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## **Unlocking Library Search Committees at ARL Public Universities: Techniques and Best Practices for Getting Hired**

### **Abstract:**

#### **Purpose**

Whether a recent librarian graduate, a seasoned librarian seeking a different academic institution, or a librarian transitioning into academia from a different library environment, an understanding how search committees function and the importance they contribute to identifying the best candidate can be beneficial to any job seeker.

#### **Design/Method/Approach**

This paper offers universal best practices, techniques, and “keys” to unlocking the secrets of the recruitment process from the candidate’s perspective to help librarians seeking employment in an Association of Research Libraries (ARLs) public university environment. The scope of this paper is for entry level and mid-range librarians, but some ARL’s do use executive search firms for upper level administrative positions.

#### **Findings**

This article describes the search process, offers insiders’ perspectives and provides techniques along with best practices on how to be a successful applicant and candidate.

#### **Practical Implications**

As experienced professionals who have served on search committees, this article explains the “keys” to best practices and how to enhance one’s resume and curriculum vita.

#### **Originality/Value**

This article walks potential job candidates through the process of how to apply and what to expect during an ARL Library Search Committee application review.

#### **Keywords:**

search committees, academic libraries, employment, hiring practices, job seeking, negotiating

# Unlocking Library Search Committees at ARL Public Universities: Techniques and Best Practices for Getting Hired

## Introduction and Literature Review

Applying for academic librarianship positions can be challenging. In a study analyzing job advertisements posted to the *American Libraries Association Joblist*, Yang et al. (2016) found that 62% of the jobs posted from 2009 to 2014 were positions originating in academic and college libraries. After a position is posted and accumulates applicants by the submission deadline, the job advertisement is closed, and the applications are ready for review.

Academic search committees are usually made up of several librarians and library personnel from the hiring institution. A search committee should be composed of employees who work cooperatively and effectively at a committee level, representative of several units and employee classifications within the library, and library personnel who will be willing to work during off hours to escort candidates (Birdsall, 1991). Just as academic libraries can vary in scope, mission, and audience, so do the search committees appointed to assist with an institution's recruitment and hiring process. The makeup of the committee, length of service, and responsibilities can vary across institutions. Search committees may also include non-library stakeholders to provide subject specialty perspectives (e.g., geology professor for a geology librarian position) or members of groups that the candidate might regularly interact with as part of the job duties (e.g., graduate student representative).

The objective of search committees is to review hundreds of applicants and reduce the applicant pool to three or four potentially desirable candidates for the open position. Interview questions and presentation topics are generally designed by the search committee to ensure consistent experiences amongst candidates. Interview questions may cover the candidate's strengths, weaknesses, in addition to how they have dealt with professional challenges and problem-solving in their current or previous workplace (McKay, 2006). In addition to reviewing the candidates, the search committee makes a recommendation to upper administration about which candidates to bring in for on-site interviews and the top finalists for the position.

When pursuing a position in academic librarianship, candidates should familiarize themselves with the several types of appointments offered, such as contract, continuing, and tenure track. Contract appointments are for set amounts of time and may or may not be renewed after expiration. Continuing appointments are more permanent with regular check-ins and potential reappointments on regular intervals. Tenure track appointments typically have similar requirements as academic faculty positions, including instruction, research, and service (Davis, 2015). When new or seasoned librarians pursue this

career path, they may find they need expertise in instruction, information technology, classification and organization, and customer service (Bradshaw, 2015).

When libraries post positions to be filled, they may be recycling an old job description or slightly revising a former position. Lo (2014) states, “libraries search for candidates to fill that specific position. The mindset is to focus on the present needs” (pg. 2). Candidates generally need to tailor their application materials specifically for each academic librarian position. In a survey of entry level academic librarians, Reed, Carroll, and Jahre (2015) found that respondents created a new cover letter for each position or modified parts of existing application letters to reflect each open position. Tailoring for each position, although time consuming, can give the candidate an edge when describing their qualifications and contributions. Candidates who fail to address the required qualifications for the position in their cover letters or Curriculum Vitae (CV) are in danger of being removed early from the search process (Alexander, Dowdy, & Parente, 2009). Thoroughly reading the position description and commenting on all its requirements will demonstrate the candidate’s understanding and experience that align with the organization’s needs and expectations.

Candidates should not omit information that may seem trivial but demonstrates how their experience complements the sought-after position. Flynn (2011) states, “Sell yourself.” If practicums, internships, or any transferrable skills (i.e., examples of customer service, communication, leadership, and team work) can be highlighted, the candidate should use them to their advantage. If working as a paraprofessional in a library, candidates should seek out professional opportunities that will distinguish them from other applicants. Houston (2016) states, “My library has had several staff members working on their MLS degrees who have been able to assist in teaching or work on innovative projects that are outside the scope of their job descriptions. It’s a win-win situation, helping the library to move forward on key initiatives while allowing the employees to gain valuable experience” (p. 258). Even if a candidate has not worked as a librarian but has had previous library experience, it should be highlighted to match these skills with the required and desired qualifications on the position announcement. Bolstering job applications with internships, part-time work, or volunteer work in a library during the job hunt will allow candidates to show engagement and participation in professional development activities (Davis, 2015).

For entry-level professional librarian positions experiences related to the desired position and/or any experience in any type of library are considered “very important” during the candidate pool review process (Hodge & Spoor, 2011). In a cohort study of incoming librarians, Reed et al. (2015) discovered that more than half of their respondents were advised to seek out practical experience if pursuing academic librarianship. When a candidate describes their experience, “merest mentions” of job qualifications can get candidates through the first round of review by search committees. The candidates in these cases merely mention the job qualification and have some understanding, training, education, or experience of it. Howze (2008) observed in his study of 125 candidate applications at a Midwestern university library

that this technique dismissed only five applicants from the candidate pool, leaving 120 in the second round for review.

Academic librarian positions do not just list expected experience or practical activities. Many positions list soft skills and behavioral traits to holistically seek the perfect candidate. Soft skills have gained priority over the years as academic librarians thrive on relationships with faculty, students, and administration. Although these skills are hard to define, generally employers seek individuals with past knowledge and experience that influence an individual's skill set (Matteson, Anderson, & Boyden, 2016). Gerolimos and Konsta (2008) analyzed 200 librarian job advertisements from the UK, Canada, Australia, and the USA in 2006 and 2007. They found that communication skills were listed in 65% of the advertisements, including personal traits, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. With emerging technologies and the rapidly changing pace of library science, the ability to adapt and remain flexible is essential to excelling in the library environment. Librarians are expected to acquire new skills on demand, but utilizing existing skills to adapt or transfer to new challenges is becoming more expected in the changing work environment (Ashcroft, 2008). In a study evaluating 71 job advertisements pertaining to academic library employment in South Africa, Raju (2014) found that after reviewing literature from the USA, UK, and Australia, position descriptions consistently cited generic or transferrable skills as required qualifications. Librarians are constantly changing to meet the users' needs, even in a reactionary mode, staying attentive to change during a transformative time in the profession (Goetsch, 2008).

Once a candidate goes through the first round of the application process and is selected to continue, the next phase tends to be a phone or video interview. At this stage, showing interest and enthusiasm for the position is key. Candidates are expected to ask questions and demonstrate some knowledge of the organization. These questions may be clarification about the job duties, work environment, or the length or permanency of an appointment (Hlava, 2016). "Wooing them" can show enthusiasm, but each candidate needs to do their homework on the institution and for role they are applying. Candidates showing that they did research and understand the basics of the position demonstrate sincere interest in joining an organization (Brammar, 2016). Being prepared for the initial phone or video interview can potentially get a candidate to the final round.

If the candidate is successful and clears the second round of review, they are then invited to campus for an on-site interview. Applicants should "commit" to the search process and be fully engaged when preparing for an in-person interview (Houston, 2016). Reviewing the position description as well as the library's website and addressing the presentation topic are essential to standing out. Knowing basic information about the organization can be useful in tailoring and enhancing the final stages of the interview process. Many universities are looking for the candidate who will be a "good fit." Likewise, candidates are searching for this as well. Consideration of the person-organization fit is a primary influence when institutions are recruiting and identifying the best hire (Schneider, 1987; Lindholm, 2003). Wang and Guarria (2009) found through a survey of 242 library search committee respondents that 60%

of the participants felt “potential fit” into the department was important. Search committees are now taking into consideration, past the words on a curriculum vita or resume, if a candidate will truly be a "good fit" for the organization.

### **Application Materials: All About the Candidate**

The job seeking process can be time-consuming and stressful. Tailoring a cover letter to the position announcement can be challenging. The applicant should ensure each qualification of the position description is addressed. Some institutions prefer brevity so a one to two-page cover letter will be sufficient while others may entertain multi-page cover letters for senior-level positions. Candidates should identify why a position description would be of interest when compared to any other job. Above all, the applicant's cover letter should emphasize his or her fitness for this position.

#### **Key #1:** There is a distinction between *required* and *desired* qualifications

Job announcements may separate out qualifications based on whether they are required or desired. Required qualifications are non-negotiable. At some institutions, when a position calls for an MLS degree, it means all applicants may need to have it by the time the job announcement closes or it may mean the finalist must have completed the degree by the desired start date. If the posting closes in April and an applicant indicates an anticipated August graduation, the committee may reject the application because the MLS degree is required and not yet obtained. Similarly, if a job announcement requires a specific subject expertise or knowledge (e.g. architecture) and the applicant never had related experience, the committee will not move the application forward in the process.

Desired qualifications are more flexible and the committee can use their discretion to determine if experience and skills match enough to move the application to the next hiring phase. If, for example, the announcement mentions that a PhD in architecture is a *desired* qualification and you do not have the PhD, the committee may still move forward with your application. Search committees can use the next phase of the interview to **focus** in on your actual experience to determine if you are a viable candidate.

The cover letter is an opportunity to showcase experience along with your skill set. It is important to include relevant librarianship and project experience. This includes previous job titles, types of library environments, and levels of responsibility. You should explicitly note any supervision, budgeting, or managing experiences. The search committee will be looking at educational background, including continuing education workshops, training, certificates, and any unique technology or software skills. Soft skills can cover a wide range of abilities such as flexibility and adaptability. Institutions are often seeking candidates who show effectiveness as an individual and as a team player. Additionally, there is a need for an ability to engage with customers and diverse clientele.

Many academic institutions may be interested in scholarly activity that includes publications and presentations. Any peer-review articles that substantiate your writing and research abilities should be

noted. Additionally, reports, book reviews, popular magazine articles, grant writing, and blog contributions could be viewed favorably. While many universities may place a preference on presentations at the national level, they will take into consideration your experience preparing and conducting presentations at the local, regional, and state level. Solo presentations are a good way to demonstrate subject expertise and contributions to the field of librarianship. Panel discussions, roundtables, and poster sessions are also indicators of impact in the field.

Service typically means work for such organizations as university, library, professional, or community organizations. Examples of service could be serving as a committee member, search committee chair, or working group facilitator. Note any professional organization involvement such as membership, committee membership, and appointed or elected positions.

Candidates are often required to submit a resume or curriculum vita (CV) in their application materials. A CV should provide details about your work history and accomplishments, projects, internships, volunteer experience, and coursework relevant to the advertised position. Your career level helps to determine the type of information to include. If you are a seasoned professional, you may wish to omit work which is not directly related to the position requirements, such as non-library jobs or library-student position. However, if you are a new graduate, you may want to include these types of experiences to illustrate you have held a job before or have previous library experience.

The final component of the application materials is often a list of names to serve as personal and professional references who will speak to your qualifications. Selection of references should include professional colleagues who have worked with you on projects, work assignments, or in teams. Identifying supervisors who worked well with you is customary and likely requested if not provided in your initial list. Librarians transitioning into academia from other library environments should identify a client or community stakeholder who can speak to organizational value or contributions to their non-library project. Notify your references to expect a call while you are job searching and email your updated cover letter and vita/resume to your references to keep them abreast of your accomplishments. Do not list a reference if you have lost touch because they may not be able to vouch for your experience. Above all, select references who will speak favorably of you.

**Key #2:** Research the institution and incorporate related information into your application materials

Institutions typically want to know why you applied with them instead of another institution. The search committee often looks for information about their institution in your cover letter. When writing the cover letter, relate how your experience would benefit the hiring institution. Actively investigate the library's website to discover information about the organizational structure, initiatives, and committees. Review strategic plans to determine if the initiatives complement your work experience. If you are considering a tenure-track librarian position, find out about the tenure process, timelines, and requirements.

Search committees realize that candidates may create a template cover letter as a timesaving measure. Using such a template works well only when you modify it to address the position announcement. Search committees have received cover letters that mention by name a different institution, which sends the message the candidate is using mass marketing techniques and not interested in their specific institution, and also reflects a poor attention to detail. Proofread your resume and cover letter closely before you submit your application materials.

### Application Materials Evaluation: Comparing Candidates

Cover letters and CVs are important application materials that help the search committee determine which applicants have met the minimum qualifications of the job announcement. The success of an application throughout the process is determined by the information included in the cover letter and CV. Search committees refrain from making jumps in logic or filling in the blanks when reviewing application materials. Search committees make their determinations based on the information provided. If you do not discuss your qualifications, your application may not move to the next hiring phase. Some search committees may use a rubric to establish ratings to help distinguish the required and desired qualifications of the candidates (See figure 1).

Librarian Extraordinaire / Fantastic Academic Library											
Candidate	Required Qualifications:				Max 12	Desired Qualifications:				Max 12	Total Max 24
	An ALA-accredited MLS or MLIS degree	Experience in a library serving a design discipline	Knowledge of col. dev.practices & information resources, both print and digital, in design disciplines	Familiarity with digital & traditional research methods & scholarship in design disciplines		Experience in an academic or special library	Experience with digital architecture and design research tools and approaches	Exp. providing instruct. in library res. and research methods	Superv exp		
A	2	2	2	2	8	3	2	3	3	11	19
B	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3	3
C	1	1	1	1	4	2	2	2	2	8	12
D	2	2	2	2	8	3	3	3	3	12	20
E	1	2	1	1	5	3	1	3	0	7	12
F	3	3	3	3	12	3	3	3	3	12	24
G	2	2	2	2	8	2	2	3	0	7	15
<b>Scoring Guidelines</b>		<b>Skype Interviews</b>									
0 = No experience		Candidate F									
1 = minimal experience		Candidate D									
2 = moderate experience		Candidate A									
3 = extensive experience											

Figure 1: Highest ranked qualifications determine invitation to the next hiring phase

The sample rubric mirrors the job announcement qualifications (see Figure 1) and provides scoring guidelines the search committee will use to assign a numerical value to the candidates' application materials. Search committee members will review every candidate's materials and assign a numerical value per candidate. The individual score sheets from each committee member are then combined and a final numerical score is recorded for each candidate. The search committee then discusses the merits of

the candidates and determines which ones they wish to retain in the applicant pool. Not every search committee uses a formal rubric, but they will employ some type of candidate assessment.

**Key #3:** Qualifications and library terminology should mirror the job announcement

Search committees will scrutinize application materials so emphasize the skills and experience you possess instead of focusing on the skills or experience you may lack. Search committees are keen observers when reviewing application materials, and they will identify your areas of strengths and weaknesses. If you are lacking a qualification, point to similar work or experience from a different environment to show the potential for skill transfer opportunities. Depending upon the institution, they may or may not waiver on any required qualification even you have provided examples of comparable skills and experience.

**Key #4:** Search committees can easily research you for additional information

The library world is well connected and mobile so do not be surprised if someone already knows who you are at the hiring institution. Make sure your online information is up to date and professional because committee members may surf the web to find your virtual presence. Keep in mind that you can also research key stakeholders at the hiring institutions to find more about the supervisor and colleagues you will be routinely working with upon hire.

**First-Round Screening Interviews: Surviving the First Cut**

After all the application materials have been reviewed by the members of the search committee, candidates regarded as the best fit for the position will receive an invitation to participate in a screening interview. Such interviews are often a traditional telephone call, but video technology (e.g., Skype) is becoming more prevalent. Most search committees will have prepared a list of questions to be asked of all candidates. At many institutions, the interview process is exactly the same for all applicants to ensure fair treatment. The search committee will be using questions to gather additional information from you that may not have been included in your application materials. Schedule a time and place for your screening interview in a quiet place, with no background noise or distracting objects behind you if doing a video interview. Ensure that your connection is clear and the search committee can hear you. Have a contact number in case you are disconnected.

As you prepare for the screening interview, practice answers to anticipated questions. Dress professionally if interviewing via video and practice using the video technology. An interview is not the first time you want to try using technology that is unfamiliar to you. Camera angle, lighting, and location can affect the success of the interview. Pay careful attention to questions asked as they will provide a window into the organization's culture and initiatives. As with almost any interview, there will be an opportunity following the committee questions for the candidates to ask questions. For some institutions,



the questions you ask during a telephone or in-person interview may be even more important than your answers to the search committee questions. Your inquiries will also help you make a more informed decision should you be invited to an on-campus interview.

**Key #5: Listen for Clues! Ask Questions!**

During the screening interview, listen for clues about the institution and its culture. Recurring themes or issues could provide insight into how the institution works and where it places value. Identify any additional layers of responsibilities such as tenure, staff supervision, or facility oversight. Listen for local library terminology and incorporate it into your responses so you do not sound like an outsider. Most importantly, asking questions is an opportunity to show you have researched the institution (e.g., Key #2) and that you are enthusiastic and eager to be part of the team.

The search committee evaluates the screening interviews and determines which candidates will receive an invitation to campus for an in-person interview. Searches are time-consuming and expensive so the search committee is seeking a candidate who is the best fit at their institution. Institutions often select two to four candidates to participate in on-campus interviews.

**Campus Visit: In-person Interview**

An individual invited to campus is one of only a few people who have made it to this stage in the interview process. This invitation should help build confidence in the applicant. Once they have made it to this stage, the likelihood of getting an offer is closer. Search committees invite only those who might be a successful candidate and future colleague. This interview phase intensifies the scrutiny of the applicant's experience and skills so it is in the best interest of the candidate to be well prepared. At ARL institutions, candidates should expect at least one full day of interview, which will likely include meals, meetings, and usually a presentation (see Figure 2). Other types of libraries may prefer an abbreviated schedule and choose to use a multi-day schedule for only highly placed positions. While executive search firms can be used in a variety of environments, this process is less common within academic librarianship recruitment.

When candidates are invited for an on-campus interview, their preparations should begin immediately. In most cases, the candidate will be contacted by an individual who is responsible for coordinating the logistics of the visit. It is a good idea for the candidate to build a friendly rapport with this person and ask such questions about the process as how long will the interview last? Who will you meet with during the interview? If an individual or group of people in the provided meeting schedule seems odd, ask why that group is part of the process or what the angle of that portion of the interview may be. Ask for an organizational chart to better understand where others fit within the organization and in relation to the open position. If travel is involved, ask what expenses might be reimbursed or what is the parking situation? Ask how long should the presentation last? If it is a tenure granting institution, ask to be sent

information about or a link to the tenure policy. The more the you understand ahead of the visit, the more confident you will feel.

<b>Librarian Extraordinaire Search</b>	
<b>Sunday</b>	Dinner with Search Committee member, Faculty Librarian colleague and Associate Director A
6:00pm	
7:30pm	Library and Campus Tour
<b>Monday</b>	
8:15am	Meet with AD Supervisor
8:30am	Meet with Library Director and AD Supervisor
9:00am	Break and meet with Admin. Assistant to prepare for presentation
9:30am	Presentation <b>Topic:</b> <i>What is the place of a Design/Planning Library in the 21st century: what challenges would an engaged librarian face in serving the needs of the architecture, landscape architecture and city planning disciplines?</i>
10:15am	Break
10:30am	Meet with Search Committee members
11:30am	Lunch with colleague 1, colleague 2 and colleague 3
1:00pm	Meet with HR Director
1:15pm	Break
1:30pm	Meet with Committee on Appointment Promotion and Tenure & Committee on Faculty Benefits, Responsibilities and Research
2:00pm	Meet with Key Constituents including faculty and Subject Librarians
3:00pm	Meet with direct reports
3:30pm	Meet with AD Supervisor
4:30pm	Candidate leaves

**Figure 2:** Typical on-campus interview schedule

Candidates should have already done preliminary research on the library as part of the application process. Now that there will be a campus visit and an opportunity to meet potential future colleagues, it is time to dig deeper into the organization. This exercise will also help you to develop questions for various individuals and groups who may be part of the interview process. Prepare one or two questions to have ready for informal conversations (how long have you lived here? What do you like best about working for the library/university?) and two to five questions for every scheduled meeting. Familiarize yourself with the library strategic plan and the university strategic plan and be able to demonstrate how you can contribute to the organizational goals at every level.

Come to the interview with some questions prepared for each group you are scheduled to meet. Research who is included in the schedule, what they do, and how this position might interact with them (if it isn't clear, make note of it to ask during the interview). Identify key colleagues you would work closely with on a daily basis. Learn as much as you can about the specific department and supervisor to whom this position would report. Review the position announcement and description and try to imagine yourself in this role and what you will bring to it and your potential future colleagues. It is a good idea to prepare a

one-minute self-introduction to be used throughout the interview sessions as you meet new groups of people and to help them see you in this role.

If traveling to the interview, allow enough time to be well rested before the interview officially starts. If something goes wrong in transit and, for example, your luggage with your interview clothes is lost, be honest and upfront about the situation. Handling this type of stress with finesse, grace, and flexibility likely demonstrates those soft skills your future colleagues seek. It is also a good idea to stay well hydrated as you will be talking most of the day. If breakfast is not part of the interview day, give yourself time to eat something before the hectic day begins. The interview schedule will be demanding on your brain and your body so prepare and pace yourself.

#### **Key #6: Every Minute Counts!**

Once a candidate arrives on campus (or is picked up from the hotel or the airport), everything said and done is fodder for evaluation. Everyone the candidate meets during the interview experience is important, especially those informal moments before or after meetings. Most institutions will collect feedback and evaluations from everyone and anyone who meets the candidate while on campus. The candidate's focus should stay on the people they are with at the moment. Remember that you are also evaluating a potential new employer and colleagues so pay attention to everything they say and do. You want to be certain that this is the organization you would like to work with to further your professional goals and help them to achieve their organizational priorities. Most ARL academic libraries hold day-long interviews with multiple meetings, forums, and meals throughout the visit. One-on-one and small group meetings are the best opportunity to understand the organizational culture and priorities.

While a potential new employer cannot legally ask any questions that reveal the candidate's age, race, national origin, gender, religion, marital status, or sexual orientation, many of the people involved in interviewing are not from human resources and sometimes their genuine curiosity takes over. Sharing personal information is an effective way to see if you would be a "good fit"; just remember to filter. It is appropriate for you to ask or share anything you wish from information about your children to how much you love to sing in church, but be careful not to overshare. Imagine the potential effect of the piece of information you are about to disclose. When asked a potentially illegal question, it is usually best to pivot politely and, if possible, turn the answer into something that reflects the position qualifications and skills. Try to determine why the person is asking that specific question. Is it genuine human curiosity or a based on a concern related to your ability to perform the duties of the position. For example, while being interviewed, one of the authors was asked by a friendly library staff member about what church she attended, and she replied, "I'm sure I'll be able to find an appropriate place of worship if I were to come here." The staff member seemed excited by the prospect and then invited her to attend her church sometime in the future. If she had gotten the sense that the question was related to a concern the interviewer had, she could have replied, "Please don't worry; my faith will not interfere with my ability to

perform this job. I have no concern about providing reference services on the schedule you need if that is what you are asking.” When the candidate is unsure of the interviewer's motive or how to pivot, they should ask the interviewer to clarify how this question relates to the position.

Often a member or two of the search team will be present at every meeting throughout the interview. Do not worry about these individuals hearing the same answer to the same question throughout the day. When asked the same question, simply find a way to improve or expand your answer or tailor it to the group or individual who asked. Additionally, repetition is a clue to knowledge, skills, or experiences that are important to various segments of the library or university.

The one interview feature event that will likely bring the candidate into contact with the largest number of library and university employees is the presentation. Most universities use this as an open session for anyone from the library or university to come and ask the candidate anything relating to the position—which may or may not relate to the presentation. The presentation is your opportunity to showcase your skills, demonstrate your expertise in the field, and provide examples of your previous work that is applicable to the sought-after position. Most often, each candidate is provided a presentation topic—sometimes incredibly specific, other times intentionally broad. Either way, the topic was given for a reason related to the position responsibilities and is used as a method to compare candidates on similar criteria. If you do not understand the topic or need more information, it is okay to ask clarifying questions when the topic is provided. Make certain all talking points are relevant and on topic. Depending on the institution, the expectation may be for the presentation to last anywhere from ten to 30 minutes. If you are not told how long you should speak, ask the search committee or human resources department contact person for guidance. Talking longer than expected or significantly shorter can negatively impact your candidacy. In general, the search committee has the candidate present to learn the following:

1. Can the candidate logically put together thoughts and ideas into a presentation?
2. Can the candidate present to a group of people with a level of confidence (which could be anywhere from four to 100 attendees)?
3. Does the candidate demonstrate expertise in the field, knowledge of trends, etc.?
4. Does the candidate provide some examples of previous work that is applicable to the position and demonstrates related skills?
5. Does the candidate give credit where credit is due? (Cite your sources)
6. Did the candidate do research on our organization (tailored presentation to the library/university)?

When selecting presentation software such as PowerPoint or Prezi, make sure to be fully comfortable with the tool and that you have designed it to complement your presentation. For example, moving gifs are interesting, but if the slide has constant movement, it will distract from the presenter (this is not desirable in this setting); if using a new application for audience participation, **be familiar with it** inside and out and have a good reason for selecting it over another tool as it is likely that someone will ask that

question immediately following the presentation. If you have a technical difficulty, admit it, demonstrate grace under pressure, and move on with your talk.

Practice your presentation in front of friends and colleagues before arriving for the interview. The more familiar you are with what you plan to say, the easier it is to avoid using filler words and noises like "um," "like," and "ah." Being familiar with the presentation means you will not need to read and, therefore, it will also be easier to make eye contact with the audience. If possible, move around the room, unless you are requested to remain in a specific location (e.g. podium) or if a wireless microphone is unavailable for you to use. Following the presentation, the floor will be opened for questions. Many times, the questions will have little to do with what was just presented and may be related to the candidate's interest in, background, or ability to perform the position responsibilities. When asked questions after the presentation, repeat them so that everyone in the room can hear what was asked. This tactic will also give you an opportunity to ensure you heard the question correctly and to collect your thoughts for the best answer. There are times when attendees will fill up all the time asking questions; however, sometimes the attendees are shy or quiet. If this happens it provides a chance to ask them questions. This may also be your only opportunity to interact with a good cross-section of library employees, consequently, if given the chance use this time to ask the group about the organizational culture—what do you like about working here, what do you think it takes to be successful in this organization, etc.

The interview will likely include both lunch and dinner. Remember, if breakfast, lunch, or dinner is part of the schedule of activities with someone from the potential office, it is part of the formal interview, no matter how informal it may feel. Keep two thoughts in mind when eating or drinking during an interview setting. The first is to keep it simple and order or select food that is easy to eat and is least likely to end up on your attire. The second is moderation. If your host orders alcohol and asks if you would like a drink, it is not a trick. You may also imbibe, but you should not feel pressured to do so. If you choose to drink alcohol, limit yourself to one glass. If no one orders a beer or cocktail, it is advisable to stick to non-alcoholic beverages.

Throughout the interview day, make certain to highlight your soft skills to show how they will help on the job. Additionally, for recent graduates or those coming from other work environments, it is important to think of all the experience gained from course work, projects, and internships and share how you would apply those experiences to the potential job. Finally, if you are transitioning careers or changing jobs, clearly explain why you're looking for a change. Even if you are leaving a job because it is a bad work environment, be able to put a positive spin on it.

### **Receiving an Offer: Expectations and Negotiations**

Following the on-campus interviews, the search team will meet to review the feedback from colleagues and references and then formulate a recommendation for the library dean or director. If you are contacted

about the position, ask yourself if you really want this position, at this institution, in this town. If no, thank the committee for the opportunity and let them know you have decided to withdraw your name from consideration. If yes, then listen to the entire offer and make sure you understand everything included and write it down. Let them know you are interested in this position. Ask any additional questions you may have about the position, institution, or benefits, and request some time to consider the opportunity. Always ask if the offer is negotiable. The institution expects that you will want to negotiate the initial offer but will not share that information unless asked directly. In most cases you do not need to provide an answer immediately if you will accept the initial offer or not. Depending on the desired timeline for the start date of the position, you can ask for a day up to a week to consider the offer. Plan to speak again after you have had time to consider.

**Key #7:** We expect you to negotiate our initial offer

Remember that salary is only one aspect of compensation. Think about the entire package, e.g., salary, benefits, reimbursement of moving expenses, professional development funds, new computer, collection funds, or tuition waivers or discounts. To aid your decision look for data on average salaries for this type of position, at this type of library, in this region of the country, and the potential cost of relocation. Is the initial offer reasonable and acceptable in terms of your experience and related market value? If the answer is "yes," then all you need to do is accept the offer and confirm your start date. If the answer is "no" or "yes, but I'd be much more satisfied with something more," then prepare a justification based on what you bring to the organization and your reasoning for requesting more, such as experience in a specific area, additional related advanced degree, or skillset that was desired that you bring above and beyond the minimum qualifications. This is also the time when you will specify exactly what you would like in terms of compensation, such as a flexible work schedule, additional professional development funds, a later start date, or more in your base salary. As McMahon advises, "Be clear. Know exactly what you want and why you're worth it, and be prepared to express both clearly" (McMahon, 2002). You may want to write these reasons down and practice what you intend to say so that you can make your statement with confidence and make certain you do not lose track of anything when you negotiate with the representative. It helps to remember that you both want the same thing; you in this position, you are only discussing terms related to your shared desired outcome.

At this stage, you are the candidate of choice; asking for a little more will not make the organization change their mind. Before resuming negotiations, know what your deal breakers are. For example, if the organization cannot negotiate a higher salary but can provide some additional professional development funds for a year or two or increase the reimbursement of your relocation expenses, would that suffice? There are sometimes budget constraints that impact the organization's ability to offer any additional compensation. When this is the case, they will let you know. It is important to remain flexible and suggest alternatives in these negotiations, especially if this is truly the job you want.

## Conclusions

As candidates navigate the search committee process, the recruiting institution wants the candidates to be successful. Seeking a candidate who will be the “best fit” is essential to the library’s time and commitment they’ve put into reviewing applicants. Doing research at every stage of the application process will assist job seekers in gaining knowledge and relating to the institution’s primary goals in recruiting for the potential position. If selected for interviews, the candidate needs to prepare questions to demonstrate genuine interest about the position and hiring department. Candidates need to remember that the search process is time consuming and can take several months. Institutions often allot several weeks or months to coordinate schedules for in-person interviews.

The following “keys” were gathered by the authors from their experience on academic search committees. The following strategies will help you highlight your potential when applying for a job:

- *Know why you want this job (not just any job) and be able to explain why you are the best fit*
- *Give examples of your current or previous work*
- *If transitioning to a new library environment, connect the dots to link previous work to current position responsibilities*
- *Proofread your resume and cover letter closely; grammatical errors can get your application declined*
- *Do your homework about the institution, potential colleagues, and the position*
- *Ask questions of everyone you meet. A lack of questions signals you aren’t that interested in the institution*
- *Rehearse for a phone or in-person interview, especially for a presentation*
- *Be friendly and polite to everyone you meet*
- *Always ask if the offer is negotiable and then ask for more*

If you find that you are not successful in your search after numerous applications, Walker (2011) attests it is time to review your strategies and materials. Asking someone for help, such as a mentor or colleague, may be useful in changing or enhancing your application materials. She states, “There may be nothing at all wrong with your materials—there may just be other candidates who are better qualified or who appear to fit the organization’s needs more closely. But it’s definitely a good idea to ask for input” (p. 42).

Institutions may get hundreds of applications for a single position; it’s advantageous to promote yourself and shine. Adding more details to your application materials may be necessary to paint a clearer picture of how you are the “best fit” for the position. Academic library search committees want candidates who stand out. Demonstrating your best qualities and highlighting how you can be part of the collaborative team will separate you from the rest of the pack.

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