
• If you need to reschedule an interview, let the appropriate person know in advance. As a general rule, you should only reschedule for health or family reasons, or to meet school-related deadlines.

MISC.

• Do not give the impression that public interest positions are your plan B. Public interest positions are important and competitive. Treat them the same way you would treat a position with a for-profit firm or the government.
• Do not be condescending, overconfident, or seem uninterested during the job search process. Remember, you are the one looking for a job.
• Be respectful to everyone you meet during the job search process. The legal profession is small and your reputation is everything.

These tips have been compiled by the following individuals and entities: Amy Woo Lee, Alliance for Children’s Rights, Inner City Law Center, Laura Riley, Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc., Public Counsel, So. Cal. Pro Bono Managers, UCI School of Law, and USC Gould School of Law.