



NYU | WAGNER

CAREER GUIDES

COVER LETTER WRITING

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

A cover letter is a brief, tailored summary of your qualifications for a specific role. It highlights key points from your resume while conveying your motivation and fit for the organization.

A strong cover letter, paired with a focused resume, is a persuasive tool that helps you stand out. It introduces who you are, explains why you're interested in the role, and shows what you can contribute.

Employers also view it as a writing sample; spelling, grammar, and clarity matter. A well-crafted letter can earn you an interview, but a careless one can take you out of the running.

IDENTIFYING THE EMPLOYER'S HIRING NEEDS

Each employer has specific hiring needs that shape what they look for in a cover letter. Your letter should clearly highlight the education, experience, skills, and values that are most relevant to the role.

Customize your cover letter for every position. Focus only on the information that aligns with the employer's needs. Start by researching the following:

1. THE EMPLOYER'S FIELD OF PRACTICE

You can find this information on the organization's website, in media coverage, published research, and marketing materials. Look for:

- The organization's issue area and mission
- The population(s) they serve
- The geographical region(s) in which they work
- How they describe their work
- How the organization differentiates itself from others in the field
- How the department you're applying to fits into the organization

Use what you learn to demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in the organization in the introduction and conclusion of your letter.

2. THE EMPLOYER'S POSITION REQUIREMENTS

Review the job description and similar roles at peer organizations. Identify:

- The responsibilities and tasks associated with the position
- Degree, experience, and licensure requirements
- Technical skills required to perform job functions

Use these details to shape the body of your letter and highlight your most relevant skills and experiences.

FRAMING YOUR COVER LETTER CONTENT

Your cover letter should provide context for your resume by telling a clear, concise story that addresses the three main criteria employers use when making hiring decisions:

1. CAN YOU DO THE JOB?

Employers want to see that you have the skills and experience needed to succeed in the role. A strong cover letter will:

- Highlight the most relevant knowledge and skills you've gained through work (jobs, internships, Capstone, volunteer experience), education, and research
- Show how and when you have performed similar job functions, such as project management, outreach, or research
- Directly connect your experience to the position requirements

2. WILL YOU DO THE JOB?

Employers also want to know that you are committed to their mission and the communities or issues they serve. A strong cover letter will:

- Emphasize how your background aligns with the organization's goals and field of practice
- Show your sustained interest through related work, education, and research
- Communicate genuine motivation to contribute to their work

3. IS THERE ORGANIZATIONAL FIT?

Finally, employers want to assess whether your personality and work style match their team culture. A strong cover letter will:

- Demonstrate shared values and a clear understanding of the organization's mission and environment
- Highlight personal qualities such as professionalism, collaboration, and a positive outlook
- Use appropriate terminology to show you understand the field's key issues, policies, and stakeholders

COVER LETTER STRUCTURE

1ST PARAGRAPH: INTRODUCTION

- State the position you're applying for, where you found it, and who referred you (if applicable).
- Briefly mention something specific about the organization's work that you find compelling, based on your research or networking.
- Finish by stating why you are a strong candidate for the role.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing to apply for the Program Coordinator position at The Building Bridges Women's Center (BBWC) posted on the NYU Wagner Career Directory. My in-depth experience in workforce development and commitment to women's economic empowerment aligns with BBWC's long, successful history of preparing teenage mothers to enter the workforce. I am uniquely qualified to help advance BBWC's work through superior career coaching and innovative program development.

2ND PARAGRAPH: PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Focus on the most relevant part of your experience—professional or academic—for this role.

Start with a sentence that connects your background to the employer's needs. Then, highlight specific responsibilities, accomplishments, research, analysis, or technical skills that match the job requirements.

In my current role as Program Associate at the Manhattan Resource Center (MRC), I provide comprehensive career counseling to unemployed young adults and teenage mothers who live in New York City Public Housing. I also manage the organization's employer recruitment program, successfully developing and implementing an employer cultivation initiative that increased MRC client recruitment by 40% over two years.

3RD PARAGRAPH: PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Highlight a different part of your professional or academic experience not covered in the previous paragraph.

Refer to the job description, and explain how this experience helped you build and apply the required skills.

In addition to my professional experience, I am currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration degree at NYU's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Through my education, I have honed invaluable management skills, including budget analysis, evaluation, and research. I make full use of these skills in my current position, leading efforts to design, implement, and evaluate the MRC's internship and mentoring programs. I am eager to leverage these skills to support the BBWC's goal of enhancing programs through evidence based practice.

4TH PARAGRAPH: SYNTHESIS + CONCLUSION

Briefly restate your key qualifications and commitment to the organization. You can emphasize your motivation and highlight your fit for the role

Thank the employer for their time and express your eagerness to discuss the opportunity, inviting them to contact you for an interview.

I am confident that my professional background, academic experience, and commitment to workforce development make me a strong fit for your team. Thank you for considering my application. Please find my resume attached. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss the position further.

COVER LETTER FORMATTING

PAGE LENGTH

Keep your cover letter to one page with three or four short paragraphs.

FONT & MARGINS

- Use clear, consistent fonts like Times New Roman or Arial
- Use a font size no smaller than 11
- Keep margins consistent and no smaller than 0.5 inches.

ADDITIONAL POINTERS

- Always include a cover letter *unless the employer says otherwise*.
- Address your letter to the hiring person when possible. Search the company website or LinkedIn for the name. If you cannot find one, use “Dear Hiring Manager” or “Dear Selection Committee” instead of “To Whom It May Concern” or “Dear Sir/Madam.”
- For U.S.-based employers, do not include information about age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, citizenship, children, or hobbies.
- When sending your cover letter as an email attachment, use a PDF to preserve formatting.

ETHICAL USE OF AI FOR WRITING COVER LETTERS

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT can be valuable resources when writing or revising your cover letters.. They can help you brainstorm ideas, refine language, and identify areas for improvement. However, these tools should support your writing process, not replace your judgment or your own voice.

AI can help you to:

- **Brainstorm ideas:** Get help organizing your thoughts and highlighting relevant experience.
- **Refine language:** Improve grammar, tone, and clarity.
- **Get feedback:** Ask for suggestions on structure, flow, and impact.
- **Ensure relevance:** AI can help tailor your letter to the job description and organization.

USE AI RESPONSIBLY

- **Avoid copying blindly:** Make sure your letter reflects your own voice and true experience.
- **Review for accuracy:** AI can polish your writing, but you are responsible for verifying that all information is honest and accurate.
- **Protect your data:** Do not share sensitive personal or employer information.

AI is a helpful tool, but it does not replace your personal insight and judgment. Always seek feedback from mentors, peers, career advisors, or writing centers before submitting your cover letter.

SAMPLE COVER LETTERS

October 28, 2025

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital
2301 Enterprise Drive Westchester, IL 60154

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing in response to the opening for a Project Manager at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital. I am inspired by the mission of Lurie Children's to provide high-quality, responsive care to children and their families. I would embrace the opportunity to leverage my experience in the healthcare industry as well as my education in health management to support the organization's goals.

In my current role at Rush University Medical Center, I collaborate with members of various teams across the organization, helping me develop a strong understanding of healthcare systems and the ways in which different departments interact. My work involves partnering with individuals across the organization, including senior leadership, to optimize internal processes and maximize efficiency. Additionally, this work requires excellent organization and time management in order to meet deadlines, equipping me with the skills to manage competing priorities as a Project Manager.

In addition to my professional experience, my education in health administration makes me an ideal fit for Lurie Children's. My coursework at NYU Wagner includes courses such as Strategic Management for Healthcare Organizations, which have allowed me to build a detailed knowledge of healthcare systems and gain applicable skills related to strategic planning and implementation in a healthcare context. Through courses and projects, I have also strengthened my interpersonal communication and leadership abilities, preparing me to lead and collaborate with interdepartmental project teams.

With my passion for health management, project planning experience, and relevant educational background, I am confident that I can be an asset to the hospital. I have enclosed my resume for your review, and I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you further regarding this opportunity. Please feel free to contact me at 773-123-0000 or job.seeker@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jo B. Seeker

Melody Cooley
Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Development
NYC Department of City Planning, Brooklyn Office
16 Court Street, 7th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11241

Dear Melody Cooley,

I am writing in response to the Department of City Planning's opening for an Assistant Borough Planner in Brooklyn, posted on the NYC Careers website. As a Brooklyn resident and urban planning professional, I share the DCP's goal of working with the community to meet its needs and support sustainable, long-term growth. I would be thrilled to use my skills and experience to help improve my community as part of the DCP.

Through my capstone project at NYU Wagner, I am working in collaboration with classmates to build an affordable housing toolkit for Enterprise Community Partners. This experience has provided me with an in-depth understanding of housing policy in New York City and the ways in which it can be leveraged to support positive outcomes for the community. The project also involves synthesizing research and communicating recommendations to the client, preparing me for the research and advising responsibilities of the Assistant Borough Planner.

Additionally, as an intern with NYC Housing Preservation and Development, I helped coordinate projects involving both internal and external stakeholders. This role included liaising with public and private partners, strengthening my communication skills in a city planning context. I also used my strong organizational skills and attention to detail to manage and distribute various reports and files, responsibilities that will support my work at the Department of City Planning.

My passion for my community, combined with my education and professional experience, make me an ideal candidate for the Department of City Planning. I would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the department as an Assistant Borough Planner and hope to speak with you further regarding this position. I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or i.m.pact@nyu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
I.M. Pact

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As you write and revise your cover letter, you have access to a wide range of resources across NYU.

The NYU Wagner Office of Career Services (OCS) provides direct support to students and alumni of Wagner via:

- [Career Advisement](#): Schedule a 30-minute appointment with a Career Services advisor via the Career Directory. Career advisors can review your cover letter with you and discuss ways to best highlight your unique skills and experiences.
- [Wagner Career Directory](#): Wagner's online job database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Career Guides](#): Comprehensive guides for all areas of career development, including cover letters, networking, interviewing, salary negotiation, and more!
- [Professional Development Resources](#): A collection of job boards, professional associations, and other helpful industry resources to assist in your career exploration. Learning more about your chosen field will help you tailor your resume for specific opportunities.

Additionally, all NYU students and alumni can access these campus-wide resources:

- [NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development](#): NYU's central campus career provides advising, professional resources, and events available to all NYU students and alumni.
- [NYU Wasserman Industry-Based Career Communities](#): Career Communities help you explore career paths, prepare for the job search, and connect with opportunities based on chosen industries
- [NYU Handshake](#): Handshake is the NYU Wasserman Center's online job and event database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [NYU Wasserman Cover Letter Guide](#): Includes Samples and Templates