

## Guidelines for Informational Interview

Informational interviewing is a career exploration tool which when used correctly will assist you in clarifying your career choices. Informational interviewing involves learning about a particular career from someone directly engaged in that career. This experience is intended to help you:

- Gain an in-depth understanding of the scope of a career;
- Validate your continued interest and commitment to a career choice;
- Learn of other contacts for further exploration and professional networking opportunities.

Informational interviewing may also be used as a pre job search research tool. It can be a way to investigate the culture of a particular organization and determine whether opportunities exist in areas you are targeting. You may discover a job opening during an informational interview, **however it should not be your objective to use informational interviewing to ask for a job.** You should not offer your resume (unless asked) or otherwise indicate that you are really there trying to sidestep their regular hiring practices. In order to be effective, it must be clear that you are there to learn more about the organization and the position, NOT to look for a job!

As a risk-free method to learn more about a career choice within a professional in the field, informational interviewing can't be beat! Here's how it works:

### 1) Determine whom to contact:

Research as much as you can about the particular career option.

- Look in LinkedIn, trade journals, newspapers, Chambers of Commerce, etc., for names of organizations who employ people in the career field you are researching.
- Ask friends, family, faculty, advisors, etc., for referrals to people they know who work in the career field you are researching.

Note: it is important that you know what you are looking for! If you cannot describe the position, you need to do further research. If you have trouble getting past the receptionist, treat her/him as a resource. Begin to ask the questions you have prepared (see below). If s/he can't answer your questions, you will usually be referred to someone else who can.

### 2) Initiate the meeting:

Often professionals are flattered that you consider them experts and want to hear their perspectives on a career area. They are usually willing to speak to you for 20-30 minutes. Here is a sample script you could use to ask for an informational interview:

*"Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a student at Washington State University. \_\_\_\_\_ referred me to you. I am trying to determine my future career direction and I am interested in the \_\_\_\_\_ field. Could you spare 20-30 minutes to meet with me and discuss your current position?" (Be prepared to suggest days and times to meet.)*

If they decline to give you information: Ask if they know someone else in this career with whom you might speak. Most people will try to offer the name of someone who can. Always thank the person for her/his time and consideration!

### 3) Research the field and the organization prior to the meeting:

The questions you ask should reflect a basic knowledge of the career you are investigating and the organization where the professional is working. This will save you and the professional valuable time and will make you look better. Before your visit, ask for company literature or articles you can read about the industry. Use the Career Center to find out more about the occupation in general. Develop a job description for your chosen career using. This research will help you develop pertinent questions.

#### 4) Prepare Questions in advance:

Design your questions to get the answers that will clarify and confirm whether this is the career and/or organization for you. Below are some suggestions:

##### a. Daily work routine/environment

- What is a typical day like? What do you like most and least about your work?
- How many hours do you work a week? Do you often work evenings or weekends?
- What is a typical starting salary? What is an average salary? What benefits are there?

##### b. Questions about the organization and future

- Describe the corporate culture of this organization.
- What are the goals of your department/organization?
- How is your organization funded and how secure is that funding?
- What new projects are coming up or how will your organization continue to be competitive in the marketplace?
- How would you evaluate the future of this career field?

##### c. Job qualifications and preparation

- How did you attain this position? What are common career paths?
- What would you recommend for someone like me who seeks this kind of job?
- Are there internship or volunteer opportunities?
- What are typical hiring procedures?

##### d. Special interest questions

These are questions which relate to specific needs or interests you may have. They should reflect research you have done on yourself as well as the organization. Examples include:

- I enjoy being creative; what opportunities are there for creativity in your organization?
- How do state regulations affect the future of this organization or career field?

##### e. Always ask!

- Who else can I speak to for more information? Always get the names of others in the same field with whom you can do an informational interview.

Plan on doing at least three informational interviews in each career field you explore. It is very important to get more than one point of view. Talk with people in various work settings to see the differences (i.e., government, private sector, private non-profit, education).

#### 5) The Day of the Interview

1. Dress appropriately! Dress as if you were going to interview for a position. First impressions count.
2. Bring your questions written out on a notepad. Ask directly from your notebook and take notes. Taking notes is important so you'll remember what is said, and because it shows that you value the information you are receiving enough to want to remember it.
3. Be punctual and be courteous to EVERYONE you meet.
4. Keep good records of whom you talk with. Get the business cards or names and addresses for you follow-up.

#### 6) Follow-up

1. Evaluate the interview. Make sure you got the information you came for. Ask yourself how you currently feel about this occupation. Did you get an objective opinion?
2. Write thank you notes to your interviewee and anyone else who was helpful to you. This will remind them of you and encourage them to let you know of future opportunities.
3. Keep in touch. Follow-up with future notes or phone calls to let them know how their help has been of service and how you are doing in your career exploration. This will further remind them of you and encourage them to let you know of future opportunities.