

NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

OBJECTIVE

An informational interview is a useful tool to help you explore career options and to expand your networking base. An informational interview can help you determine your interest in a particular professional field. As you meet more people your career search will become more focused. Informational interviews also help you get your foot in the door. “The real intent of an informational interview is simply to allow you to peek inside a particular profession. It's an opportunity to ask candid questions to someone who works in that field about the skills employers want, how résumés in that field are structured, where jobs are advertised, and, even more simply, what a typical day in that profession entails.”

DEVELOPING CONTACTS

Create your excel self-organization list. Family, friends, co-workers past and present, professional/trade/community associations are all sources. Plan your approach: What specifically do you want from each person? How will you contact and work with each one? What can you offer in return? How will you track and maintain contacts? Ask your current network for referrals. Develop your presence online through LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media. Present yourself professionally. Think of quality not quantity.

Review and find organizations you would not mind working for via:

- Alumni database
- AFE list
- School organizational contact list
- Career links and posted jobs on school's career site both current and old
- Networking connections
- Organizations you've interned with
- Google searches
- Linked-in Bloustein network

MAKING CONTACT

Professional contacts are busy people who have many commitments for their time. It may seem as though you are intruding on their schedule, but remember that people enjoy sharing personal stories and how they got to be where they are. You are creating an opportunity for them to pass along the benefits of their experience. By crafting your request as an informational interview you are more likely to receive a positive response. Remember the goal is not to get a job, rather to create a network to make you known. If you are successful in this process, your network will be able to work for you in providing you with referrals for positions and ultimately as professional colleagues.

THE INTERVIEW

Where and when you meet with your contact is often at their convenience. It could be at their office for an hour or over lunch at a restaurant. The setting should be conducive to conversation. Be sure to make a professional appearance in your attire and manner. Remember that the purpose of the interview is to gather information on your chosen career field and how to market you. Do your homework in advance. Research the company and individual before the meeting. Questions you might consider are:

1. How did the person become interested in their field of work?
2. How did they enter the field? What kind of education, skills, and training did they have?
3. What are the specific duties of their job? What kinds of skills are needed?
4. What, if any, organizational structures exist in this line of work?
5. What are the opportunities for advancement?
6. What is the hiring process like for their job?
7. What is their favorite aspect of their job? What is the biggest challenge?
8. What is a typical day for them?
9. What is the culture of their organization?
10. What do they like best about working for this organization? What are the biggest challenges?
11. What is the structure of the organization?
12. Who do they work with most often?
13. What are some of the partner organizations?
14. What is the labor market like in this line of work? Are there openings very often or is it difficult to break into this field?
15. What are some trends impacting the field?
16. What are some of the other leading organizations in this field?
17. What professional associations are most important to join?
18. What are typical salary ranges for those entering this field?
19. What advice does this person have for someone just starting out?
20. Share your areas of interest about the field and skills you possess.
21. Seek out advice on how to market yourself.
22. Can they recommend anyone else for you to contact?
23. How could you be helpful to them?

Taking notes during the interview is appropriate. Keep a positive attitude and be respectful. Allow your contact to do most of the talking. Frame your questions to gather information. At the conclusion of your interview, ask for referrals of other professionals that would be beneficial for you to meet with for informational interviews.

FOLLOW UP

Send a thank you letter as soon as possible but within one week.

TIME LINE

Conduct informational interviews during your entire course of study at The Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy to create an effective networking base. As you meet professional contacts in your classes, through internships, or at speaker events, follow up with individuals who peak your interest. By the time you graduate you will have a vast network of contacts and will be able to call upon these people for job leads. As alumni you may find yourself being called upon to be interviewed by a student. We hope you will remember your experience and respond in the affirmative.