

The Job Search Toolkit

This resource was compiled in 2018 by the Student/New Member SIG of NSGC.

The majority of the content comes from a previously existing job search toolkit that was produced by MaryAnn Campion, EdD, MS, LCGC (Co-director for Stanford University's Master's Program in Human Genetics and Genetic Counseling); the original toolkit pulled information from several sources including the NSGC Professional Issues Committee, Job Search Manual.

However, this version also contains information gathered from conversations with Cindy Soliday, MS, LCGC (now retired Director of the Genetics Department at Kaiser Permanente San Jose Medical Center). Information from outside sources has been designated as such. Thank you so much to MaryAnn and Cindy for providing so much help in putting this together.

This toolkit provides general templates for the multiple aspects of the job search as well as tips for effectively and successfully applying for jobs and professional etiquette. We hope you find it useful.

Any questions, please contact the leaders of the Student/New Member SIG.

The Cover Letter

Your Address/Contact information

The Date

The Organization's Address (use complete title and address)

Salutation (if possible, address it to a particular person by name)

Opening paragraph: Explain why you are writing to them. The first sentence is very important, so try to be specific to the organization and do not have a generic opening.

The main body paragraph: This is where you sell yourself as a good candidate. List two or three of your major accomplishments and relevant experience. Embellish! Give the employer good reasons to interview you.

Closing paragraph: Express desire for future communication with the company. If you want, you may even say that you will be following up with a phone call yourself.

Signature

General information about cover letters:

- It should *always* accompany your CV or resume, even if it's just in the form of a formal email.
- If you are doing an electronic application and it says that a cover letter is optional, still include one. Genetic counseling is a small field; personalizing your application and being as thorough as possible helps create the right impression for years to come.
- It introduces your CV or resume. It should expand upon what your CV says, not repeat it.
- It provides the employer with clues on your writing and communication skills.
- It can be used as a platform to convey extenuating circumstances that do not fit in other areas of the application.
- *It can be used to apply for a specific/announced/known opening or to inquire about a possible opening that may not be formally posted.*

Tips for creating a strong cover letter:

- All letters should be personalized, never reproduced.
 - o Tailor your letter to the specific organization/reader. Focus on what that organization needs, not what you need from a position.
 - o Visit their website for more information – do your research! If possible, figure out exactly who will be reading your letter, so you can address it properly.
- Be brief and informative – do not exceed 1 page.
- Use a font that is clean and easy to read.
- It should be professional, friendly, and enthusiastic.
- Make it memorable. Including a unique or personal story can set you apart.
- If applicable, emphasize your desire or willingness to relocate, but don't make it appear like this position would be temporary or transient for you.
- Convey focused career goals. Even if you would take any job they offered you, don't say so.
- Don't be shy about selling yourself.
- Show your team spirit and emphasize teamwork and communication skills.
- Consider your word choice. You want to sound positive and confident, neither too aggressive nor overly modest.
- Have friends or colleagues review your cover letter before you send it.
- If your cover letter states that you will follow-up with a phone call, be sure to do so.
- Do not:
 - o Provide salary information when not requested, and do not make salary demands
 - o Start too many sentences with "I"
 - o Make spelling/grammatical errors
 - o Use shoddy paper or paper that is different from your CV
 - o Include irrelevant personal information or job experience
 - o Say anything negative about your current employer
 - o Contradict your CV or lie
 - o Ignore the stated criteria for the job posting (state how you would fill those criteria)

The CV

General things to remember about the CV:

- Creating a solid CV takes time.
- Start with a rough draft, then take a few days to consider additional information that you didn't immediately remember.
- Seek advice and critiques from professionals and/or take advantage of the writing center on campus if you have one.
- If you have interest in more than one field or specialty, you may want to consider creating a CV for each area of interest. Tailor each one to include specific career objectives and qualifications.
- In most cases, your CV should not be more than 2 pages. Students with extensive work experience are the exception. If it is longer, then you may also want to keep a resume on hand (by definition, 1 page total) for places that request a succinct summary of your experiences.
- You may want to keep a "text only" version in case you are applying to a position online that requires you to cut and paste into their form, in which case fancy formatting will be lost.

Tips for creating a strong CV:

- Writing style is very important. Be consistent with your grammar and formatting, including capitalization, punctuation, and date formats. Use present tense for current activities and past tense for past activities.
- Convey accomplishments and problem-solving skills, not merely information on duties.
- Emphasize leadership potential, ingenuity, and organizational, communication, and teamwork skills.
- Use action words and clear messages. Don't try to impress by using confusing words, jargon, or acronyms.
- Be honest and accurate.
- Use spacing and arrangement to place emphasis on specific data. In addition, be very selective when using bold print, capital letters, and underlining.
- Use no more than two fonts/typestyles.
- Keep repetition of words or phrases to a minimum.
- If there are multiple pages, include a header with name and page number.
- Most (but not all) experts recommend listing items in reverse chronological order.

Do not:

- Use the word "I"
- Put "resume" or "CV" at the top
- Use slang or trite expressions ("working with people")
- Include personal information (age, race, religion, political preference) unless that information has direct bearing on your career objective
- Include salary requirements, test results, or photographs

CV Sections

Heading:

- List your name, address, phone number, email address.

Education:

- Include both undergraduate and graduate education.
 - o List the names and locations of each school.
 - o If you went to a foreign school, you may want to state citizenship or green-card status
 - o Under graduate school, put "American Board of Genetic Counseling-Active Candidate Status upon graduation."
- Include thesis/capstone project under each school where you completed one.
- Include majors and minors, if relevant to career.
- Include special seminars, summer school, or night classes.
- Include relevant courses such as medical Spanish, advanced statistics (these can be listed under "Special Training.")
- Include major awards.
- Do not include GPA or class percentile.

Experience:

- As a new graduate, you will want to list your education first. However, after a few years, you will want to start listing your professional experience first.
- Two styles:
 - o Functional – emphasize skills and talents; cluster your experience under headings such as Leadership, Research, Clinical Work, etc.
 - o Chronological – to emphasize work experience (not good if there is a "gap" in your story)
- Include all related experience, both paid and volunteer.
 - o Clinical/fieldwork placements, internships, summer jobs, academic research
 - Include upcoming rotations with dates and general descriptions
 - o Include months/years you worked, title of your position, name/location, and brief, non-redundant description of activities.
- Include past employment, if peripherally related to genetic counseling.
- Ask yourself, "Have I coordinated, organized, or directed anything professionally or for my community?" If so, include it!

Publications and Presentations (can be one section or two)

- Use an appropriate and consistent format.
- You can also combine several of these topics into one section called “Professional Activities.”

Honors:

- If you have received several honors, you may want to have a separate section. If you have only one or two, you may prefer to list them in their respective sections.
- Things to include: scholarships, fellowships, honors lists, professional or community awards and recognition.

Professional Membership:

- Include offices held and committee activities.

Special Training (if applicable):

- Things to include: experience with relevant skills outside of direct genetic counseling duties (i.e. phlebotomy, lab skills, teaching assistantships, etc.). May also include professional development and leadership training, specific training in student supervision, and training in bioinformatics or variant interpretation software outside of the normal tools that genetic counselors use (i.e. Possum, Exac, ClinVar).

Languages (if applicable):

- Indicate level (working knowledge, conversational, fluent).
- Can be a separate section or included under “special training.”

Personal Information:

- Omit this section unless there are certain personal circumstances that you think are relevant to your career.

References:

- You can list your references’ contact information directly or you can state “references available on request” – always ask your references for permission before including them on a document!

The Interview

Information Interviewing at the NSGC AEC:

- If you have a specific city in mind, email some GCs from that area a few weeks before the NSGC Annual Conference to inquire whether they will be attending and if they would be willing to meet with you for an informational interview.

Tips for Interviewing:

- Before you go, search for yourself on Google and social media. Employers may be doing the same, so you want to know what is on the internet about you.
- Dress professionally. When in doubt, err on the side of being over-dressed or wear an outfit where you can easily take off the jacket and be more 'business casual' if appropriate. Consider regional differences.
- Convey your experiences in a clear manner when demonstrates growth, learning, self-awareness, autonomy, and acknowledgment of limitations.
- Identify the three best reasons why you are a strong candidate and work them into the conversation.
- Respond completely to all aspects of a question.
- If your qualifications are weak in some areas, figure out how to express them as positively as possible.
- Don't monopolize the conversation. Make your answers accurate, interesting, and brief. Avoid yes/no answers *and* long discourses.
- Try to connect with the interviewer. The goal is to have them like/respect you.
- Be positive. Do not bad mouth previous employers, professors, or schools.
- Research the organization, then work some facts or specific questions into the conversation.
- Point out why you like the organization and why you would be happy there.
- If the job is truly of interest to you, be sure to say so at the end of the interview. Do not assume that they will read your mind.
- Learn what happens next. Is your file complete with HR? Will they call your references? Who should make the next contact and when should that occur?
- Express thanks to the interviewers as well as any others who helped you (receptionist, secretary, etc.)

50 Worst of the Worst (and Most Common) Job Interview Mistakes.

(taken directly from <http://finance.yahoo.com>)

- 1) Arriving late
- 2) Arriving too early
- 3) Lighting up a cigarette, or smelling like a cigarette
- 4) Bad-mouthing your last boss
- 5) Lying about your skills/experience/knowledge
- 6) Wearing the wrong (for this workplace!) clothes
- 7) Forgetting the name of the person you're interviewing with
- 8) Wearing a ton of perfume or aftershave
- 9) Wearing sunglasses
- 10) Wearing a Bluetooth earpiece
- 11) Failing to research the employer in advance
- 12) Failing to demonstrate enthusiasm
- 13) Inquiring about benefits too soon
- 14) Talking about salary requirements too soon
- 15) Being unable to explain how your strengths and abilities apply to the job in question
- 16) Failing to make a strong case for why you are the best person for this job
- 17) Forgetting to bring a copy of your resume and/or portfolio
- 18) Failing to remember what you wrote on your own resume
- 19) Asking too many questions
- 20) Asking no questions at all
- 21) Being unprepared to answer the standard questions
- 22) Failing to listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying
- 23) Talking more than half the time
- 24) Interrupting your interviewer
- 25) Neglecting to match the communication style of your interviewer
- 26) Yawning
- 27) Slouching
- 28) Bringing along a friend or your mother
- 29) Chewing gum, tobacco, your pen, or your hair
- 30) Laughing, giggling, whistling, humming, lip-smacking
- 31) Saying "you know," "like," "I guess," and "um."
- 32) Name-dropping or bragging or sounding like a know-it-all
- 33) Asking to use the bathroom
- 34) Being falsely or exaggeratedly modest
- 35) Shaking hands too weakly or firmly
- 36) Failing to make eye contact (or making continuous eye contact)
- 37) Taking a seat before your interviewer does
- 38) Becoming angry or defensive

- 39) Complaining that you were kept waiting
- 40) Complaining about anything
- 41) Speaking rudely to the receptionist
- 42) Letting your nervousness show
- 43) Overexplaining why you lost your last job
- 44) Being too familiar and jokey
- 45) Sounding desperate
- 46) Checking the time
- 47) Oversharing
- 48) Sounding rehearsed
- 49) Leaving your cell phone on
- 50) Failing to ask for the job

How do you decide that a job is right for you?

- Know your priorities. An advantage at one position may be a disadvantage at another. Most likely, no job will be completely perfect.
- Every job has positive and negative aspects. The goal is to find a position in which the positives outweigh the negatives and in which you can build on your strengths.
- Potential advantages: autonomy/sense of independence, support and respect of co-workers, teaching and research opportunities, faculty position opportunities/position at university medical center, diversity of position, flexibility, salary, benefits, and travel
- Potential disadvantages: limited growth or no advancement opportunities, isolated from other genetics professionals, poor education and travel opportunities, heavy workload, lack of respect from physicians, poor salary or benefits
- Other things to consider: specialty, location, clinic setting, team size, opportunities or requirements for activities not related to your main position (i.e. community outreach, leadership opportunities), if travel is required for the position and frequency/duration of travel, physical clinic amenities, what support staff is available, if you would be supervising GC students.

Interview Questions

An employer has no legal right to request information about age, sex, race, religion, marital status, health, physical appearance, or personal habits. If you are asked these questions, use your own judgment in deciding how to respond.

List of common interview questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What is your counseling “style”?
- What are your strongest skills and weaknesses? (Either pick a weakness that is actually a strength (i.e. workaholic, perfectionist) and then explain how you have worked to ensure that it is not a problem OR pick a true weakness that has improved over time.)
- Why should we hire you?
- Describe your work ethic.
- What are your short and long-term goals?
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- How do you handle criticism?
- Discuss a difficult case from your training? What did you learn from it?
How are you prepared to transition from a GC student to a GC professional?
What do you do when you make a mistake?
- Describe your ideal working environment or scope of practice.
- How do you handle difficulties with co-workers?
- What strategies do you use to solve problems?
- If you asked three people who know you well, what would they say about your character?
- Describe a decision you had to make based on your personal ethics.
- What have you done to earn your classmates’ or colleagues’ respect?
- How do you handle stress?
- Describe an instance when you needed to use creative-thinking skills.
- How do you get to know your co-workers better to improve teamwork and interpersonal relationships?
- What have you done to increase your cultural competence?
- Describe a case where your most important contribution was assisting an individual or family in solving a problem or making a decision.
- Do you have any questions for me? (Never say “no.”)

Questions to ask interviewers:

- What is the role of a GC in this position? Describe his/her typical day.
- What is the title of the position?
- Who would I be working with? Who would be my supervisor?
- Where would I work? Would I have my own office or share an office?
- May I tour the facilities?
- What would my hours be? Would I be compensated for overtime?
- Are any of my clinics/responsibilities located off-site?
- Who provides the support services, i.e. requesting records, scheduling patients, billing?
- Why are they looking to hire someone now? Is this a new position or replacement?
- What role does the organization play within the hospital or community?
- Do you anticipate any departmental changes in the next few years?
- What other resources are available on-site i.e. laboratories, libraries?
- Are there other potential opportunities for GCs? Outside activities, public speaking , continuing education, journal clubs, conferences, etc.?
- Is there a possibility of a faculty position?
- How is the position funded and how are raises determined (merit, cost of living, etc.)
- What are the benefits? Medical, dental, retirement, vacation/sick time, maternity leave, flexibility, reimbursement for professional activities (memberships, ABGC board exam, conferences, tuition, relocation expenses)? Of note: these may be better discussed after you received an offer or directly with the HR department.
- For clinical positions:
 - o How many patients would I be seeing per week?
 - o What types of clinics are we involved in?
 - o Are summary letters written?
 - o What is the referral system? What type of population do we see?
 - o What procedures/tests are done on-site, and which are done elsewhere?
 - o How is documentation done, or how are medical records kept (electronic medical record system or other)?

The Thank-You Note

Things to remember about the Thank-You Note:

- Only an estimated 5% of applicants send thank-you notes.
- Studies have confirmed that it increases your chances of being hired.

Tips for writing an effective note:

- Write soon (within 3 days).
- All letters should be personalized, never reproduced .
- Should reflect professionalism – sharp, concise, error-free.
- Do not exceed one page.
- In today's age, email thank-you notes are common and are as important as a hand-written note, however, a hand-written note may stand out more because they are so rare.

Things to include in the Thank-You Note:

- Thank the person you saw for their valuable time.
- Refer to some part of the conversation if possible.
- Express your enthusiasm about the position, department, and/or personnel.
- Reinforce your strengths and the reasons why you would be a good fit for the position.
- Present ideas that may have been overlooked in the interview.
- Refer to the next step... "I look forward to hearing from you," or "I look forward to meeting with you again."

The Negotiation

Congratulations... you have been offered a job! Now it is time to negotiate. Recognize that you will not get everything that you ask for during the negotiation. Therefore, pick your battles. Typically, a job offer may consist of job title, description, and responsibilities, salary, benefits, start date, and who you report to. Some of these elements may be negotiable, and others may not be negotiable, (especially if all employees receive the same benefits package).

How to Negotiate:

- Know your own definition of your role and your goals
- Understand your worth and know your bottom line
- Be prepared to state your “negotiables” and “non-negotiables”
- Ask for a written offer letter and/or contract before beginning any job

What to negotiate for:

- **Financial**
 - o Salary and raises (the NSGC Professional Status Survey is helpful for coming up with an appropriate salary amount; other GCs at the institution or in that city may be able to provide more specificity)
 - o Professional membership reimbursement
 - o Reimbursement for ABGC board certification and/or boards study courses
 - o Liability insurance (may be included under a supervising physicians’ policy)
 - o Benefits (health and life insurance, health and wellness programs, tuition reimbursement programs)
 - o Retirement plan
 - o Travel and meeting expenses
 - o Parking expenses
 - o Relocation expenses
- **Resources**
 - o Books
 - o Journal subscriptions
 - o Support staff
 - o Work space (own office, etc.)
 - o Job security/contract
 - o Computer and software needs
- **Time**
 - o Start date
 - o Training period
 - o Hours, including flex-time if it is important
 - o Vacation time

- **Responsibilities/growth**
 - Clear job description
 - Autonomy level
 - Opportunities to contribute to research and education
 - Title/faculty appointment or potential for supervisor role
 - Evaluation process
 - Academic and professional growth

More on Salaries:

- Some institutions would love to be able to pay you more, but there isn't a lot of room for negotiation.
 - There may be limitations in changing salaries due to union rules
 - The salaries of current GCs already at the institution may be a barrier; they won't hire you at a higher pay grade than more senior GCs.
- Use the NSGC Professional Status Survey
 - Can be used to look at how your current salary or salary offer compares to other genetic counselors with your same experience range/specialty/location, etc.
 - When looking at different factors or groups that you fall into, use the 50th percentile number (or higher) as the salary point that you take into consideration when figuring out your final salary target/request. However, don't be surprised when an employer suggests (rightly so) that your starting salary should be in the bottom percentile since you don't yet have GC experience.
 - Take into consideration that your salary and benefits go together in an offer: someone may have a higher salary but poorer benefits.
- Benefits for expenses may look different at different institutions
 - Some institutions may have rules for benefits for each individual expense (i.e. board exam, professional fees, relocation expense, conferences, etc.)
 - Other institutions may have a general "spending cap" for each employee (i.e. you get \$1500/year to do whatever you need with it)
 - Calculate how much you may spend in a year on conferences (registration fees, hotel, airfare), memberships (NSGC or other professional societies), board exam, certification maintenance fee (currently \$85/year)

Final Thoughts and Advice

- There are many ways to find open positions.
 - NSGC and ABGC send out emails from employers who have openings.
 - Joining a SIG allows you to find other GCs in your intended specialty who may know of open positions.
 - Job boards (GlassCeiling.com, Monster)
 - Network in-person at conferences, send an email to a GC who works in at an institution or in a city that you are interested in. Having a phone or in-person chat will allow them to share what they know about the local GC community; they may have insider information.
 - Creating a LinkedIn profile allows recruiters to find you.

- Network and conferences and other professional activities.
 - Exhibitors are oftentimes desperate for people to come and talk to them
 - Visit posters from genetic counselors in the area you want to work in
 - To start a conversation, considering opening with something like, “I’m interested in knowing more about your job/specialty/area that you work in.”

- Do not interview for jobs that you are not actually interested in, even if you want more practice.
 - It’s a small field, and reputation may get around. Interviewing candidates can be a significant time and cost investment for institutions (especially if they fly you in to interview). In other words, do not burn bridges or waste people’s time.

- Resources:
 - NSGC Professional Status Survey (comes out once every two years)
 - Webinar by MaryAnn Champion and Cindy Soliday (“Obtaining Your First Position”): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iWqBVQIS9s&feature=youtu.be>
 - Action Verbs for your CV, resume, or cover letter: <http://career.opcd.wfu.edu/files/2011/05/Action-Verbs-for-Resumes.pdf>
 - Positive personality adjectives: <https://jobmob.co.il/blog/positive-personality-adjectives/>