

## Chapter 3. Explore Options

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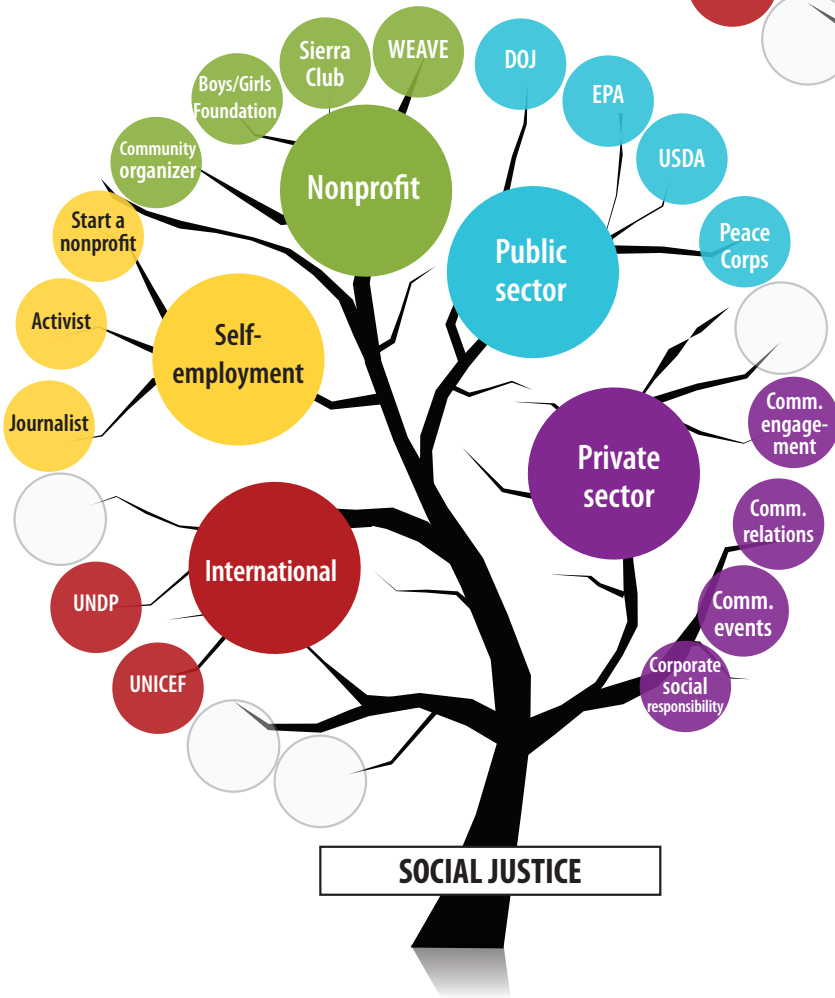
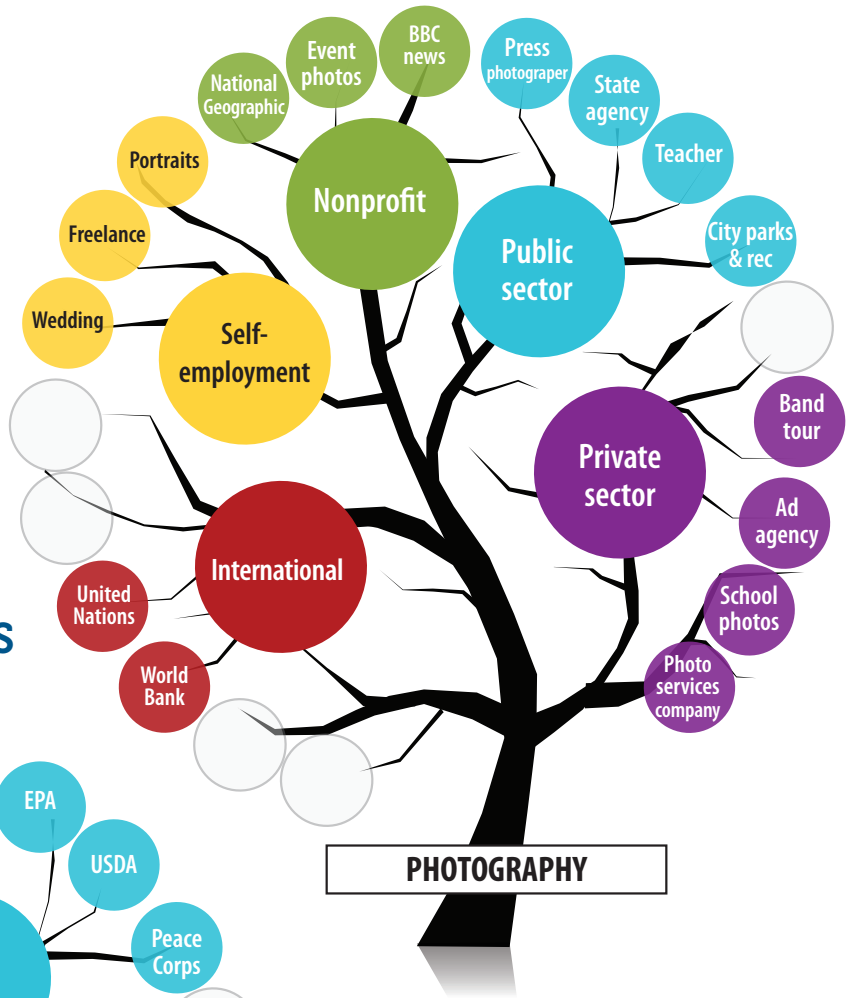
Using the “best fit” careers you identified in Chapter 2 as a jumping off point, it is now time to think broadly about and explore the possibilities before you. For example, if, through your self-assessments, you identified teaching, human resources, and social services as career directions that interest you, where are all the possible sectors of the economy where you could do that type of work?

The U.S. economy can be divided into several sectors. These include:

- **Public Sector** - Government entities including local, state, and federal government agencies (U.S. Department of Agriculture, California Department of Fish and Game, Orange County, City of Fresno, Eureka Unified School District).
- **Private Sector** - Both publicly traded companies (AT&T, Google, H&M) that trade shares on the stock market to members of the general public and privately owned companies (Dell, Albertsons, Mars) that are owned by a small number of people and their shares are not traded on the stock market. Surplus revenue in these organizations is distributed to the shareholders. or private owners.
- **Nonprofit Sector** - Organizations that use revenue to achieve their mission- typically focused on community and/or social good- rather than distributing surplus revenue to shareholders. There are nonprofits that seek grant funding and donations from the general public (Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, and Child Abuse Prevention Center) and those that are funded by a single individual, family or corporation and often grant funds to other nonprofit organizations (The Irvine Foundation, The McConnell Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation).
- **Self-Employment or the “gig economy”**- This is a situation in which someone works for themselves- selling their product or services to others- rather than working for an employer who pays them a salary. This work could be done in the public, private, nonprofit, or international sectors. For example, a contract grants writer or a freelance graphic designer.
- **International Employment** - Across any of the above sectors- may be an option that you also want to consider.

One technique to expand your thinking about career options in relation to these sectors is to fill out a “Baker Tree of Options”. Your central trunk can be a passion, an area of interest, or a skill that you particularly enjoy using. Like the branches of a tree, your career choices are broad and varied. Karen Baker, Chief Service Officer for CaliforniaVolunteers shares this example as it relates to someone who is interested in pursuing photography. An additional example focused on social justice is below.

**BAKER TREE OF OPTIONS**





## EXERCISE Tree of Options

Using the template in **APPENDIX 2**, create your own “Tree of Options” for one or more of the career fields you identified through your self-assessments.

Now that you have your “Tree of Options”; or perhaps you have a grove of “Trees” because you are considering several possible paths, you need to gather information about the different possibilities that you have identified. As you explore you may also add new options to your tree.

By following the career exploration steps in this chapter, you’ll begin to understand employer’s needs, the requirements for specific jobs, and which careers are in demand in your area of interest. Obtaining realistic and accurate information about a wide range of industries and specific occupations will give you the information you need to determine your viable options and make informed decisions about your career goals. You’ll need to gather information and answer questions about:

- Industry trends
- Job descriptions
- Education and training
- Fastest-growing jobs
- Industry key words
- Certifications and licenses
- Job titles
- Work environments
- Career paths
- Salary ranges

To answer these questions, you will need to do some research, but where do you begin?

### Resources and Methods for Exploring the World of Work

There are a wide variety of resources and methods for exploring career options and the world of work. Begin your process by gathering information from online resources and books. Then you can use that knowledge to begin conducting informational interviews, job shadowing, doing internships and volunteering, taking a class, and researching companies to further your understanding.

As you explore these resources use the Occupational Exploration Worksheet in **APPENDIX 3** to track your findings and prioritize your options.



## EXERCISE Occupational Exploration Worksheet

Use the online resources listed on the next page to complete an Occupational Exploration Worksheet for at least three of your “best fit” occupations.

### Online Resources:

- Your first stop for exploring career options should be the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH): <http://www.bls.gov/oooh>. The OOH, compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes the job duties, working conditions, education and training requirements, earnings levels, current employment levels, projected employment change, and employment prospects for hundreds of occupations. Each profile also includes a list of related occupations and sources for additional information. The OOH homepage allows you to select occupations by pay, education level, growth rate, and number of new jobs projected.
- Under the “More Info” tab on the OOH site, you will find a link to the O\*NET: <http://www.onetonline.org>. This site is similar to the OOH but has more detail on the traits, characteristics and skills needed for a wide range of jobs. In addition, from the O\*NET homepage you can find occupations by Skill Area, Industry, STEM, Green Economy, Growth Rate and “Bright”/ Emerging Careers. Through the “Crosswalks” section of the site you can identify occupations related to your areas of interest or do an Advanced Search to find occupations that use a specific skill, ability, tool, or software.
- Return to your CareerZone account where you can explore job families, clusters, and occupation listings: <https://www.cacareerzone.org/clusters>.
- California CareerCafe is both a website and an app. The “Explore Pathways” page presents California’s 15 leading industry sectors. You can chose a sector that appeals to you and find videos, resources, and links to career options within that sector: <http://www.cacareercafe.com/explore/>.
- National Career Development Association Occupational Trends provides timely articles on occupational trends: [http://ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/occupational\\_trends](http://ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/occupational_trends).
- The Sloan Career Cornerstone Center is an expansive resource center for anyone interested in exploring career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, computing, and medicine: <http://www.careercornerstone.org>.
- The AmeriCorps Alums website has a variety of webinars that provide information on a range of careers in the public, private, nonprofit, and international sectors that may be of interest to AmeriCorps members (scroll to the middle of the page to the “Exploring Careers” listings): <http://www.americorpsalums.org/?CareerWebinars>.
- You can also do a Google search using keywords for occupations, skills, or areas of interest. For tips on how to conduct effective Google searches go to: [https://www.google.com/intl/en\\_u/insidesearch/tipstricks/all.html](https://www.google.com/intl/en_u/insidesearch/tipstricks/all.html).
- To identify what certifications or licenses are required for specific occupations the CareerOneStop site offers two search tools: <http://www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-certifications.aspx> and <http://www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-licenses.aspx>.
- If you are looking to pursue a career in teaching, <http://www.teach.org> is a good source of information on certification requirements.



### **Public Libraries**

Your local public library has a wealth of career-related information including career related books, publications about specific companies and industries, and local newspapers and business journals, which can all help you learn more about careers. In addition, libraries typically have public computers and free access to the Internet. Some even have career centers with staff trained to help you explore careers and conduct a job search. After all, librarians are the original “search engines”! To find a public library near you visit: <http://www.publiclibraries.com/california.htm>

### **Job Boards**

Search for job openings for some of the occupations that interest you. Read through a dozen or so to identify themes, phrases and key words. To analyze job descriptions easily use a site like TagCrowd (<http://tagcrowd.com>) to create a word cloud of a job description. This will quickly give you a visual representation of what is most prominently mentioned.

### **Informational Interviews**

Talking to people about their careers and what they do in their jobs is one of the most powerful ways to explore the world of work and build your professional network for future career development. Richard N. Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute*, said, “The most dependable and up-to-date information on jobs

and careers is found by talking to people.” This involves getting out into the field to learn what an occupation is really like. It serves as a reality test and when you bring your curiosity to the conversation, it will give you insights into how well that type of work would fit for you.

An informational interview is a focused 15-30 minute conversation with a professional who is working in a job, career field, or organization that interests you. These discussions can be in person, over the phone or through email, although an in person interview is recommended if at all possible. The interview allows you to learn about what your contact does in their job, what their career path has been, and ask other questions to learn more about their occupation. As you listen, you can uncover how people feel about their work and how that relates to your own values, personality, interests, and skills. In addition, hearing about an occupation first hand tests your assumptions and expectations against the reality of the job. Conducting an informational interview is about getting an inside look at an occupation and gathering information about a particular industry- it is not about asking for a job. It does however build connections with organizations and industries you may want to work in which is helpful if there ever is an opening that fits you.

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## **Follow These Steps For Conducting A Successful Informational Interview**

### **Developing Contacts for Informational Interviews**

Places to find names for interviews are your family, friends, neighbors, current/former supervisors and co-workers, Program Manager, Grantee Board Members, AmeriCorps Alumni (find them on LinkedIn or the AmeriCorps Alumni website: <http://www.americorpsalums.org>), professional associations, service organizations, college alumni groups, social networking websites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook), company websites, professional and trade associations, and business publications.

## Asking for an Informational Interview

As an AmeriCorps member, you have a built-in advantage—professionals are typically open to helping people who are exploring career options, especially those who are giving back to their community through service.

- You can phone or email a person directly to set up the informational interview (see sample emails and telephone scripts in **APPENDIX 4**).
- State the purpose of your contact by introducing yourself as an individual who is investigating career fields in this person's professional area.
- Explain how you got the person's name; don't be afraid to "name drop".
- Schedule a time for the person to meet you in person or talk on the phone.
- Be respectful of the person's work setting and ask if it is a good time to discuss scheduling an appointment.
- Remember to express appreciation.
- Be ready for the possibility that not everybody is going to say yes. If your contact is not able to see you for an informational interview, respect his/her decision. Thank your contact for their time and ask if there is someone else they can refer you to for more information.

Best case scenario: Your contact answers, you make plans to get coffee, and you have a great meeting with them. But what if he or she doesn't answer? Wait a week, then send a follow-up email.

You'd be shocked at the number of people who don't respond to your first query but do get back to you after the second. Perhaps your first email just arrived at an inopportune time to answer and was then forgotten.

However, if you've sent the second email and you still hear nothing, move on to your next prospect. There are plenty of people who will talk to you, so don't spend too much energy chasing down one person.

## Preparing for an Informational Interview

- Know what type of information you are seeking. Prepare a list of questions (see suggested questions in **APPENDIX 5**).
- Learn as much as you can ahead of time about the career field, as well as the organization and the work role of the person you are interviewing.
- Think through what you want to say about yourself (remember your 30-Second Introduction). Be ready to answer questions about your areas of interests, previous experiences, and future plans. If you are unsure about your future career goals, it is all right to say you are exploring your options, but you should be able to identify some general, tentative goals.
- You may want to send a resume beforehand or have one ready in case it is requested.
- Dress professionally.
- Bring paper and pen.



### EXERCISE Informational Interviews

Conduct at least 3 Informational Interviews and use the Occupational Exploration Worksheet in **APPENDIX 3** to track your findings.



## Conducting an Informational Interview

- Be on time.
- Offer to pay if you are meeting someone at a coffee shop.
- Reiterate your reasons for meeting.
- Ask open-ended questions; do more listening than talking.
- Don't mistake informational interviewing for job search interviewing. **DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB!**
- Take brief notes during the interview. Afterwards, try to remember more of the details and record these as well. **Do not be tied to your list of questions, let the interview have a natural flow.**
- At the end of the interview ask for additional referrals, websites or professional associations.
- Be respectful of the interviewee's time.
- Avoid overly personal questions.

## Following up after an Informational Interview

- If you made a commitment to send information such as an article, a reference or some other document, follow up in a timely manner.
- Send a thank you letter or e-mail which conveys: Appreciation for time, referrals and information; Compliments regarding knowledge, expertise and helpfulness; Use of the information or how the meeting assisted you; Interest in keeping in contact regarding your progress. A sample is provided in **APPENDIX 6**.
- Be sure to record the person's name and contact information, as they are now part of your network. You may also want to connect with them on LinkedIn, just be sure to send a personalized connection request.

- Send the person updates to let them know how you've implemented their advice and how your career is progressing.

## Job Shadowing

After you've conducted an informational interview with someone, if you still feel like this occupation would be a good fit, you may want to see if you can shadow the person you talked to or someone else in the field. Job Shadowing is a process where you can go to work with a person and observe them doing their daily tasks. In some cases, you may even be able to help with some of the work. This is an excellent way to see how much you will enjoy working at that job and in that work environment.

## Internships and Volunteering

Internships (both paid and unpaid) and volunteer work can be excellent ways to immerse yourself in a job, industry, or work environment to evaluate whether or not it is a good fit. Perhaps you are considering a career in nursing because of your interest in science so you take on a volunteer position at your local hospital only to find that you don't enjoy being around people all day so perhaps laboratory work would be a better fit for you. Or you do an internship as a student aid at an elementary school and find that while helping sixth graders complete their math homework is boring, you love helping the kindergartners learn their numbers. Other career development benefits gained from internships and volunteering include:

- Building confidence in your skills.
- Developing new skills.
- Reality testing as you try out a career option.
- Creating a bridge to a career position.
- Making connections.

Many organizations offer internships and/or opportunities to volunteer. Check out some of these websites to uncover an opportunity that interests you:

### **Internships**

- <http://Internships.com>
- <https://www.internbound.com>
- Department of Labor internships: <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/internship/>

### **Volunteering**

- <http://Volunteermatch.com>
- <http://Pointsoflight.org>
- California Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism: <http://www.californiavolunteers.org>
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE): <http://www.score.org>



*"It's your life, take the time to discover occupations that match your interests, skills, and lifestyle goals so you can pursue a career path that works for you."*

John Merris-Coots, Program Director,  
California Career Resource Network.

### **Take a Class**

There are an unlimited number of classes you can take to build your knowledge and skills. These classes also can be a way to determine if the subject matter of a career holds your interest. There are a variety of options for taking a class from traditional community college courses, to adult learning programs to online options from sites such as Lynda.com, Udemy, or Coursera.

### **Research Companies that Match Your Values**

As you explore career options you may find that things such as the work environment and mission of the organization are more important to you than the job tasks. If this is the case, then researching companies that match your values may be a good use of your time. For information on how to identify companies that you might be interested in working for see the section in Chapter 5 about Direct Outreach to Employers.

Regardless of where you begin, as you explore, don't lose track of the values, personality preferences, interests, motivated skills, and other factors that are most important to you. Be true to yourself!





## BEFORE YOU MOVE ON...

In an ideal world your career will land you in the “sweet spot” where what you love, what you’re skilled in, and what employers need all meet, but that coming together doesn’t happen by accident. Planning, preparation, and persistence will be necessary to make it all happen. Luckily, you have this Guide, and the support of your supervisor, program manager and the AmeriCorps network to help you!

### Finding the sweet spot

