

ICMA: Hints and Tips for MPA's

“So You’ve Gotten Your MPA: What to Do When the Jobs Don’t Come to You”

Cover Letters

DO

1. *Sign* your letter (write your signature, scan it, save it as a JPG).
2. *Customize* your letter (include the name of the position and organization).
3. Show that you know *something* about the organization you are applying for (browse their website – Google is your friend!) and how you can benefit the organization.
4. Use **ONE font!**
5. To really impress, find out who the supervisor is for the position you are applying for, to address the letter to that person. (Call the HR Dept.)
6. Ask respected professionals you know to review your letter.
7. Check out a good article on cover letters:
<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/02/27/502445571/hey-students-5-things-that-are-wrong-with-your-cover-letter>
8. If you are making a career change, highlight this and explain why. Briefly indicate how your previous career supports the career you want to get into.

DON'T

1. Add a PS! (You aren't writing to your childhood friend.)
2. Regurgitate your resume. (DO tell me something about yourself that I won't see on your resume, something that makes you stand out in a stack of applications.)
3. Make it a “wall of words” (A few brief paragraphs is optimal. Make them count.)
4. Tell me how you will benefit by joining my organization.
5. Call to talk with the hiring manager for any reason – that person cannot give any applicant attention which is not given to ALL applicants. (Make yourself stand out within the normal hiring process, not outside that process.)
6. Send extra documents – transcripts, diplomas, letters of recommendation, etc. These unsolicited documents only detract from the documents that are actually requested.

Resumes

DO

1. Limit your resume to two pages. (If I want more information, I'll ask for it.)
2. Account for your time to present. (If there's a gap to the present, I'll wonder what you've been doing during that time.)
3. Make it neat, nicely formatted, easy to read. (If I have to "figure it out," I'll skip it.)
4. Ask respected professionals you know to review it.

DON'T

1. Use font. (If I have to strain to read it, I'll skip it.)
2. Have discrepancies or inconsistencies. (It looks like you don't have your story straight or are trying to hide something.)
3. Be a job-hopper. (You're only getting warmed up after twelve months. I want someone I think will stay in the position at least 18 – 24 months.)
4. Be anything less than *completely* honest. (Padding your resume, or hiding something, is a very good way to have a very short relationship.)
5. Try to include everything. (A "wall of words" is distracting, unimpressive, and a turn-off.)
6. Fax your application. (Show how you can follow application instructions).

In the Meantime... Prepare yourself *well* for the opportunities to come!

DO

1. Engage in activities which will keep or build your skills (and confidence).
 - Join Toastmasters for public speaking, presentation skills, etc.
 - Register for continuing education classes at a local college (writing, computers, language, etc.),
 - Volunteer with an organization which offers opportunities to build or maintain skills, contacts, *or confidence*.
2. Join a job-hunters group for support, connections, and guidance. (Check your local public library, local churches, Chambers of Commerce, alumni associations, etc. for suggestions.)
3. Take care of yourself – you'll never have a better opportunity to do so, and this will serve you – and your prospective employers – well.

4. Read! Lots of it! There are many management authors, and biographies, whose expertise and experiences, can serve you well for a lifetime – Stephen Covey, Nelson Mandela, etc. (A local library will have many of these, or you can Google “management books best sellers” for some ideas.) Or, stay abreast of the local news in the community where you want to work – so you can talk intelligently about the issues when the opportunity comes.
5. Practice phone and in-person interviews with your friends or family regularly. This will help you become more comfortable when those interviews come.

DON'T

1. Settle – for a job that doesn't interest you or isn't in line with your desired career. A lack of consistency in position indicates lack of direction or focus.
 - Consequently, how would an employer believe that you know (how WILL you know) that you will enjoy the position available if you've not been in that type of work before?
 - Needing to meet your and your family's needs is understandable. If you need income, consider working part-time with an organization you want to work full-time for, or in a position that will teach you valuable skills (like customer service).
2. Give up. If you want a “guaranteed” way to learn persistence and amazing self-confidence, stare down a big CAN'T in the eye and make it blink:
 - Learn to swim.
 - Run a marathon.
 - Complete a triathlon.
 - Learn to scuba dive.
 - Learn a foreign language.
 - Raise \$10k for a worthy cause.
 - *Anything* that trains you to conquer the ultimate cop-out, “CAN'T”. “Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right.” (Henry Ford)