

# Global Employment Connections



**“Your Link to Global Workplace Information”**

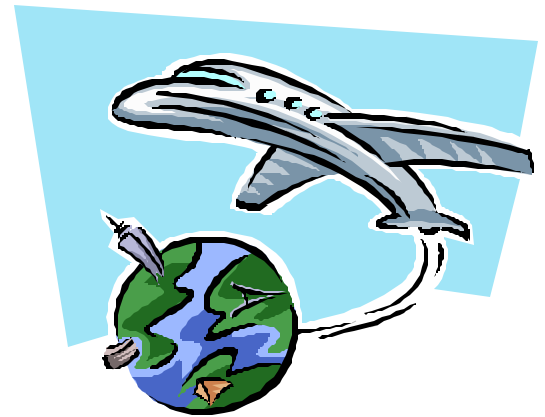
“Volunteer work can lead to employment within companies within months and puts the individual volunteering in the front line position for any vacancy that may arise.”

Jacqueline Fogg  
LEA South Africa

## The Value of Internships and Volunteering . . .

Welcome to *Global Employment Connections*, the newsletter with a practical focus on job-hunting in the global workplace. In this issue, we examine how unpaid internships or volunteer activities increase skills, help an individual become “a known quantity” and have the potential to lead to paid employment.

Cathy Stevulak, a Foreign Service spouse, shares how she was able to turn her internship experiences into salaried jobs. In addition, SNAP Local Employment Advisors share their best advice on how to find internships and volunteer opportunities. Want to find out more?



Read their suggestions and check out their book and web site recommendations . . .

## Job Seekers Tips

When job seeking, one of the first questions I am typically asked by a potential employer is “Can you write?” Very often, and particularly in countries where English is not the first language, being able to communicate in writing is a real asset. When I think back about most of my “first tasks” in a new job, they have been based on writing (website editing for UNDP and Canadian International Development Agency, annual report compilation/writing for Central and Eastern European Small Business Development Commission, editing articles of Russian scientists for a book that NATO published, compiling and writing the Information Plan at NATO).

Thus, being able to edit or communicate fluently in written English has been a definite asset in my experience.

It has generally taken me 6 months to 1 year to find work in new settings, even when I started looking for work in advance of arrival at post. Ironically, I have found it most difficult to find work in North America (when it is known that I am part of the Foreign Service and will be resident for a few years only.) This can be discouraging, however I have always “landed” in the end.

-Cathy Stevulak

(read GEC’s interview with Cathy on page 3).

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## How to Find Internship and Volunteer Opportunities

*By Ann DeLong Greenberg  
SNAP Local Employment Advisor  
San Salvador*

*"One of the best ways to get started is through networking and informational interviewing. Talk to people in your spouse's office, other expats living in the country, business associations, local AmChams and even the parents of your children's friends!"*



Seeking out opportunities for volunteering takes good detective work.

So how do you find out about volunteer opportunities? Some organizations have formal internship or volunteer programs, for set periods of time and to assist with specific projects. Others welcome volunteer assistance but don't have formal procedures in place. If this is the case, the sky is the limit as you can create your own job to fill a particular need. The trick is to do your homework, find what their needs are, then design your own project to fill that niche.

Internships or volunteer positions can be set up in almost any kind of organization: at schools, charities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), host-country government agencies or local businesses.

One of the best ways to get started is through networking and informational interviewing. Talk to people in your spouse's office, other expats living in the country, business associations, local AmChams and even the parents of your children's friends!

Many of the International or American Women's Associations work with local charities and can put you in contact with organizations hungry for volunteers. Religious organizations can also assist and have contact with a number of NGOs and charities eager for support.

If USAID is present at your post, contact the technical offices and ask which local or international NGOs they are working with.

Once you have identified the organizations you would like to work with, find out as much as possible about them. Many organizations these days, whether charities, government agencies, NGOs or businesses have their own websites and you will want to familiarize yourself with the type of work they do, how they are organized and their basic mission statements. Then you can call to request an informational interview during which you can get more details about the organization and how it works. Ask if they have a formal volunteer program or if they would be interested in volunteer assistance in any particular areas.

With a little initiative, you can have the job of your dreams, the flexibility you want and the opportunity to learn a whole new field or continue to develop your expertise through volunteer opportunities.

Several books that contain a wealth of information on volunteer opportunities include *Vacation Work's International Directory of Voluntary Work*, *How to Live Your Dream of Volunteering Overseas*, and *Volunteer Vacations*.

In addition, there are numerous websites with information on volunteer opportunities, including:

- ◆ [www.crossculturalsolutions.org](http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org)
- ◆ [www.serviceleader.org](http://www.serviceleader.org)
- ◆ [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org)
- ◆ [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)
- ◆ [www.earthwatch.org](http://www.earthwatch.org)
- ◆ [www.globalvolunteers.org](http://www.globalvolunteers.org)

## Interview with a Spouse: The Value of Internships

GEC Interviews Cathy Stevulak -

**If given a choice, many spouses would choose paid employment over an unpaid internship. Why do you feel that internships are valuable opportunities over paid employment?**

*In my experience, internships or short-term project work have provided a good entry point for employment, and have allowed me to get to know an organization, its culture and its people without being tied to a long-term commitment in an unknown environment. In those cases where I wished to eventually continue working with an organization, I then had strong background for applying for a paid position.*

*When I accepted my first internship position, I had twenty years of experience, had managed my own consulting company, and had been paid at senior level rates. Thus, to step into an unpaid position was at first difficult to contemplate. However, if one considers an internship like going back to school with the opportunity to challenge oneself, learn, make contacts and contribute, the decision to seek an unpaid position may be easier to pursue.*

**Can you briefly describe your experience with internships? It would be interesting to know where you worked and, in particular, how you found out about the opportunities.**

*Internships were not something that I have typically sought out. However, I have worked outside of the Embassy in each of the four posts we have been assigned since meeting my foreign service spouse, and I would rate internships highly - along with volunteerism, small project assignments and part-time work - when seeking work at a new post.*

*My first internship assignment was with NATO International Staff in Brussels. I came about this position by a circuitous route, but it led me in directions I would not have dreamed of. Prior to our departure for Brussels, I felt very lucky to have been offered a three-year contract there with CARE, an organization with which I had been working in Washington. However, after one year of failed attempts to obtain a work permit for this contract in Belgium (even with great help from the CLO and Embassy administration), I decided to forego the contract and look for other work. Given my previous background in work in Central and Eastern Europe, I looked toward options at NATO.*

*I spoke about job possibilities with several U.S.*

*International Staff. They explained that positions on NATO's International Staff are advertised well in advance, and that the recruitment process takes months. During further discussions about my background with NATO staff, the possibility of internship arose. Though there were very few internships at NATO, my background suited an immediate need. I was ready to accept meaningful work regardless of remuneration, and jumped at the chance to work with NATO's Information and Press Office on outreach programs to Central and Eastern European countries.*

**How were your internship experiences useful to you? Did they ultimately lead to other things?**

*My internship with NATO Information and Press provided me with a breadth of experience that I would not likely have been exposed to in a specialized position in the organization. I assisted in drafting NATO's Information Plan and discussing it with Member Nations, worked the front lines with the Press Office during Summits, and helped coordinate visits from Central and Eastern Europe to NATO Headquarters. As an intern, I was able to acclimatize to the culture and politics of the organization, without immediately assuming the pressures of a permanent position. I was also able to learn about the cycle of job postings for upcoming assignments.*

*Some months after my internship, I applied for the position of Head of Planning and Productions, deputy to the Director of Information and Press. I won the international competition for this post, and became the second most senior woman on the NATO International Staff. Having worked on many aspects of this job with the guidance of colleagues during my internship, I felt confident in assuming these duties and did not have a huge learning curve. My position involved administration for the Office of Information and Press, budgeting and financial control, publications, website design, information planning, opening offices in Russia and Ukraine, and coordination of special events such as NATO's pavilion at the World's Fair.*

*My job at NATO served me well when looking for a position at our next post in Ottawa. There, I worked as Communications Advisor with the Canadian International Development Agency on programs in Southeastern Europe, primarily Bosnia and Kosovo.*

*In our most recent post, Bangladesh, I did not enter the workforce with an internship, but rather*




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*"As an intern, I was able to acclimatize to the culture and politics of the organization, without immediately assuming the pressures of a permanent position."*

(INTERNSHIPS, Continued on page 4)

## ...The Value of Internships

*(Continued from page 3)*

with a short-term project with the United Nations Development Programs' international election observation team for the national elections. This ultimately led to a contract as Senior Governance Advisor and Team Leader, working to improve dialogue on governance in Bangladesh and managing the UNDP portfolios to support programs for strengthening parliament, human rights, transparency and accountability in foreign aid, and police reform. As prior research for work in Bangladesh, I started six months in advance and met with a dozen or so people who had recently spent time in that country. I followed up on leads they recommended, and started the short-term contract with UNDP soon after arrival in Dhaka.

**Would you recommend internships to other spouses? If so, what advice would you give spouses who are interested in finding out about internship opportunities? How would a person get started?**

Internships provide for **contacts, context and credibility**. They fill the "resume gap" to show that you have been acquiring skills continually, and they can expand horizons in a relatively non-threatening environment.

When accepting an internship, I would recommend discussing with the employer that you would like to consider your time as a stepping stone to future employment with the organization should the opportunity arise. Though some organizations have a waiting period of six months or so between an internship and application for employment, the contacts and credibility gained through an internship will carry over beyond that time frame. Furthermore, I would suggest requesting a title for the internship that will also be useful for your resume

(eg. "special events coordinator", "research analyst", "systems specialist").

There is often as much of a competition for internships as there is for paid positions, so selling yourself remains key. Foreign Service spouses often have advantages: a variety of skills, flexibility, proficiency in languages, and on-site availability.

Some internship programs specify age limits or education criteria, however others are more open-ended. Internships can provide a creative means for managers to meet their needs with qualified expertise when paid positions are not available due to budget or other constraints. Therefore, if you are keenly interested in working with an organization that has neither a vacancy for paid employment or an internship program, consider asking them if you could be their first intern.

Getting started in the search for internships is much the same as looking for paid employment. I would recommend searching on the web under the key words "international internship", and under the names of particular multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, medical organizations, or an agency that suits your particular interests.

With internships, there is little downside risk and much to gain....expanding horizons and networks, and making a contribution in a field of interest. In my case, internship allowed me to tap into my potential and set me on a course that was a chance of a lifetime.

Cathy Stevulak is married to Leonard Hill, now posted as Principal Officer in Halifax, Canada.

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### Global Employment Connections

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Do you have questions, comments, ideas?

Share your story and we'll share it with other spouses!

E-mail Melissa Hess, Editor  
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Pro bono work is what I call internships and volunteering and I sell it as an advertisement for a client's skills. For people who have worked, the term "pro bono" makes the idea more palatable and professional than calling it volunteering. I recommend that if the person eventually wants to work for pay, that this type of work be short-term and agreed upon up-front. I also suggest that in return for the pro bono work, the client get something he/she needs, such as a letter of recommendation, introductions to potential employers, etc. in addition to being able to list that work on a resume.

I have found it interesting that most people believe that they can only list paid skills on a resume and that all other skills/work must be mentioned in a "volunteer" category. During a resume workshop, I finally got them to understand that skills are skills and that you have them whether you developed them for pay or not. The salary is not part of the resume - the skill sets are.

Especially when new to a field or location, I think that internships and pro bono work are excellent ways to get a foot in the door.

Eileen Burkart  
LEA, Amman, Jordan