



There are a number of things that job seekers can do to stay relevant during their job search.
Photo by: [Matthew Henry](#)

BARCELONA — In the past year, many professionals in the global development sector have found themselves out of work as projects, fundraising events, and hiring were put on hold because of [COVID-19](#).

While significant gaps in a candidate's CV might normally be a concern for potential employers, they will be more understanding at this time since the pandemic has clearly impacted people's careers, said Jennifer Bangoura, a career and workforce development expert.

Where they may still be concerned, however, is if they ask a candidate how they have spent their time in the months since their last role and the person has nothing to say, she said.

Even amid a pandemic, there are a number of things that job seekers can do to stay relevant. Here's what the experts recommended.

Stay informed

One of Bangoura's top pieces of advice for job seekers is to keep reading. This helps people reflect and home in on what they are interested in, as well as keep up with changes in the sector, she said.

Textbox:

[Watch: How to job hunt during COVID-19](#)

Leadership and career coach Anne Steen talks about the challenges of landing a position during the pandemic and shares tips for job seekers, including how to network remotely.

Target employers of interest and focus on the content they are putting out through blogs or social media, which shows where their funding is coming from and what type of projects they are involved in, she advised.

Job seekers can then see where there might be opportunities for their skill set, and this helps them build a narrative to demonstrate their fit with an employer's strategic priorities. Later, in an interview situation, this also means they can be "fluent and comfortable" in talking about the sector's players and actors, she said.

Career coach Caroline Korda Poole encouraged job seekers to take advantage of brown-bag and "lunch and learn" activities, which are now virtual and often run by reputable institutions.

While these activities do not go on your resume, they are a great opportunity for job seekers to stay relevant and expand their network, she said. "It keeps you in the field ... meeting people ... energized. It puts things on your calendar. It gives you direction. ... And it helps you feel a part of something," Poole said.

Increase your online visibility

Networks play a critical role in finding out about openings in the sector, many of which are not advertised.

Julia Lemmer, a career coach and experienced human resources professional, suggested that job seekers reach out to their network to let them know they are looking for a new role and the type of challenge they are looking for. They should also make sure their LinkedIn profile is up to date, with details of all relevant experience and an interesting headline, and change their status to inform recruiters that they are looking for a new role, she advised.

It is also a good time for job seekers to reconnect with contacts that they might not have been in touch with for a while and grow their network by introducing themselves to people who work in organizations they want to join.

However, don't just make use of your contacts to your own advantage, Lemmer cautioned. Think about what knowledge you can share and what you can offer people in your network.

Publishing relevant content on sites such as LinkedIn is also a great way for job seekers to highlight their thought leadership and expertise in an area, she said.

Quote:

“This is a time to be proactive. There are always opportunities; it's just about finding them and creating them for yourself.”

— Caroline Korda Poole, career coach

Volunteer

Lykke Andersen, chief of talent acquisition and people programs at the [United Nations Development Programme](#), recommended volunteering as a way for a candidate to demonstrate that they have stayed engaged in the sector and that they are the type of person who proactively looks for ways to work on their own development. She pointed to opportunities with the [United Nations Volunteers](#) program, which also facilitates online volunteering.

Bangoura noted that, now more than ever, there are a lot of organizations looking for support from skilled professionals, including in locations where job seekers live. Whether it is writing grant applications or overseeing social media posts, you should think about how your existing skills can be useful to others, she said.

Volunteering can also provide opportunities for job seekers to develop skill sets in areas where they are not quite experts yet. “I’m big on volunteering as a way to build and reinforce a skill set,” Bangoura said.

Poole agreed that “volunteerism is always a phenomenal step to take” and one that demonstrates passion and commitment. But it is up to job seekers to carve out opportunities to contribute their skills and expertise.

“This is a time to be proactive. There are always opportunities; it's just about finding them and creating them for yourself,” she said.

Reach out to people and find out where organizations might need support. “If you just sort of raise your hand and say, ‘I’m here to volunteer,’ that's not as helpful as having done an analysis [and] having a clear idea of what a team might need,” Poole said.

If, for example, an organization has huge amounts of data that no one has had time to analyze yet, this is an opportunity for someone with relevant skills to provide this assistance or even assemble a team to work on this and produce an outcome that really serves a purpose, she said.

Be strategic in developing your skills

Textbox:

[Which project management training is right for you?](#)

With a wealth of project management certifications out there, it can be overwhelming to figure out which one is best for you. We break down the pros and cons of some of the most popular project management trainings for development professionals.

With so many virtual learning activities and online courses now available, job seekers can take advantage of this time to brush up on certain skills or learn new ones. But look for courses and training programs that can go on your resume and provide certifications, Poole suggested.

“Seek training during this time that is skills-based, [and] look at all of your training as a chance to network,” she said. “You also want to be building transferable skills, and you really want to be building billable skills, if possible.”

Certifications for project management professionals and development professionals in project management, for example, are highly valued in international development and across other sectors, Poole said.

Similarly, Bangoura encouraged job seekers to be strategic in deciding which learning opportunities to pursue, especially with so many free webinars and courses now available online that it can be overwhelming.

She suggested that job seekers block off some time each day to find and review, line by line, job descriptions. Once you have 10 to 15 job descriptions, you will start to see patterns in what aspects of the work excite you or are off-putting, where you have strengths, and where you have gaps that can be addressed by taking some courses, she said. Next, research different courses and see how the curriculum lines up with what you are seeing in job descriptions.

Options such as LinkedIn Learning or Coursera are great for a professional exploring new topics of interest, Bangoura suggested, but taking it to the next level by completing a boot camp or short course, such as those offered by [2U](#), shows that the person is invested in becoming an expert in that area.