

*This month's Muse-ing comes from Abigail Phelps, an interpreter at the L.W. Paul Living History Farm in South Carolina. As we head into the springtime job and internship season, she offers some advice for organizing the data that can help track and focus your search.*

Conducting your first (or second or third!) job hunt in the museum field can seem like either the most exhilarating or daunting task. When juggling classes, life responsibilities, and in recent years the consequences of a global pandemic, the complex array of deadlines and application requirements can feel overwhelming. I found myself in this situation as I finished my degree online in the fall of 2020. Technology was the key to both finding a large number of opportunities and organizing them into a database that helped me prioritize and keep track of my applications.

One silver lining of the pandemic has been an increased use and awareness of technology amongst museums. Even small, local organizations who formerly may not have had a web presence now post online regularly, including their job opportunities. Some larger museums offer email alerts to their employment opportunities, and signing up for those is a good way to make sure you don't discover the opening just a few days before it closes. Following several museum job boards on state, regional, and national levels makes clear that plenty of jobs are out there – the field thankfully hasn't collapsed as some people predicted at the start of the pandemic. But even after sorting out openings that match your qualifications, there are still more opportunities and variables than you can track with a simple checklist. How to prioritize all these applications? Enter the spreadsheet.

With a tool as simple yet powerful as Excel or Google Sheets, it's easy to list out a museum's name, location, position title, key tasks, salary and benefits, required application materials, deadline, and contact person. Link the position title to the online job listing to create a quick way to check on the details. With this system in place you can scan the columns to visually assess which positions matter most to you, and which need your most immediate attention. Even as new job opportunities constantly emerge with varying deadlines, simply sorting the deadline column by date solves any confusion over which is due first.

As you begin submitting resumes and going through the initial rounds of interviews, adding a few more columns will help you stay on track. One for "date submitted" is a satisfying reward to fill out, as well as an important reminder when waiting to hear back from employers. If more than a week goes by, take notice and follow up with an email to the contact person. Adding interview dates and times helps prevent double-booking. And disappointing though it can be, including a column to date any rejections serves a purpose too. Tracking where your applications are getting more and less traction provides a clearer course for future action.

After using this method during my final semester, I couldn't have been happier to set my spreadsheet aside, having found my first job working for a museum. But in the uncertain weeks prior, maintaining organization and motivation made a world of difference. Using a chart gave me free peace of mind. For anyone looking for a job in this digital age, I highly recommend it!