HOW TO LAND A RESEARCH POSITION BY Dr. Ali Ajrouch

There is little guidance on how to find a research position post-graduation. This is a guide prepared by Dr. Ali Ajrouch who went through the process of looking for a position. While this guideline does not guarantee finding the right position you are looking for, it may save you a lot of time in your search and serve as a step-by-step approach to your search.

Outline:

1- CV

2- Letters of reference

3- Cover letter

4- Find positions

5- How to make the best of the NIH reporter and Clincaltrials.gov

6- Sending mass personalized emails

7- Some interview tips

8- Masters options

9- Congrats! You got the job, now what?

Step #1: Develop a Good Curriculum Vitae (CV)

· A CV details all your academic credentials and professional science-related accomplishments, so review all your relevant qualifications and list everything you might include. Ask classmates and seniors if they can share their CVs with you as you might get inspired or remember something you might have otherwise forgotten or find a better way to phrase it.

· Determine how to highlight your accomplishments; show that you are a unique candidate for the job by using strong, active verbs: https://hls.harvard.edu/dept/opia/job-search-toolkit/action-verbs/

· Be sure to use keywords mentioned in the position's requirements you have identified

· You can improve your CV/cover letter with the help of the writing center and career hub. These guys have more experience with this than you do, but their advice is better tailored to fields other than medicine, so take it with a pinch of salt. (Example: your CV does not need to be a single page long, but neither should it be 3 pages long. Keep it relevant.)

· Ask your mentors and colleagues to critique your CV. It is good from someone who has been through the process.

· Free CV critique https://www.topresume.com/resume-review?pt=6D3G7mebV0VJp&utm\_medium=referral&utm\_source=Unmatched+MD

Tip: The writing center is closed during the winter break so you might want to consult them beforehand.

**CV templates/examples:  
-**https://medicine.osu.edu/student-resources/career-advising/the-cv

-<https://career.ucsf.edu/professional/medicine/cvs-resumes-cover-letters#Resume-Samples>

Step #2 Letters of Reference

· Most positions require letters of reference. Start getting these as early as possible since procuring can take up to a few weeks. If you have done some research, get them from people you have done research with and can speak highly of youand of your skills. If you have not done any research, mentors and attendings you have worked with will work.

· Some positions will only ask for references, and they will contact them for a letter. There is a specific template you can look up online or on Microsoft Word on how to present your references.

·Most positions ask for three letters. Some would ask for none or up to five.

Step #3 Cover letters:

While the cover letter is not going to get you the job, it is an opportunity to highlight some of your experiences and achievements stated in the CV.

. It is very important to state your interest in the position in the introduction. Highlight your passion towards the subject that you are applying to.

. Highlight your research, lab, statistics, leadership, computer literacy experience in detail backed by facts.

. Know the duties entailed in the job you are applying and focus on how you are a good fit for the position

. Read about the primary investigator’s work and achievements and highlight specific interests where you can help complement his/her work.

Step #4: Finding a research position

It is difficult to know where to start. Usually, big institutions have more opportunities. These are some links to possible positions in some institutions. Some are listed by specialty. A posted job does not mean that it is available.

A-   -UChicago fellowship database:

https://grad.uchicago.edu/fellowships/

-University of Wisconsin database – updated once a month

<https://postdoc.wisc.edu/funding/research-fellowships/>

B - Harvard database

<https://research.fas.harvard.edu/postdoc_opportunities>

-Johns Hopkins list

https://research.jhu.edu/rdt/funding-opportunities/postdoctoral/

NIH post graduate research positions :

<https://www.training.nih.gov/career_services/postdoc_jobs_nih>

<https://www.training.nih.gov/career_services/postdoc_jobs>

https://www.cancer.gov/grants-training/training/at-nci

C- CDC Fellowships (short internships and fellowships in infectious disease, toxicology, **disaster medicine,** public health and health policy). These and the NIH ones are on the more competitive side.

<https://www.cdc.gov/fellowships/index.html>

<https://orise.orau.gov/cdc/current-research-opportunities.html>

D- Variouswebsites intended for listings of research fellowships positions

-<https://postdocjobs.com/job/category/list?name=Medical+and+Health+Sciences>

-<https://www.zintellect.com/Catalog>

<https://www.postdoctoraljobs.co/Medical_postdoc_jobs?s=09>

**E- Ortho positions**:

1)Orthogate.org

2) https://careers.ors.org/jobs

-**Surgery**:

1) https://apds.org/education-careers/program-director-education-and-other-openings/

2)<https://t.co/mm4Y5bHFS2?amp=1>

-**Emory Rollins School of Public Health Job Board** (includes listings in a variety of fields intersecting with public health like microbiology, pharmacology, toxicology, cancer, cardiology etc) And you can post your own info/CV for recruiters to find it https://apps.sph.emory.edu/PHEC/

-<https://www.unmatchedmd.com/> A list of research and healthcare related (telemedicine remote opportunities) positions along with residency and fellowship positions outside the match.

-**Clinical research**: https://www.socra.org/careers-and-services/clinical-research-job-opportunities

-https://jobs.sciencecareers.org/jobs/health-sciences/

-<https://innovativepublichealth.org/about/employment/>

**E**- Contact seniors, mentors, family and friends. Spare no one. Connections are extremely important . Some people secured positions partially because they knew the person that occupied it before them and they vouched for them.

**F**- Look for positions on “LinkedIn”and twitter (@inside the match for example). You could explore several places where you can put your interests and look for jobs. They include "Indeed", "Devex", "Dev Net Jobs", "Development Aid", etc. (you can Google more).

If you are not having any luck with post doc positions, research fellowships, or research assistant jobs, look into positions such as **Monitoring and Evaluation** (**M&E**), CRAs, CROs and CTMs.

G- Some institutions have newsletters that share any relevant openings in their institution or others. It is a good idea to subscribe to them.

HF-Public health related fellowships:

UC Berkeley's compilation:<https://publichealth.berkeley.edu/student-life/career-and-leadership-development/career-services/fellowships/>

Another compilation:<https://www.profellow.com/fellowships/35-public-health-fellowships-for-professionals-and-researchers/>

At the CDC:<https://www.cdc.gov/fellowships/index.html>

Through ASPPH:<https://www.aspph.org/study/fellowships-and-internships/>

Step#5- how to use NIH reporter and Clinicaltrials.org

Due to the pandemic, hiring freezes were put in place. The only exception was positions with external funding. One of the top funders in the US is the NIH. NIH Project reporter is an electronic system to search NIH research funded projects. You can find a description about the project and the PI involved so you can contact them. You can see them by field of study, state, university etc..

<https://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm?CFID=26620839&CFTOKEN=66837291>

- You can also **search for *all the institutions* that have an NIH training program in a particular field** (for example, schools with a training program in infectious disease).

**Step 1**: Select “training, institutional” under “funding mechanism.” This very general search results in over 2000 institutional training programs.

**Step 2**: Add the selection of an NIH institute in Agency/Institute/Center (see acronym list <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/acronym_list.htm>; note that this two-letter code appears before the project number).

Or use search terms. A search using the term “summer research” results in ~800 programs same as above

- **Finding posts through http://clinicaltrials.gov/** this video has some tips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1RQshxRk9s>

**You can use these two websites to find/send emails to PIs you’d want to work with, check bellow:**

Step 6- Sending mass emails approach:

**Email template:**

Good day Dr., XXXX

I hope this email finds you safe and well.

1)     Introduce yourself: My name is XXXX, a 4th year medical student at the American University of Beirut (AUB). I aspire to become a physician-scientist as a ……………….

2)     What do you want: I’m writing to inquire of whether you have any available research positions at your institution/organization.

3)     Sell yourself. Include whatever skills and achievements you have. If you’re not sure what to include, look at job postings you are interested in and see what skills and requirements they’re expecting. At the end of the day make it about what you can do for them. The more personalized, the better and be honest.

Ex: I offer significant experience in …… (patient interviews, literature reviews, drafting protocols and research questions, IRB experience, data analysis skills, certifications, publications etc) …… I believe I can be an asset If given the privilege to contribute to this field under your mentorship.

4)     Finish it with the formalities:

Please find attached my CV and I’ll be happy to provide any other supporting documents. Thank you for your time.

Step#7-Modern problems require modern solutions: How to send hundreds of personalized emails in a few hours? Use mailing lists and mail merge to send bulk personalized email messages.

1) For our example, first Download the most recent Contact Information of NIH-Supported PIs. The latest list when this was written is from 2018, but it will do. (Or create your own list, more on that in section 2 bellow)

https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/freedom-information-act-office/contact-information-nih-supported-pis

2) Go to the organization column, press on the arrow to filter it by keywords relevant to you. (If there is no arrow at the lower right corner of the header, select the column you want to filter, go to the data tab, and then press the filter press filter button. it will appear)

3)Copy the results (mainly you need the emails and the PI last name) to a new excel sheet. Remove the filter and replace it with a new one. Repeat the previous steps as necessary in different columns such as the PI mailing address as it includes their department name will give you results too.

For example, I’m interested in public health: so, I used the terms public, global, prevention, social, epidemiology etc.

4) Once you’re done, go to the new sheet and mark the column containing the emails addresses. Now go to the home tab. -> conditional formatting -> highlight cells rules -> highlight duplicates. **Finally delete all duplicates**. This is important. You don’t want to spam people or have your emails be marked as spam.

5)Congrats. You now have a mailing list. Once you’re done with the 2018 list you can do the same for the 2017 one and merge them etc. Keep in mind they have the same columns but in different order. Remember to always remove duplicates when you’re done.

6) Follow these steps in the video to learn how to send mass personalized emails with attachments.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj_s3cdfVDY>

I- If you have a university website, you’re interested in applying to (check below on how to find some of these). Just a hundred emails on several profile pages. Instead of copying them manually into emails, you can have a program in a few clicks gather all the emails and names for you in a list. Then use the mailing merge discussed above to send a personalized mass email.

This is a free email scraper with an article/video on how to use it. The program has a tutorial too when you install it. It will save you plenty of time. It only scrapes200 emails per run so you need to be creative when there is more in your selection.

https://www.parsehub.com/blog/scrape-emails/

Lists of emails databases:

<https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/pure/clients> (includes email lists for Anderson, Indiana, Baylor, Northwestern etc. )

-You’re at the 10th page of a google search trying to find the email of that one attending you absolutely want to work with: try<https://hunter.io/>. They have a database you can search through.

Alternatively, if you know anyone at that institution or they had an elective there and received an email, you can use the in-house outlook directory to find it.

II-

1- Go to Doximity residency program ranker (requires you to create an account to get full access)

https://residency.doximity.com/programs?residency\_specialty\_id=39&sort\_by=research\_rank&location\_type=region

2- Sort the programs by research output/location etc. whatever criteria is important for you

3- work through the list and google the hospital/university’s name plus your specialty of choice checking if they’re offering research fellowship/assistant job postings (look into their job postings website) or simply email faculty.

The common wisdom I heard is that you want to email the big programs since they have the most funding, produce high-impact papers. Or programs where you have a good chance matching in so you can better improve your odds.

You can request a list of where AUB grads are matching in your specialty of choice through Mr. Harb’s office.

III- NIH intramural research principal investigators list. Lists PIs at the NIH and their contact categorized within different research areas.

https://irp.nih.gov/our-research/principal-investigators/focus

-How many emails should you send? Well the most honest answer is it depends. Do you have a US/Canadian/Mexican passport (Canadians and Mexican citizens are eligible for a special work visa through nafta)? What kind of field are you looking for? Are you looking for a paid, half paid or volunteer position? Are you willing to do lab work or are you only interested in clinical research? Are you available for one or two years? All of this will affect how hard you’ll have to look. The take home point is, even if you get a verbal offer, keep applying. Unfortunately, verbal offers can still fall through and I've seen this happen. Only stop when you get an offer letter/contract.

**Interviews:**-Know the person/position you’re applying to as much as possible. One tip is to look up the current grants this person has. Many times, it’s that money that’s going to pay for your position so reading the grant proposal can give you an edge and can help you know if this is something you’d be interested in working on.   
-You’ll get asked the same questions a hundred times and in a hundred different ways. That’s good, they’re predictable and you can prepare for them.   
<https://www.nijobs.com/careeradvice/research-assistant-interview-questions>https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/research-assistant-interview-questions-It’s recommended to send a short thank you note after interviews.

-How to Follow Up After an Interview if you don’t hear back from them?  
[https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/candidate-tips/how-to-follow-up-an-interview1/](https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/candidate-tips/how-to-follow-up-an-interview1/https:/careersidekick.com/follow-up-after-interview-no-response/https:/www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2014/02/12/10-things-to-do-when-you-dont-hear-back-after-a-job-interview/#12e1db6c1714)<https://careersidekick.com/follow-up-after-interview-no-response/>[https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2014/02/12/10-things-to-do-when-you-dont-hear-back-after-a-job-interview/#12e1db6c1714](https://www.coburgbanks.co.uk/blog/candidate-tips/how-to-follow-up-an-interview1/https:/careersidekick.com/follow-up-after-interview-no-response/https:/www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2014/02/12/10-things-to-do-when-you-dont-hear-back-after-a-job-interview/#12e1db6c1714)

**Funding opportunities:**

-Non-NIH Funding Opportunities

- Grants and Fellowships https://www.fic.nih.gov/Funding/NonNIH/Pages/default.aspx?type=postdoctoral

**-Other options such a master’s degree:**

-The Arab Youth Center compiles a list of available scholarships, internships, fellowships, and other opportunities locally and abroad. Check opportunities available to Lebanese citizens and Arabs at large

- https://opportunities.arabyouthcenter.org/

- \https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/scholarships/

-Congratulations!!! You got a job!!!:

-       The national postdoctoral association has resources for postdocs in general and IMGs in particular<https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/page/Postdocs_Resource_Library>

-   Dr. Maria Abou Nader wrote an excellent guide about the steps you need to take in the states (Visa, apartments, taxes, improving your credit score, getting a car or a credit card etc) it’s written for residents at Indiana University, but it has a lot of useful advice.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qrMPaayoOAZ0yKPibk8lrG6Qx1DTOUWv/view?usp=sharing>

-   To many of us this would be the first time we have a full-time paying job and taking care of our own personal finances.

Khan Academy offers simple and short explanations of tax law in the U.S. (Tax Brackets, TAX deductions) -This will come very handy with tax season- along a well-rounded education about personal finance (Budgeting, Investments, and retirement etc.)

khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/personal-finance

A more extensive guide can be found on the personal finance subreddit:<https://www.reddit.com/r/personalfinance/wiki/index>

-       More help on taxes:

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offered by the IRS: The program partners with universities, local governments, etc. to offer free tax services to individuals that meet certain criteria such as income below $54,000.

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-you-by-volunteers>