

Resources for First-Generation College Student Job Seekers

As a first-generation college student, you are likely to have a wealth of skills that employers value. These skills include being resourceful, navigating ambiguity, and being adaptable, amongst many others. There are also some common questions many first-generation college student job seekers often have. This page offers resources to help answer some of these questions. You can also [schedule an appointment](#) with a Career Advisor to seek support throughout your career exploration and job search process.

Building your Grad School and Industry-Specific Social Capital

Social capital is the social connections and links an individual or group has that enable them to work together towards common goals. From a professional standpoint, cultivating these relationships can lead to the sharing of knowledge, opportunities, and resources that can help guide you in navigating through complex academic and professional systems and environments that may be new to you.

The following information is intended to provide tips and resources for how you can expand and strengthen your college and field-specific social capital and therefore your professional networks and opportunities.

Networking Tips and Resources

Networking is the process of developing professional or social connections by interacting with others to exchange information. Some great people to network and build relationships with are faculty members, classmates, and outside professionals in your field of interest. This section

provides information and resources on effective ways you can make connections, from the initial greeting you extend to how to follow up and stay connected.

Who can I network with?

Faculty & Peers

Building strong relationships with university faculty and peers is a great way to build your connections. If you are a current student, being on time and attentive in class will give your professors a good first impression and show that you are dedicated to learning and a public health career. Additionally, showing up to office hours (even virtual ones!) or introducing yourself after class if in-person will help you stand out. You can also reach out to faculty whose background interests you to ask if you can set up a meeting to ask them some questions about their career journey, current research, and academic experiences. Once you've built a bit of rapport with your professor, it will be easier to ask them for career advice going forward.

In terms of your peers as a student, you will get to know classmates (whether virtual or in-person) through group projects and class discussions. Should you have the bandwidth and choose to get involved in [student activities](#) you will have additional opportunities to learn about people's academic and professional backgrounds. As you meet your peers, be intentional about making time for formal introductions. Make a habit of asking people about their work backgrounds and what brings them into a public health graduate program. Inquire about whether or not they've done any internships (and how they found them), held positions in the field, or if they are just starting out in their transition. In addition to learning about interesting roles people have held, you may meet people with insight into what application or interview processes are like for specific organizations or what kind of work specific job titles entail. Connecting with peers also gives you the chance to find a "job search buddy." This is someone

you make intentional plans with to check in on your job searches for accountability and ongoing motivation.

Past or current colleagues

Getting to know people around your place of work is a great networking technique. Being friendly and introducing yourself to people at your job is a great way to establish professional relationships. If working in person, mingling with people in the breakroom or attending office birthday or going away parties will allow you to talk with your colleagues more casually and in a light-hearted environment. This will help establish not only healthy working relationships, but will help build your professional network as you learn more about other's work and how you might be able to collaborate or support each other. If working in a virtual environment, you will have to be even more intentional about getting to know your colleagues. This could look like looking through the staff directory, looking colleagues up on LinkedIn, and reaching out to them to set up a phone or Zoom call to ask them some questions about their work and experiences.

Friends and family

Think through your existing network of friends and family. Is anyone working in or adjacent to the public health field? If not, have they ever mentioned knowing people who do? When asking friends and family about their network or for job search help, be specific with your request and what you hope to gain. Many family members or friends may want to help you out but might not be aware of what exactly it is that you need until you tell them. Being specific will help your friend or family member connect you to the right person if able, whether it be introducing you to an HR manager or for a more casual interaction like an [informational interview](#). If your existing connections end up not being able to share field-specific information or contacts, they can still provide valuable support in your job search. Sharing your weekly job search progress and goals

with someone close to you allows them to provide encouragement and accountability in moving your search forward, especially if you are balancing a lot.

LinkedIn

Having a LinkedIn profile is an important part of an individual's professional online presence and the network and job searching process. For a guide on how to create your profile, as well as how to take an existing profile to the next level, click [here](#). LinkedIn can also be used to find and reach out to people in roles or organizations of interest. For a step by step overview of how to use LinkedIn to connect to professionals of interest, check out the [Informational Interviewing How-To Guide](#).

How can I network?

Informational interviews:

Informational interviews are informal discussions that you can have with a professional to ask questions to learn about their work, current or past organization, and to garner tips and advice for your own career journey. They can be conducted virtually, over the phone, in-person in someone's office, or even over coffee. They can also be done on your own time, and are a great option if you are not able to make it out to live events due to your schedule. For guidance on how to conduct an informational interview and how they can be helpful, click [here](#).

Attending career or department events (virtual or in-person):

Attending career or departmental events is a great way to network with recruiters and other professionals in your field. There are a few tips you can take to help you navigate these events successfully. First, register early. Registering early will allow you to receive information about the event in the registration confirmation email such as who will be speaking and their role at the organization. This will allow you to better prepare by allowing you time to look up the speaker's

bio and craft questions relevant to their specific role. If the event is virtual, registering early will also help prevent any last minute technological hiccups and ensure you receive the virtual event log-in information on time. Make sure your technology is functioning correctly the night before to avoid any technical difficulties. If utilizing a desktop or phone app, such as Zoom, make sure your version is up to date. For both virtual and in-person events, make sure to dress professionally. If virtual, make sure your background area is clean and organized, and avoid areas that are noisy or contain distractions where possible.

Additionally, prepare your resume in case it is asked for or you have the opportunity to share it after the event. Tailoring your resume with buzzwords you see on the organization's website and position descriptions will catch recruiters' attention. Next, practice your introduction or "elevator pitch" and tailor the skills and experiences you share in it to those that are relevant for the organization or department you are meeting with (see below for a review of what an Elevator Pitch is and best practices for crafting yours).

Lastly, prepare to follow-up. Since employer information sessions usually occur in group settings rather than in a 1:1 format, asking the presenter what the best way is to follow-up if you have additional questions will open the door for further communication. Follow-up within 24 hours of the event via email, to thank the recruiter again for their time. Provide a brief summary of who you are and any discussion you may have been able to have with them at the event, and how you hope to stay in touch. If you have additional questions that would benefit from a follow-up discussion, you can ask the recruiter if you can arrange a time to speak with them 1:1. This will allow you to ask the questions you have prepared that you may not have had the chance to ask at the event, and will help you build a more direct relationship with the recruiter. Additionally, attach your resume to the email for the recruiter's convenience.

Creating Your Introduction or “Elevator Pitch”

What is it and what might it sound like?

For any event or networking session, you should have a brief “introduction” prepared showcasing your academic and professional background, what you are doing now, and what you are looking for or hoping to gain from the interaction. This is called an elevator pitch. It is used to share your background and qualifications with new connections in a brief and compelling way. When crafting your pitch, keep it short enough where you would be able to present it to someone during a brief elevator ride - hence the name! You do not need to recite your entire work history or even everything that is on your resume. It should just be a short synopsis of your career experience and goals that will persuade the listener to want to learn more about you, your organization, or idea. An elevator pitch can also be used to answer the ever popular question asked at the start of most job interviews: “Tell me about yourself.” An elevator pitch should be adjusted depending on the context in which you are using it. An effective elevator pitch at a career fair or employer information session might sound something like this:

“Good afternoon {name}. My name is Lydia , I’m a recent graduate from the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy where I earned my Master of Science in Population Health Informatics. My current interests involve using health informatics to create programs that reduce health inequalities in under-resourced communities. I have experience using my analytical skills and forward thinking lens to advance design and implementation of multi-domain health data applications. I’m currently exploring my career options and would like to know more about your work in this area and potentially where my skills and experience might fit in at your organization.”

Elevator Pitch Best Practices

Lead your pitch with a positive tone. If you are in a position you are not happy in, have had negative work experiences, or there are particular things you are hoping not to do in your next position, save that for later in the conversation if it happens to come up once you have built some rapport.

Additionally, pace yourself when you speak and try to stick to just the key points you wish to share. An elevator pitch is typically 30 seconds to two minutes in length depending on the context. For example, if you have a person's 1:1 attention, your elevator pitch can be slightly longer. If you are introducing yourself in a group setting, veer towards a shorter introduction. Storytelling can be saved for later in the conversation if time allows. It is important that the content and the way it is delivered is clear. Avoiding speaking for too long or speaking too fast will make it easier for your audience to digest what you are saying and give them an opportunity to ask questions or probe for more information.

Finally, aim to sound conversational. Reciting your pitch word for word from memory can lead to a monotone or robotic outcome. Remember that the pitch should flow naturally, just like any other part of a conversation. Start by jotting down the key points you wish to include. Do not write out whole sentences which might be tempting to memorize. Instead, write out short phrases that will help you remember your key points. Next, practicing in front of a mirror, with a friend, or just reciting it back to yourself will give you a better idea of how to pace yourself, what to include and what not to include. It likely will come out a little differently each time, and that's ok! The more you practice, the more natural it will become.

How Often Should I be Networking?

There is no solid rule for how often you *should* be networking. However, building this outreach into your month or week as an ongoing practice can be a good way to build a solid network of connections over time. Additionally, focusing on reaching out to a few people at a time can be a good way of managing your networking so that the task only takes a couple of minutes of your day, rather than reaching out to 10 people at once and becoming overwhelmed. This will make the whole process seem more manageable and less daunting.

For more tips on using LinkedIn as a networking tool, check out our LinkedIn Guide [here!](#)

For more details on conducting informational interviews, check out our Informational Interviewing Guide [here](#).