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Getting a Job at Eugene Public Library

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Getting a job at Eugene Public Library

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with thanks
to **Kate Rowles**

Eugene Public Library recently had an opening for an Adult Services Librarian. More than 50 applicants, with a wide variety of special skills and experiences to offer, met the minimum requirements for the position. Even though we'd love to hire at least a dozen or three, we could only select one person for the one specific vacancy. When so many excellent librarians applied for one job, we had to pass up some wonderful people. So, if you are one of those wonderful people, how to do you rise to the top of the application pile next time?

Before you apply, do some homework about the community. Take a look online at the daily newspaper www.RegisterGuard.com and the alternative newspaper www.eugeneweekly.com to get a sense of the community. Do you want to live here? If you love being in a larger city with its bustle and diversity and 24/7 activity, Eugene may not be stimulating enough for you. On the other hand, if you're looking for a nice quiet peaceful little town, you may not enjoy the contentiousness of a place where so many actively involved people have more convictions than willingness to compromise. Competition tends to be fierce for all jobs in Eugene. Will someone who shares your household be able to find a job if you move here?

Look inside yourself. If you have lived all your life in a hot sunny climate, will you find long term happiness on the rainy side of the Cascades? Can you live in a place where people rust instead of tan, and sometimes battle Seasonal Affective Disorder depression?

Find out what you can about the current job opening. Call the library or the human resources analyst, to get a sense of the library community. What do you have to offer this community?

The application process

Eugene Public Library positions are filled through the City of Eugene Human Resources Division. New openings are posted weekly on the City's web site (www.eugene-or.gov/jobs). Look at the job description for general requirements and duties. The description will also have a line or two about the particular position—whether it is in Adult Services or Youth Services, for instance. Occasionally, if more than one vacancy is anticipated in the next few months, one posting might be used to fill multiple vacancies. Most often, however, each vacancy is filled through its own recruitment process and you will need to submit an application for each position in which you have interest.

You can complete the application online. Don't wait until the last minute to complete your application, even if you really love stress. Allow a little time for the technology to be cranky.

Every potential employee completes a standard application. Most positions also require you to answer the questions on a supplemental questionnaire. Those supplemental questions are the meat of the application. They give you a better idea of what the library is looking for this particular time. Your answers to the supplemental questions are vital in determining whether you move to the interview stage.

The standard application is used primarily to determine whether you meet the minimum qualifications for the job. Oh—and when a job posting requires three years experience? It means three years of full time equivalent experience; three years working part-time is only a year and a half to us. If you meet the qualifications, your application is forwarded to library staff members who evaluate your answers to the supplemental questions based on specific criteria, which are determined before the opening is



posted. Sorry, no, you won't know exactly what those criteria are. Just tell us what you know and who you are as best you can.

This is important. Even if your standard application indicates that you would be great for the position, that information gets you nowhere unless you also provide it in your answers to the supplemental questions. Read the directions. The supplemental questionnaire specifically says, "Do not refer to resume or previous sections." So don't answer any question "see resume" unless you really don't want the job. Also, unless specifically requested, it is not necessary to include your resume.

Give detailed answers. You can only be judged on what you actually say. Your list of previous jobs and resume might be outstanding, but at Eugene Public Library, if you don't repeat the information in your answers to the supplemental questions, it doesn't get evaluated. Brevity is not always a virtue.

Neither is verbosity. Put yourself in the position of the person reviewing and evaluating the materials. It is not uncommon to receive over 100 application packets for one position. You want your knowledge, skills and experience to be well-organized, clear, and easy to evaluate—at the same time, you don't want the evaluator to assume anything about your credentials. Bottom line—if you don't tell us, we won't evaluate it.

Think creatively. How does your non-library experience relate to what the library is asking for?

Toot your own horn, point out your successes.

You can count on being asked about your experience with diversity. Think broadly. How is understanding of, experience with, and curiosity about human diversity related to working in a public service environment? There are many, many areas of diversity within a community and within the community a library serves. Don't limit

yourself to racial perceptions. Tell us about the classes you've attended as well as your work experience, life experience, etc., and how this experience has broadened your ability to serve a diverse population.

Ask a trusted person to read your application. Are you showing the library the very best you have to offer? Ask someone who is good at details to proof read everything; your spelling checker won't ask whether you meant council or counsel. Just as an Olympic gold medal can be won by a fraction of a second, a misspelled or misused word might be the one point that separates someone who isn't interviewed from someone who is.

The interview process

Congratulations! You've been called for an interview! Pat yourself on the back, and now it's time for more preparatory work. Ask the person who called you whether there is some specific person who can answer your questions about the library and the position you are applying for. Find out as much as you can, so your interview answers can be as relevant as possible.

It is fairly standard with any City of Eugene job interview that you will be facing a panel (or maybe two) of people who take turns asking you questions from a prepared list. As you answer the questions, keep in mind that these people are starting you with a blank slate. You do not come into the interview with a score based on your application answers. Some people on the panel may not have even seen your application or resume. Your application got you to the interview; the interview evaluation is based entirely on what you say today. Just as when you answered the supplemental questions, it is okay—even preferable—to repeat yourself from one question to another, if appropriate.

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The future of public libraries—any changes?

Lots of changes. Of course, the hard part is that mostly it is unpredictable (hence the need for flexibility, curiosity, new learning, etc). Frankly, I think we need to decide what our battles will be—can we really compete for the attention of adults who don't have kids? Do we segment adults into populations based on things like language needs/literacy or tech skills/access? Should we assume that our "bread and butter" customers (families w/young children) will, for the foreseeable future, consume our books and programming in much the same way they do now (not an unreasonable assumption IMHO). It all comes down to resources and how we choose to distribute them.

—VAILEY OEHLKE
Deputy Director,
Multnomah County Library



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Most importantly—listen to and respond to each question as if it is the only question being asked, clearly, thoroughly, concisely. As with your application materials, give detailed answers. Again, brevity is not always a virtue; neither is verbosity.

Now this is easier to say than do, but try to relax enough that the interview panel can see your real personality. If you are presenting yourself as something other than your real self, you might end up being miserable in a position you really dislike, because the interviewers thought you would fit.

And if you don't get hired this time? It doesn't mean you're a bad person or that you're not qualified. Sometimes the final decision is very difficult, choosing between two or three people who would all do an

excellent job. Perhaps this time you didn't show the library that you have exactly what they need for this particular position—fluency in Swahili, perhaps. I won't tell you how many times I applied for librarian positions here before I was hired.

If your favorite part of librarianship is reference work or working with children, consider applying for a Library Assistant III or IV opening. While these positions don't require the MLS degree, they do give you the opportunity to have much of the public contact work that many of us love. They also help you build up experience for future librarian openings.

On the other hand, maybe this job would have been a bad fit for you. Some grapes actually are sour, and your sweet job may still be waiting elsewhere for you. 

