

# BUILDING AND NURTURING YOUR INTERCULTURAL CAREER

An Industry-Wide Survey of  
Global Interculturalists

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Copyright © The Interchange Institute, 2022  
[www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org)

For questions and requests to distribute, please contact [info@interchangeinstitute.org](mailto:info@interchangeinstitute.org).

### **Order a Full Report from This Study**

The complete report from this study includes 18 pages of results, and commentary about the IC field, including a description of five common pathways to an IC career. It also includes a 16-page Appendix with more detailed findings and extensive quotes from participants about how they began their careers, where they have studied, how they manage their careers, and their advice to others considering an IC career. Purchase a copy to download at [www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org).

## INTRODUCTION

Interculturalists do many different kinds of work, in many different cultures and countries and organizations, each with its own set of norms, entry requirements and expectations. Most interculturalists have had careers outside the intercultural field, developing skills and gathering a wide range of credentials along the way. No wonder there is no internationally-agreed on set of professional criteria. Newcomers to the field have little guidance about how to get started, how to assess the relevance of their other credentials, how to build their business and how to know when they are ready to offer their services. Few have a mentor to help them. We set out to offer them some guideposts.

## STUDY GOALS

- To **help emerging interculturalists** learn about the many ways to enter the field and build a practice.
- To **hear from practitioners** about how they got the knowledge and skill base they need.
- To **gather the advice of experienced interculturalists** about how to pursue an intercultural career.

We are grateful to all those who shared their stories, advice and experience so openly and generously.

*A full report of this study is available at [www.interchangeinstitute.or](http://www.interchangeinstitute.or). It includes both statistical conclusions and verbatim personal narratives, and thoughtful, detailed advice and reflections from participants.*

## THE SURVEY AND OUR PARTICIPANTS

We developed our on-line survey by working with a group of experienced intercultural (IC) trainers from a variety of countries and backgrounds, asking for input into our focus and strategy. Participation was then invited, through listservs and social media, from practicing interculturalists\* who had been doing some kind of intercultural work, full- or part time, paid or volunteer, for at least six months.

The survey took about 30-45 minutes to complete and included a range of closed-ended checklists and rating questions and open-ended chances to write more extensive reflections.

As you can see in this box to the right, the sample includes a range of ages, nationalities and professional backgrounds.

From a checklist, participants noted what kinds of IC activities they do. These fell into four clusters:

- Personal and Family Supporters
- Trainers and Coaches
- Academics
- Language Teachers

### 141 Participants

83% women, 17% men

80% independent practitioners,  
20% organization employees

43% from USA,  
14% from UK  
43% from 34 other countries

38% work primarily in USA,  
13% in UK and  
49% in 37 other countries\*

72% have worked in IC field  
>10 years, 20% 3-10 years

Roughly 25% in each age group  
25-44; 45-54; 55-65; 65+

# RESULTS SUMMARY

## Getting Started

We asked participants to describe in their own words how they got their first paid intercultural work.

Stories ranged widely but fell into three categories:

- *Push* (43%)—hired as a result of some specific, intentional effort on their part
- *Pull* (14%)—purchaser asked them to work
- *Expansion* (43%)—expanded work they were already hired to do

## Marketing Strategies

We asked participants to describe any marketing strategies they used to build their business practice, which of these led directly or indirectly to paid work, and which promoted their business even if there was no known link to paid work. The strategies participants used fell into four types:

- *Social Media* (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- *Networking* (e.g., attending Chamber of Commerce or regional professional meetings)
- *Sharing Expertise for Free* (e.g. offering free workshops, speaking at conferences)
- *Direct Contact* (e.g. calling organizations, with or without known contacts)

## Building Expertise

In preparation for an IC career, our participants gained their intercultural knowledge and expertise by:

- Formal post-secondary degree programs
- Non-degree IC training courses
- Psychometric or IC tool or framework certification program
- Attending conferences
- Personal experience

### Sample Participant Advice for Getting Started

Attend as many pertinent intercultural congresses, workshops, seminars, webinars etc. as you can both for knowledge and networking.

There is so much material out there, try to find it before you create your own—it will make your life easier at the start. Network, join groups and don't be shy to reach out to the experts.

Train and be trained as often as possible.

### Strategies that Most Often Led Directly to Paid Work:

Directly contact hiring organization with known contact

Maintain a LinkedIn page

Cold call hiring organization

### Sample Conferences and Courses

Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research

Crossing Cultures with Competence (The Interchange Institute)

Summer/Winter Institute for Intercultural Communication

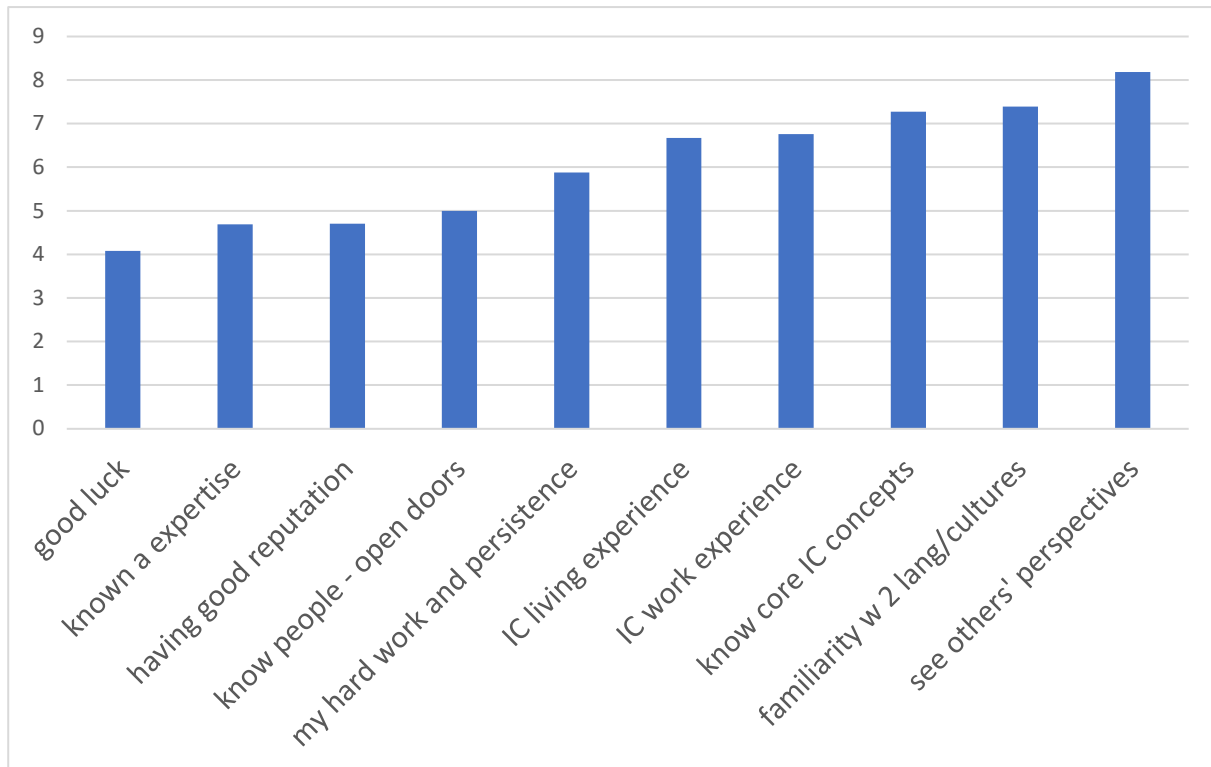
TESOL Leadership Course

Culture Detective

Intercultural Development Inventory

## Most Important Factors in Career

We asked participants to rank from 1-10 (10=most important) the **factors that have been most important in their IC career**. The factors are shown, in increasing order of importance, in the chart below.



## Financial Aspects

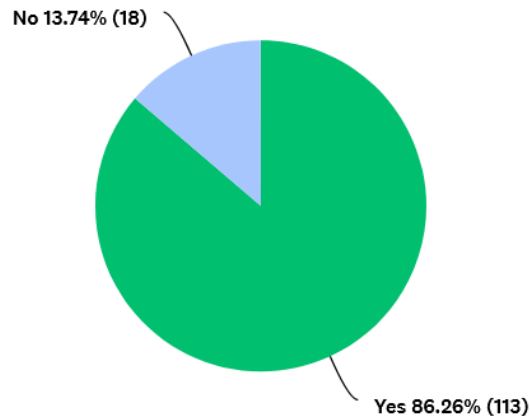
Participants reported on a number of financial aspects to an IC career. Highlights include:

- About one-third of our participants do very little or no *pro bono* IC work, while 7% do all or most of their IC work for no pay. **The average amount of work that was paid was 80%**. 96% of those who do some *pro bono* work rated the experience as positive.
- **The majority of participants were at least moderately satisfied with the amount of money they earned and were optimistic that they would earn a satisfactory amount doing IC work within the next few years.** The more satisfied participants were more experienced and were older. Almost all said they believe their IC work is important and makes a difference in the world.
- We asked participants to tell us their balance point between needing to make money (rated 100) and being assured that their IC work had a good impact (rated 0). The average score was 67. **Impact- and money-focused participants were similarly satisfied with their current earnings.** More impact-focused participants did less *pro bono* work, were younger, did more Training and Coaching activities.

## Advice

We asked participants:

***All things condered, based on your experience, would you advise someone to pursue an intercultural career?***



### Order a Full Report from This Study

The complete report from this study includes 18 pages of results, and commentary about the IC field, including a description of five common pathways to an IC career. It also includes a 16-page Appendix with more detailed findings and extensive quotes from participants about how they began their careers, where they have studied, how they manage their careers, and their advice to others considering an IC career. Purchase a copy to download at [www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org).

### Intercultural Training Expertise Certification (ITEC) Program

On the basis of the results of this survey and years of mentoring interculturalists at various stages of their careers, The Interchange Institute hase developed the *Intercultural Training Expertise Certification (ITEC) progrm*, designed to help interculturalists communicate their expertise and experience and to help purchasers of services assess the preparedness of interculturalists who offer their services. Find information about the ITEC program at [www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org).



**[www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org)**

The Interchange Institute is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization, founded in 1997 by Dr. Anne P. Copeland, focused on studying and supporting those who live and work in intercultural environments. We have trained and mentored over 500 interculturalists at various stages of their careers. On the basis of this experience and the results of this survey, we have developed the Intercultural Training Expertise Certification (ITEC) program, designed to help interculturalists communicate their expertise and experience and to help purchasers of services assess the preparedness of interculturalists who offer their services. Find information about the ITEC program at [www.interchangeinstitute.org](http://www.interchangeinstitute.org).