

## ANNUAL MEETING HANDOUT

# Plan B: What to Do When Your Museum Job is Terminated

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Established museum professionals provided case studies and techniques for finding a new position, whether in a museum, a related field or as a consultant. The session provided strategies for coping with job loss, networking, finding interim contract and consulting work, and securing new positions.

### Moderator

- » **Anne Verplanck**, Associate Professor, Penn State, Harrisburg

### Presenters

- » **Jeannine Disviscour**, Teacher, Baltimore City Schools
- » **Mary Jane Taylor**, Research & Evaluation Manager, National Constitution Center
- » **Lee Vedder**, Independent Curator & Art Historian, American & British Art, Pre-1945

### Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

As the museum field's premier professional development opportunity, the Alliance's Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo showcases the best thinking from practitioners and visionaries on major issues confronting museums and the communities they serve.

This session handout is from the 2013 Annual Meeting in Baltimore.

# **When your museum job is terminated: some practical tips for what to do next**

## **DEALING WITH NEWS OF A LAYOFF**

### Negotiating your exit

Review your employee handbook/personnel policies to be sure your severance offer is within the museum's guidelines.

Consult a lawyer about your severance agreement before you sign it, particularly if you think you're being short-changed.

Consider negotiating for additional time before your departure date, for extra weeks of severance and/or health care coverage, for registration costs for an upcoming conference.

If offered an outplacement service, decide whether you will use this or whether you should ask for the money to underwrite your own job search

Begin to think critically about your most marketable skills, and what work products showcase these skills. If you haven't done so already, make copies of materials that will assist in your job search.

### Handling your practical affairs:

COBRA provides for continuation of health benefits for 18 months, but is expensive, especially for a family.

Investigate options for health insurance: check your eligibility for a spouse's or parent's plan, buying benefits through a part-time job, or obtaining coverage through a professional association.

Research your state's unemployment compensation immediately, and begin the claims process.

Consider whether you a.) can, b.) want to, and c.) should look for jobs outside the area in which you live.

Assess your financial situation and reduce expenses as needed.

If you have young children, weigh the (often substantial) costs of daycare against the need to have focused time for the job search. Part-time care might be a good compromise.

### Take care of your physical and emotional health

Exercise and good nutrition matter; take time to eat a balanced diet and get regular physical activity.

Find a confidant or two with whom you can share your frustrations about your former employer or job hunt; to the rest of the world, present an upbeat attitude.

Spend time with positive people. If someone in your social circle is consistently negative about your situation, avoid them as much as possible.

Consider volunteering for a social service agency. Helping others provides perspective.

Anne Verplanck, Jeannine Disviscour, Mary Jane Taylor and Lee Vedder. "‘Plan B:’ What to do when your museum job is terminated." Session presented at AAM 2013 Annual Meeting, May 22, 2013, Baltimore, MD.

## **FINDING YOUR NEXT OPPORTUNITY**

### The job search

Set a consistent weekday work schedule for job-hunting, and create a new daily routine. A regular early morning walk or run with a friend can start your day on a good note.

If needed, find an alternative location to work on your job search every day. Your public library or neighborhood coffee shop might make a more productive office than your kitchen table.

Do not be shy about your situation. Posting “revising my resume for the first time in 5 years” on Facebook can signal to a broad group of friends that you are job-hunting.

Focus your job search by compiling a list of target organizations for which you’d like to work. Read all you can about these institutions, and find people who can connect you to stakeholders.

Make a prioritized list of whom to contact, and create a system to track your interactions with potential employers and networking contacts.

Maintain a thorough resume on Linked In; make regular posts; create an e-mail signature that includes the web address for your Linked In profile.

Pursue your job search online *and* off. Balance scouring web job listings and using social media with attending networking events, having informational interviews, and meeting contacts for coffee.

Remember that many jobs (including freelance and consulting work) are obtained through word of mouth.

Seek professional volunteer opportunities. Join the planning committee for an upcoming conference, judge a local art show, science fair or National History Day; review grant applications.

Maintain your professional and academic memberships (i.e. American Alliance of Museums, local and regional museum associations). These organizations put you in regular contact with colleagues in the field.

Participate in a job support group offered by local unemployment offices, community centers and churches.

### Catalog your transferrable skills

Think critically about how your past experience might qualify you for jobs beyond museums. Consider roles in:

Fundraising, including grant writing or major gifts

Auction houses

Research, with projects that can be supported by fellowships

Teaching: tutoring, primary and secondary education, college (including community college), curriculum writing

Travel industries, as a speaker/leader on educational tours, especially cruises

Consulting (see “Building a Successful Consulting Practice,” AASLH technical leaflet 228 )

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## Assessing new job opportunities

Be selective about jobs to apply for; look for positions that are a good fit, rather than submitting an application for everything that comes along.

Do your homework on institutions you're applying to, paying close attention to a museum's:

Financial health: Read the organization's annual reports and strategic plan, and find their IRS 990 forms on [guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org). Determine the board's level of financial engagement.

Personnel: Research the recent rate of staff turnover. Learn about the board of trustees and the senior level staff, past and present.

Reputation in the community: Talk with staff members at peer institutions. Consult pertinent news reports.

Institutional culture: Find (or get introduced to) colleagues with knowledge of what it's like to work there.

## **MOVING ON WITH YOUR CAREER**

### Curating Your Career: Being Prepared

Maintain a separate, non-work email account for your professional memberships, newsletters, list-serves and activities, and for personal messages.

Photograph exhibitions and other projects for your portfolio. Maintain copies (electronic or hard) of labels you have written, programs you have developed and contacts.

Keep institutional and personal research projects physically separate. If there is overlap, maintain copies off site.

Always keep your resume up to date; maintain an "everything but the kitchen sink" resume should you need to recall precise dates or complete duties for a job application.

Carefully consider buying versus renting a home.

Volunteerism and community involvement are often rewarding, and can also develop one's network and increase skills such as fundraising, strategic planning, and marketing.

### In Your New Role

Thank those who helped you

Help those who have lost their jobs, whether they are in your field or not. The phrase, "let me take you to lunch" means a lot to someone who has lost his or her job.

Maintain contacts with former supervisors, advisors and mentors who can provide guidance, contacts, and references. Keeping in touch with former students, interns and junior colleagues also helps build a strong network.

Be prepared for changing leadership and be alert to signs of administrative volatility. Develop allies at all levels in the organization who can advocate for your work.

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