



# New Directions: Exploring Careers Beyond International Development

11/19/24 by Arifa Abbas (SID-US)

*On February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, SID-US hosted a virtual panel discussion “New Directions: Exploring Careers Beyond International Development” to help job seekers explore opportunities beyond their current fields. With recent shifts in the international development sector—including layoffs and sector-wide changes—this event provided practical insights and guidance for those looking to pivot their careers. Panelists Amy Chin, Stephanie Mansueto, and Wayan Vota shared their experiences, discussed transferable skills, and offered tips on how to future-proof your career (spoiler: it involves a mix of adaptability, reflecting on your values, and a good resume). Watch the recording of the event on our YouTube channel [here](#)*

## Contents

About the Speakers .....	2
Context .....	3
Key Takeaways .....	3
Main Discussion & Advice .....	3
Other questions answered .....	8
Unanswered questions .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>



## About the Speakers

### **Amy Chin | Founder & CEO of Crescendo Group**

She has 15 years of experience in human rights and international development managing US government- and UN-funded projects, many of which were in conflict and volatile environments. She has worked in Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kosovo, and Rwanda with organizations such as World Learning, Democracy International, and The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation.



### **Stephanie Mansueto | Corporate Recruiter & Job Hunt Coach**

Stephanie Mansueto is a job hunt coach and former corporate recruiter helping mid and senior social impact professionals' level-up their careers in mission-driven organizations with a focus on global development. She has worked with medium and large global for-profit companies and non-profits in marketing, talent acquisition, operations, program management, and business development giving her a strong understanding of corporate dynamics and operations.



### **Nick Martin | Founder & CEO of Tech Change**

He is an educator, technologist, and social entrepreneur. He is the founder and CEO of TechChange, a Washington DC-based social enterprise that builds beautiful online courses on topics that matter. He is also an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown and Columbia Universities where he teaches graduate courses on Technology for Social Change and International Development. He received his BA with honors from Swarthmore College and holds an MA in Peace Education from the United Nations University for Peace (UPEACE). He serves on the board of Poptech.



### **Wayan Vota (*Moderator*) | Founder of The Career Pivot**

30 years' experience in technology leadership roles, with 20 years at the senior advisor/director level in mission-driven organizations. He creates innovative nationwide digital development programs and paradigm-shifting events in health, education, agriculture, and economic development sectors across a variety of global settings.





## Context

The international development sector is facing significant upheaval due to the recent closure of USAID and the issuance of stop-work orders, leading to widespread layoffs and project disruptions. Many professionals in the field are navigating career transitions, exploring opportunities in related sectors such as CSR, ESG, and local government, while grappling with the emotional and financial impacts of the sudden changes. The situation has sparked discussions about the future of global development work and the need for resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty.

## Key Takeaways

- This is an industry extinction event and it is okay to feel upset, without feeling shame.
- Reflect on your values and strengths to guide your job search and reframe your experiences to highlight transferable skills that recruiters value.
- Network strategically by reaching out to alumni, communities, and LinkedIn connections, and use to uncover hidden opportunities.
- Follow the 80/20 rule: Apply to roles where you meet 80% of the qualifications, and reserve 20% for stretch opportunities to avoid burnout.
- Leverage resources like JobScan, Teal, and Impact Coach to tailor resumes and cover letters, and explore job boards like Impact Source for nontraditional roles.
- Explore emerging sectors like climate, philanthropy, and CSR, and adapt your language to align with employer terminology.
- Consider entrepreneurship or consulting if you have the bandwidth, as there's a growing need for new contractors and consultants.
- Stay intentional and balanced—focus on quality over quantity in applications, engage thoughtfully on LinkedIn, and remember that rejection is redirection.

## Main Discussion & Advice

### **What are some of the challenges and barriers to facing the reality of finding a new career soon?**

It has been shared that experiencing multiple layoffs, including unexpected ones, is not uncommon, and many professionals understand the emotional and professional challenges that come with such situations. Common struggles include rewriting one's narrative, revamping a resume, and effectively repackaging previous education and experiences. These challenges are often faced by both junior and senior-level professionals, particularly those who feel stuck in a specialized field. In times of uncertainty, take a moment to assess your current situation and reflect through journaling. Some prompts you can use for reflection include –

- What are your talents/strengths?
- What are your transferable skills?



- What are your professional/personal interests?
- What are your professional/personal goals?
- What does your ideal role look like?

### **This is a mass layoff event happening across the industry, given the stigma of layoffs, how do we talk about it or explain it to a future employer, family or peers?**

The past week has felt like an entire year, and it is important to take time to process the current situation and reflect on one's identity. From a recruiter's perspective, who has experience in for-profit government contracting, international development nonprofits, and the corporate sector, seeing layoffs is normal.

While it may be tempting to downplay a layoff, it is crucial to address it confidently and transparently. Specific experiences should not be hidden or removed from a resume; instead, they should be owned and highlighted to demonstrate their value. If you're wondering how to "de-government" your resume, the key is to embrace and reframe those experiences. Show how your skills and expertise can be applied in new contexts, as recruiters value transferable skills and the unique perspective you bring.

### **Which is more important my resume, my LinkedIn or my cover letter?**

Both a resume and LinkedIn profile are equally important, and maintaining consistency between them is crucial. The relevance of each depends on how an application is submitted—if it is through a portal, the resume may carry more weight, whereas referrals often lead recruiters to review the LinkedIn profile first. Regarding cover letters, some recruiters may not read them, while others do. If a company requests a cover letter, it should be thoughtfully prepared and submitted. While AI tools can provide a helpful starting point, it is important to avoid copying directly from them. Instead, the content should be tailored and edited to include a personal touch, ensuring it reflects the individual's unique voice and qualifications.

### **What are the resources we should use when thinking about when pivoting our careers?**

It has been noted that this is a challenging time for many, with recruiters and career coaches experiencing a significant increase in outreach and engagement. In such circumstances, it is important to utilize available resources effectively. Some recommended resources include -

- [Wayan's Newsletter](#)
- [Amy's Free Resume and Cover Letter Templates](#)
- [Amy's LinkedIn](#) – for posts
- [Stephanie's LinkedIn](#) – for posts
- Spend time on LinkedIn
- [Impact Source AI](#) will match you directly to right fitting jobs in the impact space



- [Impact Coach](#) to be connected with the right coaches

It is important not to navigate this process alone, as there are numerous paid and unpaid professionals available to provide guidance, many of whom are more active than usual during this time. Utilizing these tools and resources to one's advantage is highly encouraged.

### **How do you do informational interviews when all your friends (everybody you know) are laid off too?**

Networking is emphasized as a critical component of the job search process. A networking sheet is included as part of a [Job Search Tool Kit](#), alongside a CV guide, to help individuals expand and refine their professional network. This tool helps you identify the right connections and encourages reaching beyond your immediate circle. Suggestions include engaging with neighbors, extended family, religious communities, headhunters, executive search firms, alumni networks, volunteer organizations, and even cold messaging on LinkedIn (while keeping messages concise). Parents are also encouraged to connect with other parents at their children's schools.

Additionally, a new tool is being developed to help individuals identify "weak connections" within their network. [This tool](#) launched on Feb 14<sup>th</sup>; allows users to upload LinkedIn connection data and surface tailored opportunities by leveraging their broader network.

Another helpful tip is to seek out individuals who have successfully transitioned from international development to other fields. Using LinkedIn's advanced search features, you can filter first-degree connections by past employers and explore where former colleagues have moved. This approach can provide valuable insights and potential networking opportunities.

The front door is going to be extremely busy for the next few months, so it is important to try and use the back end.

### **One job had 625 applications in 6 hours, since there is such a vast increase of supply of job seekers, how do we deal with the increased competition?**

It is common for recruiters to receive hundreds of applications for a single job posting, after which the application window is closed. An initial scan is conducted, and many applicants are often found to be unqualified, prompting employers to reopen the job posting to find more suitable candidates.

While recruiters still prefer applications to come through the formal process, it's important to prioritize roles where you are a competitive fit. If a job has been open for an extended period and doesn't align well with your qualifications, it may be more productive to focus your efforts elsewhere. Submitting applications within the first few days of a posting is highly recommended.



Additionally, targeting medium and small companies, which are often overshadowed by larger corporations, can be advantageous, as larger companies tend to attract the highest volume of applicants.

### **Are there any sort of out-of-the-box opportunities for us to collaborate and create something completely new?**

While many professionals have faced challenges in their careers, this period is an opportunity for you to reflect on how you want to show up in the world. Take time to identify your core values and determine how to express them professionally. Ask yourself: What are your core values, and how do you want them reflected in your work?

Additionally, this is an opportunity to consider entrepreneurship, as there may be a growing need for new contractors and consultants. For those with bandwidth, resources, and ideas, pursuing entrepreneurial ventures—even those previously set aside—could be a creative and fulfilling path. However, it is important to acknowledge that entrepreneurship is not without its difficulties and requires careful consideration.

### **What kind of industries and sectors should we be considering? What skills do people need in them?**

Frankly, many industries are currently experiencing layoffs, and this has shifted the focus toward functional roles that are in demand. Roles such as fundraising, impact investing, private sector partnerships, and business development are particularly prominent currently. Business development, in particular, is a highly sought-after skill.

Additionally, there is an anticipated rise in opportunities within foundations and endowments focused on global development, though these may take around six months to materialize. Professionals with international development experience are encouraged to monitor these emerging opportunities.

To broaden job search prospects, it is recommended to figure out other titles. Ask AI to give you a list of alternative job titles to your current one – out of those 30, 15 will be applicable to you. For example, Corporate Social Responsibility managers are often called community managers, social managers, impact managers, or partnerships managers.

Adapting language to match the terminology used by potential employers is also important. For instance, referring to “grants” instead of “contracts” or “subcontracts” can help align with the language found in job descriptions, annual reports, or strategic documents.



Translation tools can assist in identifying relevant terms and phrases that may not be immediately familiar. Additionally, practicing proactive interviews using these terms can help candidates sound like a natural fit for the roles they are pursuing.

### **When talking about the job process, can I have more clarity on looking on Impact Source? Will I be led astray or am I safe?**

It is crucial to connect with your values to help guide which opportunities to pursue. Impact Source is designed with a broader perspective, featuring nontraditional employers that align with international development experience. The platform scrapes job postings in areas like philanthropy, climate, and more. While Idealist may feel slightly outdated, it still offers valuable job listings. However, job boards like Devex, which focus heavily on traditional development roles, may not be as relevant given the current challenges in the industry.

There is significant hiring activity in the climate sector, and [resources](#) are available to help identify great opportunities in this space. Exploring these emerging fields can open new doors for professionals with diverse skill sets.

### **How do you navigate loving the purpose of your job but getting paid less and doing less purposeful work but for more salary?**

Self-reflection and self-assessment are essential; otherwise, time may be wasted casting a wide net without focus. Evaluate your non-negotiables, such as work-life balance, and clarify these priorities before applying for jobs. Seek out individuals and organizations that align with your values, and explore where they are working to find opportunities that resonate with your goals.

### **What about jobs in DEI?**

DEI remains alive in law firms and other industries. For some organizations, DEI work may continue under titles like "employee engagement." Explore opportunities that align with your skills and values in this evolving space.

### **If there are one or two tips or tricks/top line things we should be thinking about when doing the job search and applying for the job?**

Create a comprehensive list of employers and target open positions that align with your skills and experience. A helpful strategy is to follow the 80/20 rule: 80% of the jobs you apply for should be competitive, meaning you meet about 80% of the qualifications. The remaining 20% can be roles where you fit 60-40% of the qualifications. For example, if your experience is in West Africa and the



job focuses on the U.S., it may not be a competitive fit. This approach helps avoid burnout and ensures clarity about where you are most competitive.

Additionally, it's important to first reflect on your values and purpose. Second, given the current job market, this may be an opportune time to explore other opportunities or take a year to pursue something different. Finally, make the most of your time on LinkedIn by engaging intentionally—this helps the algorithm work more efficiently for you.

Building on this, be strategic in your job search. Both recruiters and job seekers have limited bandwidth, so avoid overextending yourself. Be mindful and deliberate about where and how you apply. Some individuals apply to 4-5 jobs a day using the same resume, while others spend two days tailoring a single application. Find a balance that works for you and maximizes your chances of success.

## Other questions answered

### **Do I erase USAID from all my experiences and change that to just USG donor?**

Definitely not. A good company will not hold your USAID experience against you.

### **If cover letters are optional, would you still recommend submitting one?**

Panelists suggested submitting a cover letter if the job posting requests one, as it can demonstrate attention to detail and writing skills.

### **From a recruiter's perspective, is a resume over 2 pages always a no-no?**

Panelists advised keeping resumes concise (1-2 pages) unless applying for academic or senior-level roles.

### **Are tools like hiringcoach.ai and Teal valuable for tailoring resumes?**

Panelists recommended using AI tools like JobScan and Teal to tailor resumes and cover letters.

### **How do you network with people at an organization when you come across a role that matches your background?**

Panelists recommended reaching out to employees inside the company, especially those with shared experiences or connections.

### **For informational interviews, should you reach out to HR people, people doing the jobs you want, or both?**

Panelists recommended reaching out to both HR and current/former employees in the roles you're interested in.





**How do you find executive search firms/headhunters, especially ones that understand your background?**

Panelists recommended firms like Konektid, Head Global, and BroderickHaight.

**What other industries can we pivot to, and how can we translate USAID program management experience?**

Panelists suggested exploring roles in CSR, ESG, and local government, as well as green jobs and sustainability sectors.

**Any AI, templates, or tools for launching a business (e.g., Legal Zoom, Wix)?**

Panelists recommended tools like Legal Zoom, Squarespace, and the SPARK toolkit.

**Is there a support community in the DMV area?**

Wayan Vota announced regional support groups through his [newsletter](#)