

Panelists

- Lisa Varon, *Vice President of Education and Workforce Services*, Congreso de Latinos Unidos
- Patricia Meehan, *Director of Social Work, Clinical Resource Management & Social Work Department*, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania
- Joanne Wolf, *Vice President for Programs*, Presbyterian Children's Village
- Heather Wertz, *Director, Civic Engagement*, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania

Background Information

Lisa Varon is currently the Vice President of Education and Workforce Services at Congreso. After receiving her BSW, Lisa traveled to South America, Southeast Asia and the United Kingdom before pursuing her MSW with a Macro focus at Penn. She initially applied for opportunities at Congreso at the suggestion of a field placement supervisor and landed a position as an Operations Coordinator, which allowed her to gain management experience and exposure to juvenile justice policy. She left Congreso for a period of time to run a state reintegration program before returning to serve in her current role.

Patti Meehan has worked in a leadership role in the Clinical Resource Management and Social Work Department at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania for a number of years. Having grown up in a family of nurses, healthcare has always been a part of her career interests. She started out as a social worker in an outpatient setting before transitioning to her current role.

Joanne Wolf found herself interested in social work after graduating from the College of Arts and Sciences with a degree in international relations and pursuing a career in television production. She cites her first MSW field placement supervisor at Penn as a key influence who continues to be a mentor to her. After a number of years in clinical work, she moved to a quality improvement position in an agency which provides drug/alcohol addiction treatment before coming to Presbyterian Children's Village

Heather Wertz was drawn to social work based on her own experience as a recipient of social services. After receiving her BSW from Temple University, she worked in direct services before pursuing her MSW at Penn and shifting to macro work. At the United Way, Heather focuses on capacity building in the health and human services sector, engaging people and corporate entities to mobilize them for community engagement.

Advice***Networking and Job Search Strategies***

Networking with professors and field placement supervisors is key. Ask your professors if they have contacts. (*Joanne*)

If you are looking at a particular niche, connect with organizations in that niche and conduct informational interviews with people in those organizations. (*Heather*)

Talk to everybody and stay in touch. Every position I've had was based on networking and follow up. (*Lisa*)

I'm open to informational interviewing by phone especially when there's an interest in the organization as opposed to a focus on "finding a job." *(Joanne)*

Field placement supervisors can be strong advocates if the organization is hiring. Remember that your field placement is a "nine-month interview." *(Patti)*

Attending events that the organization is hosting is a good strategy for making connections. *(Heather)*

Don't be afraid to leverage past experiences from a previous career or position. I was able to highlight my transferable skills from my work in drug and alcohol and move to my current position even though I did not have previous experience in child welfare. Often, employers are looking more for particular skills than for content knowledge. *(Joanne)*

Referrals, interning and volunteering can go a long way. For example, I received a cold call from a student, who ended up volunteering with us. *(Heather)*

Try to pin down a contact so that you can make a personal connection – you can usually figure out the e-mail pattern. You can call Human Resources to ask for the correct contact person. Individuals can apply online but online applications are overwhelming from the recruiter's perspective. *(Patti)*

Don't search only for positions requiring an MSW degree. Be open to a variety of non-profit positions. *(Heather)*

SP2 degrees are so malleable. Be open to the many opportunities available. Don't limit yourself. *(Lisa)*

Look beyond the titles and consider how your skills can transfer. Look in non-traditional places for careers. For example, the business community may hire for community engagement or philanthropy divisions. *(Heather)*

Be open to getting your foot in the door and getting good experience, even if the position is entry-level. Entry-level positions can be good opportunities in that a lot of non-profits like to hire from within and you can progress very quickly if you excel. *(Joanne)*

Be open to entry-level positions; you'll likely be in a better place to progress since you've gotten your foot in the door. *(Heather)*

Resumes and Cover Letters

Two page resumes are okay, as long as they are relevant. Cover letters are really important. *(Patti)*

Be prepared to explain gaps in your resume, perhaps via your cover letter. *(Joanne/Lisa)*

It is important to customize your materials, especially your cover letter, which should reflect the needs indicated in the job description. *(Heather)*

Your cover letter provides an opportunity to feature roles that are most relevant to the position, so that you are not pigeonholed based on your previous experience. *(Heather)*

Interviewing

It is important to research the organization and get a feel for its values and services before the interview. Be creative. Interview for the organization, not just the job. *(Joanne)*

Dress professionally for the interview. Bring extra copies of your resume and reference lists. Be prepared to put your best foot forward. *(Patti)*

Other Topics

On international opportunities

Be prepared to go to your destination and then look for a job. It's difficult to line up a position before you are actually there. *(Lisa)*

On the U.S. job search for international students

Make sure you are knowledgeable regarding the visa process.

Congreso sponsors H1B visas. *(Lisa)*

The Hospital of University of Pennsylvania can sponsor by way of the University, but you would need to demonstrate that you are a top candidate. *(Patti)*

On the timing of the job search

It's not too early to communicate your interest, especially at your field placements. *(Patti)*

It's fine to reach out now, perhaps there will be positions opening up later on. In the meantime, there may be opportunities to volunteer or conduct short-term projects in research or other areas. *(Lisa)*

On important skills

Cultivate a political savvy and ability to think on your feet. Programs are constantly evolving and being refined so problem solving abilities are key. *(Heather)*

Some employers have human resources do an initial screening by way of an online skills survey. Make sure that you emphasize teamwork and collaboration. *(Patti)*