

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

OBJECTIVE

An informational interview is a useful tool to help you explore career options and to expand your networking base and 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 to enable 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 an excel worksheet to organize yourself. Family, friends, co-workers past and present, professional/trade/community associations are all sources of contacts. 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? You should also prepare a resume and begin to develop your professional presence online through LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media. Present yourself professionally and showcase your Personal Brand. Review and find organizations you might be interested in working at by scanning the AFE employer list, Bloustein organizational contact list, career links and posted jobs on Bloustein's Job Board (both current and old) and Handshake (via Rutgers University). Think quality, not quantity.

Where to Find People to Interview:

- **Bloustein and/or Rutgers Alumni** – meet them at events, workshops, via LinkedIn or Bloustein's Career Management Specialist
- **Academic Departments:** Consider reaching out to your professor or teaching and research assistants. Many remain connected to a community of professionals in their fields of expertise.
- **Networking Events** – you should attend as many professional events as you can while a student – either at Bloustein or hosted at off-site locations. Take advantage of them while a student you never know who you will meet!
- **LinkedIn:** This professional social networking platform allows you to connect with Rutgers alumni and other professionals individually, by industry, or through LinkedIn groups.
- **Professional Associations:** These are non-profit organizations that aim to advance professions in a particular field by providing connections, opportunities, and information to interested individuals. Some professional associations will offer a student membership as well as local chapter membership which you should take advantage of joining. Some examples of professional associations in the urban planning and policy fields include: [The Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration \(NASPAA\)](#), [The American Planning Association \(APA\)](#), [New Jersey Society of Women Environmental Professionals \(NJSWEP\)](#),

[The Women's Transportation Seminar of Greater New York \(WTS International\)](#), [Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management \(APPAM\)](#), [Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning \(ACSP\)](#), [Young Professionals in Transportation \(YPT\)](#), and so many more!

- **Family, Friends and Fellow Students!**

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. 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 ask or get a job, but to create a network and get yourself 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.

REQUESTING THE INTERVIEW

Once of the best ways to approach your contacts is to lead your requests by telling them that you are seeking career information and are interested in learning about the work that they do or the organization in which they work (or have worked). You are asking them for their advice and expertise, given their experience in the field. You should never ask them for a job or internship. You must first build the relationship with them.

Sample Request for Informational Interview:

"I would love to speak with you to ask your advice and expertise and work in/at [insert organization or industry]. Based on your experience, I believe you'd offer unique insight that may be helpful to me as I refine my career goals. Would you be available to speak with me for 15 or 20 min (or over lunch/coffee) sometime in the next few weeks so that I may ask you some questions?"

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 or coffee at a restaurant. Just be aware that since you are asking them for their time, you should pay for their lunch/coffee. The setting should be conducive to conversation. Be sure to make a professional appearance in your attire and manner. Also, remember that the purpose of the interview is to gather information on your chosen career field and how to market you. It is NOT to ask for a job or internship (unless the conversation goes in this direction). Do your homework ahead of time: research the company and individual before the meeting. At its conclusion, express a desire to remain in contact if you prefer. Ask your contact if they have other colleagues with whom you can connect to learn more. Express your appreciation.

Questions you might consider asking:

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 (email or written) as soon as possible but within one week. If you haven't done so already, connect with them via LinkedIn. Be sure to check in with them, send them articles of interest and let them know where you land, thanking them for their guidance and expertise.

TIME LINE

Use your time wisely while at Bloustein! We strongly suggest that you conduct informational interviews during your entire time here to create an effective networking base. As you meet professional contacts and alumni in your classes, through internships, or at speaker events, follow up with those 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.