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AFC's Young Professionals say industry is hiring

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Starting a professional career often leaves one feeling flush with emotion. Whether it is excitement, anxiety, or a combination of the two, the American Floral Endowment's [Young Professionals Council](#) strives to be better equipped to enter the workforce. In the fall of 2021, AFE circulated a survey to gather more career-focused information on experience, background, and advice from current industry professionals. The results were presented and discussed during a YPC webinar conducted by AFE in November of 2021. Presented is the sum of what we learned from the survey and webinar.

Data was collected from 104 respondents within AFE's community who represent a diverse range of fields within the industry. Nearly two-thirds of respondents work for or own companies in retail, floral design, or event planning; 15% represent production growers or breeders; and the remaining are wholesalers, manufacturers, educators, and consultants. Almost half of them are either business executives or business owners. Most of the businesses represented in the survey have ten or fewer employees, although around 10% have more than 500.

Regarding formal education, the survey demonstrated that a variety of pathways exist while preparing for a floriculture career. While higher education may be needed to fill some roles, nearly a quarter of respondents ended their formal education after high school. Some of these respondents earn six-figure salaries and/or operate their own businesses, which reinforces that higher education is not always a requisite for professional success in our industry.

Of those who earned degrees, only 50% studied horticulture or related focus areas. Nearly all others studied business or marketing. Some even studied a combination of horticulture and business via a concentration, minor, or master's program. The other 20% of respondents have liberal arts degrees in subjects such as art, political science, or English.

Nearly 75% have held their positions for more than 16 years, and two-thirds had some horticultural experience before attaining their current positions. However, young professionals planning on entering the industry who may have limited experience should not fret about job prospects.

In fact, it is safe to say that the industry is lush with a wide variety of opportunities. Nearly two-thirds of the companies represented in our survey plan to hire up to ten employees within the next year.

Employers use a variety of online platforms to post job openings. Company career pages and Indeed are the most widely used job posting sites; however, LinkedIn and social media sites such as Facebook are also common. Additionally, be sure to check out the [AFE Career Center](#), which has industry-specific job and internship postings from across the country. To get the full scope of positions, it is recommended to explore a diversity of these resources considering no single platform was used by more than 50% of respondents.

It is also worth mentioning that some smaller companies still rely on physical signage and word of mouth for advertising open positions. Many employers are seeking to add ambitious members to their teams, so directly contacting businesses of interest might uncover otherwise *hidden* job posts.

Only about a quarter of respondents applied online to job openings to earn their current positions; most took a different approach. A quarter of respondents mentioned they started or purchased their own business, and another 35% reported they entered a family-owned business. Others mentioned that hard work and dedication resulted in internal promotions. During our webinar, the expert panelists expanded on networking opportunities and how to work your way up from your current entry-level role.

Salaries within the industry vary greatly, with the lower half earning between \$20,000-60,000 while the upper half earns from \$61,000-120,000+. The top 20% of earners make more than \$120,000 per year. The highest-paying positions included researchers; business executives and owners; and sales, marketing, and product managers. Entry-level employees should be prepared for entry-level salaries but also understand that experience and self-improvement will create opportunities to seize roles with higher compensation. When looking for salary comparisons and data within the industry, our panelists recommended resources like Glassdoor and doing research on the costs of living for your preferred location.

Whether looking to land that first job or seeking a position with a new company, the survey uncovered some solid advice to use when applying. As respondents addressed filtering out potential candidates, many equally emphasized the importance of both hard and soft skills.

Applicants should be prepared to corroborate any claims of their skills, both physically and anecdotally. For instance, those applying for floral designer positions should be prepared to share a portfolio of previous designs and provide examples of when they worked collaboratively with others.

Incomplete job applications or spelling and grammatical errors leave hiring managers with a poor first impression, so be mindful to review resumes or applications in detail. Be sure to follow all instructions and carefully review the entire application before submitting it.

When hiring, there are a few core character traits employers are searching for in new candidates. A majority recognize the significance of previous experience, formal education, and occupational knowledge; for individuals who are first entering the industry, a passion for learning has tremendous gravity.

As a piece of general advice, many respondents emphasized that young professionals preparing to start in the industry will benefit from demonstrating flexibility. A plethora of foci exist within each horticultural and floriculture segment. Open-minded individuals who are willing to learn all aspects of the industry will have more clarity regarding where their passions and strengths lie, allowing them to identify a potential avenue for specialization in the future. One respondent summarized by saying, “the scope of options is [...] expansive. You may start in one segment but find you are more interested in other parts of the industry.” Accepting a diversity of responsibilities and demonstrating enthusiasm towards on-the-job learning, especially when first starting out, also sets foundational experience for higher-level positions, where a broader range of operational knowledge is paramount.

Employers are also looking for candidates who are a strong cultural fit with their existing teams. Many respondents described this as a team player who is both personable with coworkers and customers, excels in verbal and written communication, and is devoted and passionate towards their work. Specifically, in the floral design arena, companies are also seeking to hire creative and artful talent.

Finally, anyone interested in horticulture and floriculture should understand that “this is a very demanding, yet rewarding field.” Entry-level roles may include long hours and weighty work responsibilities. However, those who commit to the industry will see how fulfilling a floriculture career can be. Whether breeding, growing, crafting, or selling flowers, floriculture always seems to put a smile on our faces. Through our industry, you are getting a chance to bring happiness to those around you through flowers, work in a very welcoming field, and gain many diverse skills through a wide variety of opportunities.

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