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In **Part 1**

Career Advice

Broaden Your Horizons: A Step-by-Step Guide to Organising Your Own Internship, Part 2

The benefits of spending time in a different lab and working with different people are well recognised.

"You will gain new experiences and impressions, both about the science and about a new place and its culture."

(/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2002_10_11/noDOI.7152436228981874878) , Andreas Bergthaler outlined the three steps you'll need to take to decide where to do your internship and how to make contact with the head of your target lab. Now he completes his preparations!

S tep 4: Don't give up!

If you do not receive an answer immediately, it doesn't mean that your would-be boss is ignoring you intentionally. Remember how busy scientists are and don't get frustrated. Remain persistent and try to contact the person again after 1 or 2 weeks. If e-mail doesn't work, use the phone, or try contacting somebody else from the lab (after all, you'd have no way of knowing if your target was travelling for several weeks). As long as you stay polite and friendly, persistence may be rewarded in the end.

This is exactly what happened to one of my best friends. He was very determined to spend some time in one specific top laboratory in the United Kingdom. He sent an e-mail but received a very short reply from the professor saying that currently there were no places available. Surprisingly, though, my friend didn't give up. In fact, one day he picked up the phone and called the professor on his cell phone. The professor was standing in a field in Africa at the time, but he was so impressed by my friend's persistence that he finally offered him a position to do a PhD in his lab! Now I'm not suggesting that you should invade a scientist's privacy to land a job, but this story does demonstrate how much is possible if you only want it badly enough!

Hint

Students tend to be rather shy when it comes to senior scientists and professors, but there is no reason for being so! Even the most shining star, with numerous scientific accomplishments, prizes, and media appearances to his or her name feels honoured and enjoys the fact that someone else is interested in his or her work. So, don't be scared off by titles or positions. You are a scientist-in-training with the same interests, and as such you may be surprised by how much interest an eminent scientist will take in you.

Step 5: Find the money

In many cases the professor is happy to welcome you but cannot provide you with funding, so it's your turn again! Contact your student union and your university officials for scholarships or grants. Ask at science foundations, both private and state-owned. Think about suitable international institutions that might be able to support you (e.g., the EU, UN, WHO, or nongovernmental organisations). And last but not least, don't forget industry: Big global players may even have established structures to support this kind of activity, but small companies can be very open-minded as well if only your inquiry is convincing and matches their interests.

I raised some of the money I needed by applying for scholarships from three public foundations. In addition, I hoped to convince a selection of companies, which were all somehow involved in the field of immunology, to support my endeavour. I wrote approximately 10 letters and got two positive replies in which representatives of the management board expressed their interest. In the end, one of them supported me with a generous sum and, in return, asked me to give a short presentation about my experiences afterwards.

Step 6: Sort out the important last-minute details

Hint

If you plan to work in an internationally renowned institute or laboratory spearheaded by one of the leading scientists in that particular area, it will certainly make it much more attractive for someone to "invest" in you.

Where are you going to live? It can sometimes be difficult to find a place to stay in an unknown town, let alone in a foreign country. Another language and different traditions may complicate things further. If you do not know anyone in the city personally, consult people at the place where you will be doing your internship. If they can't help you directly, then they will probably be able to suggest useful Internet resources (search engines, newsgroups, mailing lists, and the like) or put you in contact with the student body at the institution.

I was able to get the name of a foreign resident who would be away from Tokyo during the period of my stay, and I thus arranged to rent his accommodation very cheaply.

In addition to, possibly, booking your flight, make a list of the things you need to take care of before you go: visa, health checks, vaccinations, and so on. Be sure not to wait until the very last week!

And if you are going to a foreign country, it might be a good idea to inform yourself about different customs and traditions and maybe learn some useful everyday phrases in that language. For example, I wrote down the Japanese words for greetings, expressing one's gratitude, and asking the way. Once in Japan I found that, very often, this was not really necessary because my Japanese friends and colleagues spoke English very well. But I think it's a worthwhile thing to do if only because the positive impression you make by showing an interest in your host country's culture and language makes things so much easier for you.

Step 7: Relax and enjoy!

Look forward to a great time! You will gain new experiences and impressions, both about the science and about a new place and its culture.

Finally, you will also have learned a great deal about yourself, about being independent, and about taking responsibility for your future.

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