

# Recognising career opportunities

Lorraine Bradshaw, Information Enterprises Australia (IEA)

What happens when you have studied hard and have finally received your piece of paper, only to find that there are not as many job opportunities out there as you thought there were going to be? To add insult to injury, the jobs advertised are often for qualified professionals with a minimum of two years of relevant experience.

In Western Australia we have seen an endless round of mergers and acquisitions in the private sector and beyond. Higher education — often seen as the professionals starting platform — has not been exempt from re-organisation, downsizing, right-sizing, re-structuring or whatever else management has decided to call the current round of 'head-cutting'. An ex-registrant of IEA's employment services contacted us recently to ask what the job situation was like in the contract arena since she had been asked to apply for her own position, and though she thought the interview had gone well...

So what do you do when the jobs are simply not there? Or at least it does not look like they are.

These days, job titles can be a little misleading. Be prepared to read between the lines and get as many application and information packages as you can get your hands on. If the job sounds interesting get them, it might just be the starting point that you are after.

So where do you look? The obvious ones are: papers, online job boards (such as Seek.com, and ALIA's employment pages <http://alia.org.au/employment/>) government websites such as <http://jobs.wa.gov.au>, university websites, and why not register with an employment agency? Fixed-term contracts are a great way of getting experience in a wide variety of organisations. IEA

also publishes a weekly job list that is abstracted from Saturday's *West Australian* that may highlight some opportunities you might not have considered.

E-lists are also important. Register with the West Australian Information Network (WAIN), ALIAwest, Records Management Association of Australasia (RMAA) and the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) as some positions do not always make it into the paper! Details of these and other organisations can be found at <http://alia.org.au/links/organisations.html>.

Networking — if you are not working, then networking is a great way to get out there and get noticed. But make sure that your master résumé reflects all of your skills and abilities: that job as a check-out-chick may not sound like much, but dealing with difficult behaviour, customer service, handling large sums of money and excellent time-management are all good skills to have. Having an up-to-date résumé also means that if an opportunity does arise, you can respond quickly.

The growth of records management, archiving, information management, information technology and knowledge management means that there are lots of opportunities to be had — if you are willing to look, and more importantly, go anywhere and do anything to get experience — and a foot onto the corporate ladder.

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## NT Group mentoring

Ann Ritchie, ALIA Board of Directors

The mentoring program began in Darwin in May 2002 when it was decided to implement a monthly mentors' training group to explore and learn about the different roles of being a mentor. The training program modelled the structure and process which would be followed in the proposed group mentoring program for graduates and students. The mentors' training sessions included topics such as learning styles (and how these relate to the coaching role), counselling and feedback skills, psychological personality tests as a tool for mentors to understand themselves and their mentorees, role modelling, leadership, and career planning.

The mentoring program was advertised through the e-list and promoted by visits to the local university. A group of fifteen mentorees began the program, with fluctuating numbers through the year. Meetings were hosted in various libraries and mentorees ran the sessions on different topics.

One participant, a librarianship student, said: 'especially as a distance education student it was nice to meet other students studying the same thing' and

'the sessions (for example, on résumés) were a great chance to get insight from professionals in the area.' She stated that the program had affected her career in the following ways: 'by meeting professionals in the field, it demystified a lot about people who work in library and information services. I realised that the gap between being a student and someone working in the field does not have to be that scary. Meeting different librarians provided inspiration and encouragement, and confirmed my choice of career.'

A second participant was a recently-graduated library technician who had moved to Darwin from interstate — knowing nobody and having no contacts. The mentoring group had a large effect on getting her career started. She said: 'the mentoring group helped me meet people in the library world and learn about potential places of employment in Darwin. The group was directly responsible for my first employment contract because of the contacts that I made while involved'.

After twelve months, an evaluation of the program found that, on the whole, the mentorees had appreciated the program and the learning that had occurred. They

valued networking and social aspects, as well as learning about local libraries. The evaluation also noted that all of the mentors were members who attended the ALIA monthly meetings on a regular basis, and having two meetings a month could be quite taxing. It was suggested that inviting the mentorees to the regular meetings could be a way of helping their transition into the profession, maintaining the benefits of networking, and learning about professional issues. It was decided to mainstream and integrate the program into the normal ALIA meetings. To help the mentorees to feel comfortable and welcome, some of the strategies suggested were:

- having a designated mentor whom the mentorees could meet before the meeting, and follow-up with any queries about the issues discussed;
- having a social opportunity with the meeting, such as dinner after the meeting.

There will be a reassessment at the end of the year, with a view to starting the program again with a new group of mentorees. ■