

# Researching Potential Employers: Finding Your Best Fit

## Objectives

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1. Learn various ways to thoroughly research potential employers.
2. Learn how to organize data and incorporate employer information into an interview.

## Why Research Employers?

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Researching employers is a crucial element of career development and decision making. You may want to research employers to find out more about a region, industry, position, or organization. Whether you are exploring options, considering experiential learning, launching a job search campaign, or preparing for interviews, employer research can help you to make more informed decisions and determine your fit with an occupation, industry, and/or organization.

Performing thorough research can also impress employers in an interview. Employers are looking for candidates who show genuine interest in their organization, and research reflects interest and enthusiasm. A favorite interview question of many employers is “Why are you interested in our organization?” When you know something about an organization, you can describe in more relevant terms how you could work within that environment or how your skills could help the employer be successful. Being familiar with an organization can also help you answer questions like “Will my personality fit in this environment?” and “Do my goals correspond to the promotional structure?”

Finally, there is more to many organizations than meets the eye. When you assume that you know enough about a potential employer without researching it, you could be overlooking important information that may be asked about in an interview or strongly impact your choice to work at an organization. Targeted questions resulting from your research can provide you with answers that can help you decide whether or not to accept a specific offer of employment.

## What’s Inside

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|  |   |
|--|---|
| Information Interviews.....                  | 2 |
| Organizing Your Data.....                    | 2 |
| Employer Facts To Know.....                  | 3 |
| Matching Employers to Personal Criteria..... | 3 |
| Incorporating Data Into Your Interview.....  | 4 |
| Sample Employer Information Resources.....   | 4 |
| Additional Resources.....                    | 5 |

## Types of Employer Information Resources

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As with any research project, performing thorough employer research involves being mindful both of the kinds of sources providing you information, as well as how each source presents information to you. Below are examples of the types of resources you may review while gathering employer information:

- **Primary** (information directly from the employer): Interviews, documents such as annual reports, and websites
- **Secondary** (information about the employer): Books, articles, directories, databases
- **Bibliographic** (reference guides and directories): Indexes to primary and secondary sources

You can find these types of resources in a variety of locations including The Career Center Library and the Internet. Section VI of The Career Center Library contains books, literature files, directories, and indexes to help you research specific employers. You can also find online tools to gather employer information at [www.career.fsu.edu/library](http://www.career.fsu.edu/library).

## Types of Employers to Research

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Organizations come in all shapes and forms. Understanding the classification of an organization can help you to access and understand employer information more easily. For example, some organizations have smaller organizations that belong under their brand or management. These smaller organizations are called “subsidiaries”

and the bigger organization is called a “parent” organization. It is often easier to obtain information on parent organizations than subsidiaries. Similarly, it is generally easier to find information about organizations that are domestically located than internationally located, as well as older organizations. Below are some common classifications that may help you to better understand the information you gather about employers:

- **For-Profit:** Operated mainly to make profit for owners and/or shareholders. These organizations can be publicly or privately held; it is generally easier to find information on publicly held companies as they report to the government. Some examples of for-profit employers include Goldman Sachs, Target, and Publix.
- **Not-For-Profit/Non-Profit:** Operated mainly for religious, charitable, scientific, public safety, literary, or educational purposes, exempt from paying federal income tax on net earnings. Educational organizations, professional/cultural associations, social services agencies, and environmental or political organizations often fall into this category. Examples of these organizations include Green Peace, National Public Radio (NPR), New York Public Library, and Doctors Without Borders.
- **Governmental Organizations:** Operated and funded by either local or federal government. These organizations can be local (e.g., Police Station), state-wide (e.g., Department of Environmental Protection), national (e.g., Internal Revenue Service), or international (e.g., United Nations) organizations.

## Getting Employer Data: Information Interviews

An information interview is a meeting you arrange with a professional in your field of interest, working for an organization you would like to work for, or holding a position in which you are interested. The purpose of the information interview is to obtain “insider” employer or industry information. Information interviews may provide answers to your questions that print or electronic resources do not cover. You can ask questions about employer needs, organizational culture, operations, etc. to learn important facts about the organization’s operations, values, and culture.

To find individuals to interview, ask for a referral from friends, family, faculty, university personnel,

former employers, peers, etc. FSU students can also use the ProfessoNole network to locate FSU alumni and community members who have volunteered to assist students with career development. To access ProfessoNole, go to [www.career.fsu.edu/ProfessoNole](http://www.career.fsu.edu/ProfessoNole).

Once you have a referral, you can call the employer directly to set up an appointment at his or her convenience. Preparing for the information interview and knowing how to conduct yourself during the appointment is very important, as it is different from a job interview! For more information on how to conduct an information interview, speak to a career advisor at The Career Center or review the “Conducting an Information Interview” guide, available online at [www.career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides](http://www.career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides).

## Getting Employer Data: Employer Facts

There are many factors to consider when researching employers. As you begin gathering information, use the checklist on the following page as a guide to identify key employer facts. The categories on this checklist highlight some important elements of organizational structure, culture, and operations that may be useful as you make career decisions. They are also the categories that employers may ask questions about in an interview.

## Organizing Your Data

Start early when researching a specific employer. You may find a lot of information that needs sorting through to identify important facts. On the other hand, you may not find any information on certain organizations and need to make phone calls or set up information interviews to get employer facts.

Once you have started, you will want to keep your facts organized by maintaining some kind of organizational/filing system. Keeping a file on each employer you research may make interview preparation easier. You may also want to create an interview preparation sheet to record facts for use in a possible interview with an employer.

Finally, part of your research data will focus on personal criteria and how an employer meets those criteria. Once you decide which employment factors are important to you (i.e., work activities, career path, values, etc.), you can create a criteria summary sheet like the one on the next page that will allow you to record and organize pertinent facts about employers you are researching.

## Employer Fact Checklist

### Basic Facts

- Name, address, telephone
- Complete product line or service
- Number of plants, stores, outlets, employees
- Geographical locations
- Location of corporate headquarters
- Parent or subsidiary company information

### Employer History/Image

- Industrial outlook
- Organization's national and local reputation, awards, other recognition, etc.
- Associations they are actively involved with
- Major competitors — how can you help the employer gain a competitive edge?

### Financial Information

- Stock prices if relevant
- Size of firm and industry

- Potential growth
- Annual sales growth for past five years

### Philosophy/Goals

- Mission statement — should reflect current strategies and long-term goals
- Biographical information on CEO, etc. — education, career path, salary, etc.
- Political, research or social interests/ financial support

### Professional/Work Environment Concerns

- Organizational structure
- Position descriptions
- Types of training programs
- Salary and benefits
- Typical career paths
- Employer's review or evaluation process
- Background of entry-level positions and managers
- Employee morale

## Matching Employers to Personal Criteria

The following is a six-step model to help you determine which employers meet your personal criteria. By using a form similar to the example below, you may more clearly make decisions on whether to interview with certain employers or on whether to accept or reject specific offers of employment.

1. Identify which types of **information** about the employer or the position are important for you to know, and rank them in order of importance from left to right.
2. What are your **preferences** with respect to these factors? This step includes examining your values, interests, preferred work style, environment, etc.
3. Identify the **employers** you are currently considering.
4. Research and record specific **data** that's important to you for each employer.
5. Compare the employers based on your results.
6. Determine which factors are negotiable. Remember that in every decision, there will be compromises!

### Example Criteria Summary

| 1. Information | Starting \$      | Location   | Activities   | Work Style | Special      |
|----------------|------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| 2. Preferences | \$30,000         | GA, CA     | Sales, Mgmt  | Team       |              |
| 3. Employers   | 4. Research Data |            |              |            |              |
| PharmCo        | \$27,000         | FL, GA, AL | Pharm, Sales | Yes        | Environment  |
| RetailCo       | \$29,000         | Nationwide | Retail Chain | Yes        | Beagle Award |
| JoeCo          | \$25,400         | CA         | Etc.         | No         | Joe's there  |
| Stuff4You      | \$27,500         | PA, NY     |              | Pairs      | Etc.         |
| GeorgiaInc.    | \$28,000         | GA         |              | Sometimes  |              |

## Your Criteria Summary

|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------|------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Information |                  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Preferences |                  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Employers   | 4. Research Data |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |
|                |                  |  |  |  |  |

## Incorporating Data Into Your Interview

Simply being informed about an employer does not guarantee a successful interview unless you use that information effectively. Knowledge of products and opportunities is only helpful if you know how to tactfully weave that knowledge into the interview. During the interview, most employers will ask some variation of “Why do you want to work for our organization?” or “What are your long-range career goals?” Relating your skills to those that (according to your research!) seem to be needed for a position, or valued by the organization in general, can be an effective way to show that you have done your homework. Remember to articulate transferable skills like communication, writing, leadership, sales, and/or technical knowledge. Before the interview, brainstorm how you can provide value to the employer based on the information you found through research.

Another way to incorporate information is through the questions that you ask the employer, usually towards the end of the interview. Request information only on topics you really want to know more about that cannot be readily found elsewhere (for example, on the employer’s website). Ask questions that encourage the employer to expand on information you obtained in your research. Some examples of topics you could address are: corporate policies, future strategies, impact of recent industry trends, how recent initiatives have changed or affected the organization.

## Sample Employer Information Resources

The following are examples of resources you can use to identify types of employers, review employer profiles, and research employers in-depth. Where necessary, step-by-step directions are provided on how to maximize your search for information.

### Career Center Library

- **Employer Files:** Located in Section VI of The Career Center Library. The Section VI Employer Files contain promotional materials from hundreds of businesses that can be searched alphabetically and by major.
- **Career Key:** Our online catalog will help you locate books, industry profiles, directories, professional associations and more. Search from any computer at <http://opac.libraryworld.com/opac/home.php>.

### FSU and Career Center Databases

- **Vault Career Intelligence:** Offers insider employer profiles and rankings, which combine the inside perspectives of anonymous employee reviews with expert context from Vault’s editors. Access Vault via <http://www.vault.com/>.
- **A to Z Databases:** Provides employer and industry profiles, historical data, competitors, demographic profiles, ownership information, etc. Accessible via <http://www.atozdatabases.com/quicklookup/details>.

- **Hoover's Academic:** Comprehensive company profiles, corporate history, executives, products/operations data, financials, and news for U.S. public and top private businesses. Accessible via <http://mergentionline.com/Hoovers/continue.php?status=sucess>.
- **Plunkett Research Online:** Market research, industry statistics, trends and in-depth analysis of top organizations. Accessible via <http://www.plunkettresearchonline.com/>.
- **Business Insights: Essentials:** Provides organization profiles, company brand information, rankings, investment reports, organization histories, chronologies, and industry news/information. Accessible via <http://bi.galegroup.com/essentials/?u=tall85761>.
- **GoinGlobal:** Country-specific guides that include country employment outlook, industry trends, corporate profiles of larger employers including NAICS descriptions, revenue and full contact information. Accessible via Secure Apps on myFSU: <https://cas.fsu.edu/cas/login?service=https://apps.oti.fsu.edu/SecureLogin/Authenticator>.

#### Websites

- **Glassdoor:** This free resource provides an inside look at jobs and companies with “employee generated content” – anonymous salaries, company reviews, interview questions, and more – all posted by employees, job seekers, and sometimes the companies themselves. [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com)
- **GuideStar Non-Profit Reports:** Information on non-profits and other organizations that file for tax-exempt status. Includes 990 forms and other financial files. You can search their database of information on non-profits by creating a free login. <http://www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx>
- **Best Companies to Work for in New York:** Annual rankings of organizations based in New York. <http://www.bestcompaniesny.com/>
- **100 Best Companies to Work For:** Compiled by *Fortune* and Great Places to Work Institute, reviews based on employee feedback regarding work environment, information on organizational outlook, and employee benefits. <http://fortune.com/best-companies/>
- **Ranking Fortune 500 Companies:** Rankings of Fortune 500 companies by number of employees, average pay, and location. <http://fortune.com/fortune500/>

#### Newspaper & Magazine Articles

- **Access World News:** A newspaper collection from NewsBank that provides full-text articles from the electronic editions of record for more than 700 newspapers around the globe, includes over 60 Florida newspapers. Find this database via the FSU Libraries A to Z Databases link (see previous page).
- **Business Source Complete:** 8,500 business journals via the FSU Libraries A to Z Databases link (see previous page). Type in a term and select “AB Abstract” from the drop-down box. On the results screen, look at subjects in the left panel to narrow your search.
- **ABI/Inform Global:** Select the “Advanced Search” tab to find articles. Start with a broad search; then use the “Suggested Topics” on the results page to narrow your search. Find this database in FSU Libraries A to Z Databases link. [www.lib.fsu.edu/](http://www.lib.fsu.edu/)

#### Summary

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Researching employers is a critical part of the career development and decision-making process. This guide has given you some methods and resources with which to begin gathering information on employers of interest to you. The Career Center Library has a wide range of resources available to gain additional employer information. If you would like further assistance in developing your employer research skills or help finding specific resources, visit The Career Center and speak to a career advisor.

#### Additional Resources

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##### Select Career Center Library Resources

*Corporate Equality Index: Rating American workplaces on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality*.....IG1 H8  
*Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries*.....VIC F5 v.1  
*Directory of Florida Industries*.....VID FL 8  
*National Trade and Professional Associations of the United States*.....VIE N3  
*The Almanac of American Employer*.....VIB A4  
*U.S. Directory of Entertainment Employers*.....VIB6 E32

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