

Action Kit: How to Leverage a Gap Year

If you didn't match into a residency program but plan to pursue the Match again in the future. Consider these tips to leverage a gap year and set yourself up for success.

Residency programs are looking for candidates with the skills and experience to be successful in their program.

Reviewing your CV sections to see where you have room for growth is a helpful way to make yourself a competitive residency candidate!

Make sure to review your CV for consistent formatting, grammar, and most importantly readability. Look to your mentors, friends, and take advantage of **ASHP Fall and Spring CV Review Program** to get an extra set of eyes!

Education

- Identify certificate or licensure programs that may benefit you in your career goals.
 - Seeking critical care - consider BLS/ACLS training or ASHP [professional certificate](#)
 - Ambulatory pharmacy – consider an immunization certification
- Does your school, workplace, or another organization offer recognition for exceptional work? Submit an application!
- Keep your skills sharp – education does not have to be formal, there are plenty of ways to keep up on current literature.

Professional Experience

- Ideally you may end up in a full-time or part-time position related to your area of interest to build your skillset. Unfortunately, that is not always the case so you need to be creative. Finding innovative ways to build those skills in any job can demonstrate your passion and dedication.
- Consider volunteering at a previous APPE site. Do they offer a shadowing opportunity? Seek ways to maintain ties and continue learning about the practice area you're interested in.
- Work experience is the most important quality rated by residency program directors when reviewing applicants who did not have a direct transition into residency from pharmacy school.¹

Research and Publications

- Professional writing helps build your CV, drug information, analytical, and clinical skills. Options include submitting clinical pearls to ASHP, manuscript development, or reviewing journal articles.
- Does an APPE site or professor have a research or quality project that could use some extra hands? This can offer valuable experience in an area that is important for residency success.
- Now may be the time to seek a venue for the pharmacy school project you never presented, or use a school presentation for a clinical pearl to present professional meeting.

Service/Leadership

- Continuing your involvement in professional organizations demonstrates your commitment to the profession and provides valuable networking opportunities. Additionally, continuing to attend professional meetings can have similar benefits.
- Consider seeking out local medical non-profit groups related to your area of interest to build additional practical experience.
- Take opportunities at work for leadership roles or extra projects. This can increase your experiences to recall during interviews, build your skillset, and help provide excellent recommendations.

Networking and Other Important Considerations

Networking

Pharmacy is a small world

Professional colleagues - Working as a pharmacy intern allows you to discuss career leads within your department or beyond. In addition to providing a way to gain experience through work, networking with your professional colleagues may help you identify professional opportunities to advance your personal brand.

Pharmacy classmates - Fellow pharmacy students from your school can be untapped resources for career advice that can further your understanding about job opportunities. They can offer practical measures that helped and may even be able to provide future job referrals by maintaining that connection.

Faculty members - Faculty mentors are usually more than willing to discuss opportunities to advance your brand. Did you work on a project with one of your professors or advisors in pharmacy school? Now may be the time to elevate this project into a meaningful deliverable such as a poster presentation or clinical pearl at a professional meeting.

Preceptors - Consider a current or past APPE preceptor that can offer professional advice, help brainstorm career avenues or explore available opportunities. Preceptors can provide unique insights into the job market as well as offer meaningful information that can be critical to your success during your gap year.

Social media - Online platforms provide an added layer of support to maximize your candidacy. Professional social media accounts through LinkedIn, for example, allow you to list employment history, education, awards, leadership, and relevant skills. This opens new opportunities to network with other professionals, locating individuals to connect virtually, and search for job openings in your desired field. Remember to keep your page professional for future employers.

Conferences - Professional meetings are always an opportunity to network with other professionals across the country in one location. Most have receptions that you can attend to exchange contact information. Reach out to classmates or mentors ahead of time to schedule time to catch up. Remember your business cards!

Other Considerations

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." - Benjamin Franklin

Reflecting on the Match

Consider all the variables you used during your research for post-graduate training programs. These variables could include geography, the program's pharmacy practice model, rotations, research, cost of living, and city attractions.

If you could rank the same programs differently, what would be your next best order?

If you broadened your search criteria, which programs would emerge from this additional search?

Letters of reference

Strong letters of recommendations are highly valued when applying for residency programs.² Look to your reference writers for guidance as you plan the next step of your career path. Inform them of your strategy so they can recall specific examples about how spent your time between pharmacy school and the next Match. This would demonstrate your commitment to working hard, problem solving, and self-appraisal that are critical factors when ranking candidates.³ Alternatively, consider evaluating if letters of references used before might have been the issue. Think about seeking alternative writers that you believe can highlight strengths on your behalf. When seeking out writers, give them plenty of notice and ask them if they would be willing to write a positive or strongly recommend letter.

Interview skills

Interview preparation is one of the most desired areas for prospective residency candidates. In addition, the interview is the highest-ranked criteria for acceptance into residency programs.⁴

Was there a situational, difficult, or hypothetical scenario you did not elaborate enough, or failed to highlight relevant experience?

Perhaps you blanked on the "tell me about yourself" questions and started things off on the wrong foot?

Ask a mentor, friend, or ASHP [InterviewPrep](#) to help you prepare with your elevator pitch and questions so you can respond when it counts.

Case Example: Michelle

Michelle was a second career pharmacy student excited to start residency and the next phase of her career. She received interviews at all the PGY1 sites she applied for except one. However, on Match Day, the results were not as expected. Due to personal reasons, she was geographically limited for Phase II programs. She received one interview, but was did not match.

Certain that residency was the right path for her, she spent the months between the Match and graduation speaking with mentors and strategizing how she would spend the time until the next residency application cycle. During these conversations, she evaluated and solidified her career goals and identified how she could strengthen her application to showcase her dedication to these goals. Michelle is now completing her PGY2 in ambulatory care and is excited to start practicing in this area post-residency!

Education

Though she did not pursue any formal licensures or certifications, Michelle focused on staying up to date on guidelines and keeping her clinical skills sharp. She utilized professional pharmacy organizations to stay aware of new guideline publications and read through them, challenging herself to understand their application to practice.

KEY POINT: Michelle highlighted this effort in her interviews to show her dedication. She noted it was important to be able to back up these claims as one interviewer asked her summarize these guidelines and how they apply to practice.

Professional Experience

Michelle took a job at her parents' independent pharmacy and took every opportunity to engage in clinical services related to the ambulatory care practice she hoped to pursue. This included patient counseling and increasing statin prescription recommendations. She also worked as a freelance medical writer to continue building her writing and literature analysis skills in addition to expanding her clinical knowledge.

KEY POINT: Michelle leveraged her interim position in community pharmacy to continue to build her skills in the area she hoped to obtain a residency position.

Research and Publications

To continue to improve her professional writing, Michelle reached out to a healthcare communications company where she had completed an APPE rotation to inquire about a per diem position. She worked as a freelance medical writer on projects such as development of medical publications based upon current evidence-based literature and, editorial review of manuscripts.

KEY POINT: This helped Michelle build her portfolio of topics on which she was knowledgeable and continue to keep her clinical, drug information, and literature analysis skills sharp.

Service/Leadership

As a student leader in a professional association, Michelle had been planning to take some time off during residency. However, when she didn't match she sought leadership roles in her gap year, securing a position on a committee and served as a delegate in the House of Delegates. Additionally, through her connections she had an opportunity to serve as a mentor, where she precepted patient care events and was as a mentor to student pharmacists.

KEY POINT: Maintaining professional involvement demonstrated Michelle's commitment to the profession, and gave her invaluable networking opportunities with pharmacists across the country in the House of Delegates and locally with student pharmacists and pharmacists.

Networking

What worked for Michelle?

Michelle credits networking and relationship with mentors as the foundation of her success. Their advice in the early months helped her create a plan for the months between graduation and the next residency application cycle.

Michelle remained active in organizations

Her continued professional involvement gave her invaluable relationships with pharmacists across the country and locally at the programs she planned to apply to. Their knowledge of her goals and dedication to obtaining a residency position provided her with opportunities to informally help the programs better understand her application.

How about conferences?

Michelle continued to attend professional conferences during her post-graduation time to continue to build her network and seek professional opportunities.

Other Considerations

Should I rank every program?

Michelle emphasized the importance of finding a residency that aligns with your interests, goals, and values. She shared that she had not ranked some programs in her first residency application cycle because she did not feel the residency was a fit for her. She does not have any regrets, as she ended up in a program that provided her with the experiences and training she was looking for to achieve her long-term career goals.

Address the emotions

Not matching can feel devastating and can lead to self-doubt. Michelle believes that addressing and processing the emotions was vital in order to regain her confidence and see that setbacks are merely opportunities to grow. Seeking support from friends and mentors immensely helped her come to terms with not matching, build her confidence and allowed her to approach it with a clear head. Additionally, having a support system helped her alleviate anxiety before interviews and gave her insight on how to approach “second time application” questions that may be asked.

Why Did I Not Match?

A reflection

Michelle feels one of the most useful things she did was reach out to a fellow interviewee who successfully matched at a program she applied to. Through self-reflection and discussions with the fellow interviewee, mentors, and friends, she was able to identify areas for improvement during interviews and gathered advice on how to highlight her qualifications during interviews. She felt this helped her immensely the second time around in the interview process.

Resources Supporting Your Transition

Nontraditional Candidate Guide to Residency | [PDF](#)

Curriculum Vitae (CV) Resource Center | [Website](#)

Wellness After Match | [ASHP Connect](#)

InterviewPrep: ASHP's Mock Interview Platform | [Website](#)

A New Practitioner's Guide to a Successful Interview | [AJHP Article](#)

Creating Long Term Goals for Career Development | [Website](#)

[New Practitioner Interview and CV Resources](#)

References

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