

LANDING A JOB WITH AN LIS/MLIS DEGREE

— Advice for Job Seekers



CAREER RESOURCE SERIES

NEW CAREERS FOR MLIS AND LIS GRADUATES & ALUMNI

Foreword

The role of the librarian is undergoing profound transformation. Some people are predicting the demise of the profession altogether as publications go digital and information goes online. Their thinking is, “Who needs a librarian when you have Google?”

Well, the profession may be in the throes of change, but to paraphrase the famous quote, those death reports are greatly exaggerated! The need for library science skills are greater than ever.

Librarian responsibilities like reference and research, classification and cataloguing and outreach are evolving. Meanwhile new roles are being added as we move to the age of Library as a Service.

That’s the reason LAC Group is publishing a series of booklets for LIS and MLIS students and graduates. As a leader in the business of libraries, organizations from law firms to corporations to the venerable Library of Congress turn to us for solutions to their knowledge and information challenges.

Each booklet will focus on a topic related to those needs and opportunities. Our wish is to help guide you to a more fulfilling, rewarding career path based on employer needs, market demands and coming trends.

We hope you heed our advice to help us modernize the role of “library” and “librarian” – more than ever, the world needs your energy, creativity and information know-how.

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The first steps to your new career

The future depends on what you do today.

— Mahatma Gandhi

You are about to receive practical job-seeking advice for starting a new career with your MLIS or MLS degree. The advice comes from the recruiting professionals at LAC Group, an employer of information professionals for a wide variety of organizations, from law firms to the Library of Congress.

Our goal is to better prepare you for an ever-shifting employment landscape and the opportunities available in modern librarianship. The best opportunities are available to those who understand they are advocates of information – increasingly digital and virtual – and who recognize that they must occasionally put on the sales and marketing hat during their job search and once they are on-the-job.

We encourage you to begin your search with the understanding that your first job is a stepping stone – a way station on a life-long journey. Your goal is to get your foot in the door and on the path that will allow you to develop your skills, gain experience and continue moving forward.

Develop your plan

You are undertaking more than a job search. You are taking the first steps toward your professional career – how you will earn a living, contribute your talents and make your mark in the world. You are doing so in a time of unprecedented change and opportunity.

Planning is a crucial first step.

Figure out the kind of job that could be your first step toward reaching your ultimate career goal.

With a Master's Degree, your expectations may be high. But the more flexible, open and willing you are to positions that will get you started on your journey, the better your odds of getting your first job and launching your career.

Do the research.

With your library and information science training, you have a clear research advantage– put it work for your benefit! Analyze job descriptions. Find out who is hiring and what they're looking for. Identify and target employers that interest you. Leverage and use your resources.

Create your story.

You are more than a list of credentials and skills; you have experiences and ambitions that can help you stand out and be remembered. Craft your elevator pitch. Develop a personal narrative. Be prepared and willing to position and market yourself in the best light, something many people feel uncomfortable doing.

Identify and pursue opportunities

Leave no stone unturned in your search for work:

- [LinkedIn.com](#) groups.
- Major online job boards like [Indeed.com](#), [CareerBuilder.com](#), and [Monster.com](#).
- [Craigslist.org](#) – one never knows!
- Your local newspaper.
- All the people you know, who lead to people they know, and so on.
- LAC Group careers, located at [careers.lac-group.com](#).
- Librarian careers listed on [LibGig.com](#).

Increase your options by using search terms beyond the usual 'library' and 'librarian' terms, particularly for positions in special libraries and work outside of the academic and public realms. In addition to librarian, make sure you include terms like Specialist, Manager, Clerk and Technician.

Other search tips:

- Use the suffix 'ist' or 'er' – Taxonomist, Indexer, Researcher, Archivist.
- Incorporate terms such as:

Information	Research	Preservation	Acquisitions
Technology	Virtual	Cloud	Emerging
Reference	Electronic	Services	Instructional
Knowledge	Digital	Records	Materials
Intelligence	Media	Curation	Collections
Data	Literacy	Archiving	Assets
Catalog(ue)	Metadata	Indexing	Taxonomy
Law/Legal	Medical	Clinical	Technical

Be open to niche positions.

While the idea of focusing on Metadata or Indexing may not sound like ideal work, view it as a career stepping stone to prove your worth and gain access to more diverse roles and greater responsibilities.

(Make sure to read the [Day in the Life](#) story of a metadata specialist included in this booklet on page 13)

Develop the right resume

The right résumé is a foundational document that serves as a springboard to versions that are personalized for each opportunity, in order to match your skills as closely as possible to the needs of the job description. The objective is to position your training, skills and experience in the best light for a given opportunity. While it requires a little extra effort, the initial screening process of candidate tracking systems have made this a necessity.

Résumé Tips:

- The purpose of a résumé is to bring awareness and create initial interest.
- While the résumé is **about** you, remember that it's **for** the hiring organization and their needs.
- The purpose of your résumé is to get you through the screening process and into an interview.

Important: Include your technology experience and knowledge of technical standards and protocols. Use specific names rather than general terms like 'various ILS' as employers search or use automated systems to find these exact skills. If you are applying for a position that requests particular experience you do not have, state something like "Basic knowledge of Microsoft Excel" so that you make the initial keyword cut. Meanwhile, go to the vendor's website and sign up for a free trial, take a class, search YouTube for video tutorials – learn as much as you can, however you can.

Cover Letter:

A cover letter is no longer a separate document or attachment; it is the body of the e-mail message in which you submit your résumé. The content should explain anything particular to the situation, such as why you are applying for a job in Denver when you live in St. Louis.

The exception is applying to academic library positions, for which you will need a cover letter along with a CV or Curriculum Vitae. Check with your university for help with this format or visit this link at [About.com](#) for CV advice, templates and examples.

Bridge the experience gap

As a recent graduate, you are facing an experience gap that will need to be filled:

- **Volunteer.** With budget constraints the norm, public libraries are always welcoming of volunteers. It can be difficult to work for free, yet it can make the difference if an opening does become available. Also volunteer for information-related duty at a non-profit. For example, if your interest is in Competitive Intelligence, offer to do a competitive assessment of other non-profits for an organization you support.
- **Become a subject matter expert.** You will be more attractive as a candidate for a special library position if you can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant topics in a given industry like medicine, law or media.
- **Consider freelancing or contracting.** Temporary assignments often lead to other opportunities, and you may be able to work virtually from home and continue your search.
- **Get creative!** Start a blog that's related to your career goals. Create a video resume and post it on YouTube. Complete a sample project to show an employer the kind of work you are capable of doing. Find a way to present You in a unique yet relevant way.

If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.

— Milton Berle

Get out there

It's important to meet, greet and network both online and in person, even if it means going outside your comfort zone.

Digital Networking

- LinkedIn is the top social network for employers and recruiters so create and maintain a good professional profile. Solicit your network for endorsements and recommendations. Join groups and participate regularly.
- Restrict visibility of personal accounts like Facebook during your search and clean them up if needed. It is true that otherwise promising candidates have been eliminated because of questionable social media activity.
- Join the major online job boards (Indeed, Monster and Career Builder) for greater visibility as a candidate; however use them passively, not as your primary job tool. Since online job boards are keyword driven, make sure to include as many of the specific job requirements as possible. Be prepared to slightly tweak your resume or application in order to make a match.

Face-to-Face Networking

- Join associations for networking, meeting potential employers, job listings, peer support and camaraderie and continuing education. Some offer discounted student memberships.
 - For academic and public libraries, join the American Library Association (ALA). (www.ala.org)

- For special libraries, join the Special Libraries Association (SLA). (www.sla.org)
- For law librarianship, the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). (www.aallnet.org)
- For archiving, the Society of American Archivists (SAA). (www.archivists.org)
- For industries or topics of interest, research Gateway to Associations or Weddle's Association Directory for relevant associations. (www.weddles.com/associations)
- Tell everyone you know and meet that you're looking for work. You never know where a job lead can come from!

Networking Matters:

Without experience, it's even more critical for you to be networking and meeting potential employers face-to-face, since your credentials are not as strong "on paper" as other candidates with experience.

Ace the interview

Approach every interview with confidence, knowing you have passed the initial screening and met the basic requirements. You will be judged on your personality and cultural fit, how you might work with other employees and how you might deal with conflict and other soft skills.

Most importantly, you will be judged based on the perception of how you can meet needs and add value to the organization.

- Learn as much as you can about the job description, the organization and the people involved in the interview process and be prepared to discuss how you will meet the requirements.

- Develop a list of questions prior to each interview for the interviewer. Be smart about this, as it will give you an opportunity to shine and demonstrate ingenuity, a skill in demand by all employers. Look to the organization's website, social media and other information you can uncover. Show you care about THAT particular job and THAT organization.
- Research and rehearse typical interview questions. Use them to develop a meaningful, memorable story about who you are and where you aim to be. Start with this list of 120 common questions along with sample answers. (bit.ly/interview-QandA)
- Focus on the interviewer, understanding his or her role in the process, as well as the needs of the organization based on the job description.
- Find ways to show off soft skills. Demonstrate professionalism, creativity, drive, communication skills, organizational skills, leadership and teamwork by talking about your life experiences, sharing stories of obstacles you have overcome and goals you have accomplished.
- Follow up with a personal thank you, sending a prompt email or handwritten note.
- Find additional interview information and tips on the LibGig.com website.

Increasingly, employers are relying on Skype.com and video interviews for at least some of the screening and selection process. We recommend finding friends and mentors who are willing to help you practice using these technologies; you will be more comfortable and polished when the time comes for real!

Stay positive and be persistent

Very few graduates of any program find it easy to get their first job. A positive attitude, resilience and tenacity are all traits that will support you through the process.

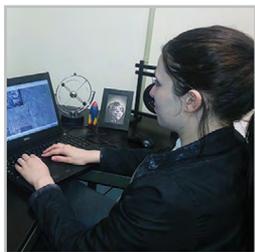
Meanwhile, to help you handle some of the more common bumps and potholes:

- **If you are not getting interviews**, go back to your resume and change how you are describing and defining your skills, experience and capabilities.
- **If you are not getting offers**, go back to practicing interview questions and examining your communication and interpersonal skills. Have one friend or mentor interview you and another observe you and videotape you for feedback.
- **If you're finding nothing that appeals to you**, may we tactfully suggest less ego and more flexibility? Remember that getting your foot in the door is your objective – your first job is a stepping stone to the career you want. Keep the mindset that no librarianship job is beneath you and that no job is forever. Learn what you can to gain practical experience and a good reference.

**The most difficult thing is the decision to act,
the rest is merely tenacity.**

— *Amelia Earhart*

Day in the Life



MELISSA LOHREY was hired by LAC Group for a metadata project working for the research arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees 800 research projects across some 90 locations, including laboratories overseas.

This recent MLS graduate from the University of Maryland did not begin her job search thinking, “What can I contribute to the world of agricultural science?” Her interest was in metadata and archival information for eBooks and other general library assets. Yet she accepted the project, knowing the experience would lead to other opportunities.

In her role at USDA, Melissa was responsible for data documentation and management to make research information more accessible and understandable to a wide audience. She became involved in a variety of projects, from giving a poster presentation at a major conference to working with Geographical Information Systems and historical aerial photographs for showing land use changes over time. She discovered that working with metadata is very interactive and requires collaboration, debate and teaching.

This particular story ends with Melissa resigning after one year to take a new job that better suited her personal and professional goals. While we don’t want to encourage quitting or jumping from one job to another, which introduces a different set of challenges to overcome, it demonstrates our advice to first-job seekers: Create a plan that works for you, be honest and responsible, and be open and willing to any relevant opportunity as your first step.

Current state of libraries

You may be well aware of the forces that are changing the state of libraries, yet they bear repeating. Without an understanding and acceptance of these factors, you risk jeopardizing your job search and your career opportunities.

Digitization and Virtual Access

Paper has been going away since the advent of personal computing, so we're not ready to predict its demise yet. However, the transition to electronic media continues unabated, with a number of all-digital libraries now operating in all spheres – public, academic and special libraries. Increasingly sophisticated mobile devices and easy internet access are accelerating the pace of change.

Accountability and Value

All organizations, including once venerable institutions like law, medicine and academia, are under intense pressure to be accountable to customers, investors and funding sources. All are facing greater competition, stricter budgets and ongoing scrutiny, which makes every function open to regular review and assessment. Think creatively, solve problems and find other ways to add value.

New Forms of Work

Work is shape-shifting away from well-defined schedules and roles. At some point in your career you may be freelancing, contracting, consulting, job-sharing or telecommuting. You may be moved between work teams and projects. Downsizing and re-engineering have eliminated layers, leading to more individual contributors and collaborators and fewer managers.

1. Public and Academic Libraries

If your goal is to work within a public or academic library setting, we encourage you to follow it. Yet we would be remiss if we failed to share a realistic assessment of this career path:

- Expect fewer opportunities – Even in large cities, the number of public and academic libraries is relatively small and expected to remain flat. Low turnover and high competition for open positions further restrict the employment potential.
- Cutbacks and shortfalls have left many public and academic libraries doing more with less, cutting staff, hours and materials budgets.
- Expect a lengthy hiring process – With multiple interviews and panel reviews, hiring decisions can take months.
- Embrace new staffing and operational models such as managed services and outsourcing.

Recommended Approach:

- Identify every public or academic library within your area and beyond if you are willing and able to travel during the hiring process and to relocate if you get hired.
- Explore opportunities for part-time work, contract work, volunteer positions or employment with managed service providers like LAC Group.
- Be open to short-term projects, which sometimes evolve into something permanent. If not, you will gain valuable work experience and build your credentials and references.
- Demonstrate fresh thinking and practice teamwork in every possible way.

2. Special Libraries

Special libraries are diverse in size and scope, operating in a variety of organizations and settings including law firms, corporations, media and entertainment concerns, the medical field, the military, special collections and more.

Many special library positions are in profit-driven organizations, which requires a different mindset from academic or public organizations. You will need to demonstrate your ability to:

- Handle deadlines, budgets, performance plans and other operational pressures.
- Collaborate and develop ongoing relationships with co-workers in other areas like marketing.
- Utilize skills like project management, planning, creativity and teamwork.
- Demonstrate fresh thinking and ability to meet goals and objectives.
- Embrace new staffing and operational models such as managed services and outsourcing.

Recommended Approach:

- Identify industries and information specialties that are of interest to you.
- Target the organizations within those categories that are located in your community. Learn as much as you can about them. Participate in their social media networks.
- Become a subject matter expert, learning the issues and concerns within that segment. Stay current on news and advances. This will help you stand out during the interview and selection process.

You are the voice of information

Librarians have always been the ‘Voice of the Information’ and that role continues with new urgency and different responsibilities in the Digital Age. Instead of people going to the library, increasingly the library is going to them.

While traditional library doors may be closing, many other new doors are opening:

- Refining and improving search results through curation and added context.
- Discerning the validity and reliability of information and its source.
- Improving productivity and alleviating information overload when ‘do it yourself’ is not the best use of someone’s time.
- Helping people understand how to begin a project, how to get the best available information and how to know when they are done.

Skilled librarians can get better results, faster, by zeroing in on the “good stuff” more effectively. People who can classify, sort and make sense of it all, and innovate better new ways to do it, are in high demand.

Adaptability is the name of the game; if you understand that you must now be adaptable and flexible, you will find a way to succeed in your career. If not, you will succumb to job market pressures.

— Author Miles Anthony Smith
Becoming Generation Flux: Why Traditional Career Planning is Dead

Information speaks binary code

If librarians are the voice of information and information is increasingly digital, any logician will tell you that librarians must speak the language of digital information.

Of course, if your interest is in archiving, preservation, curation or general librarianship – working with books or physical artifacts – you should pursue those opportunities. They are well-defined roles that are easily identified within a distinct set of possibilities.

We cannot over-emphasize that the demand for technology know-how exceeds the demand for academic know-how. Those of you who are fluent in technology and position yourselves as information specialists will find more opportunities. It may require a bit more digging to uncover them, and you may end up in places that seem rather foreign to you, but you will find many more options for job placement and career growth.



BRAD ROGERS
Director of Recruiting
LAC Group

SPOTLIGHT

The advice and tips presented in this career guide are from Brad Rogers, a results-oriented recruiting professional who is committed to helping clients and candidates accomplish their goals. As Director of Recruitment and Client Services for LAC Group, Brad has witnessed firsthand the transformation of the role of the librarian.

Job candidates and employers alike are facing constant change in our fast-moving knowledge economy and digital information age. Brad shares his expertise as part of LAC Group's mission to develop new ideas and solutions that match the skills of the librarian to current employment needs and trends.

"I like helping people. That might seem cliché, but recruiting is finding people jobs, which is a major part of someone's life."

MLIS and LIS Careers Resource Series

This is an exciting time to be a librarian and information professional, where jobs now span a wide range of environments, both physical and digital.

The following career resource guides describe new and challenging career opportunities for MLIS and LIS graduates and alumni.

- 1 COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE
 - 2 CURATION AND ARCHIVAL
 - 3 KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
 - 4 BIG DATA MANAGEMENT
- ★ LANDING A JOB WITH AN LIS/MLIS DEGREE

MLIS and LIS Career Resources



LibGig is the #1 job site for information professionals, offering jobs, interview tips, resume help and much more. It's a place to connect with employers and network with other information professionals. Established in 2008, LibGig has earned its reputation as a proven leader in the information professionals community.



LAC Group, a leader in Information Curation and Knowledge ManagementSM, offers comprehensive services to help organizations maximize the utility of real-time and archival information. A certified woman-owned business established in 1986, LAC Group is a trusted choice of government agencies, Fortune 500 companies, law firms, major media concerns and universities seeking to manage their ever-increasing information and knowledge management challenges.

To receive other career resource guides in this series, contact your university's career service center or visit www.lac-group.com/library-career-guides