



Professional Development Program

Informational Interview Module

Step 1: The Informational Interview

- Identify someone other than your internship supervisor or an immediate family member who works in a career that interests you. Consider asking your internship supervisor for an idea of a colleague that you could connect with. Read through the Informational Interview Guide on the next page for more information.
- Prepare a list of about 5-7 questions that you could ask during your informational interview. Begin with the following list and add of your own questions, depending on what you want to learn.
 - Please share a high-level overview of what you do in your job?
 - How would you describe the organizational culture of your workplace?
 - How does it compare to other places you have worked?
 - What advice do you have for me as I am beginning my professional career in this field of work?
 - Can you suggest another colleague I may connect with to gain an additional perspective on this career field?
 - Add 2-3 questions of your own, based on what you are hoping to learn from this meeting.
- Conduct a 30-minute informational interview!
- After the informational interview, send a thank you (email or handwritten) to the person you met with and consider adding them as a connection on LinkedIn if you have a profile set up.

Step 2: Reflection

Following your informational interview, take some time to reflect on your experience. Write down some notes, as you will be discussing your experience with your Internship Coordinator at your next site visit or phone check-in. You and your Internship Coordinator will discuss:

- A brief overview of the informational interview including: Who you met with, his/her job company and title, and 2-3 of the additional questions you prepared in advance.
- A summary of what you learned from the informational interview, including 3-5 key take-aways from the meeting.
- How the information gained from this meeting has impacted you and your own career plans. Did learning about this profession make you more or less interested in this career path and why? What are your next steps for your own career plan based on this informational interview? Topics to address may include: Who you will reach out to for another informational interview, what career you want to explore next as a result of this meeting, how you will follow up on the advice given to you by this person, etc.
- Anything else you want to share about how this informational interview relates to your internship experience.

Informational Interview Guide

An informational interview is a meeting with an experienced professional intended to help you gather information about an occupation of interest. These meetings are much more beneficial than reading about an occupational area and provide the following benefits:

- Gather career information tailored to your specific career questions and concerns.
- Gain insider tips about getting jobs or internships in the field.
- Observe the work environment and see the different settings available for an occupation.
- Meet people in your field, which may develop into future job leads or networking opportunities.

Setting Up the Interview

For some, setting up interviews with strangers can feel uncomfortable. Be sure to rehearse your approach with a friend and write out bullet points of what you will say. When you call, make sure to:

- Give your name and affiliation.
- Explain the purpose of your visit: to learn more about their field and gain advice on a job search.
- Ask for a 30 minute meeting with them in person, so you can see their work environment.
- Remember to be flexible – lunch or early morning may be the best time to meet someone.
- Get complete directions to their location.
- Leave your number in case they must re-schedule.
- Be sure to get their full name and title so you know who to ask for when you arrive.
- Telephone appointments are a good option if they are out of state.

Interview Suggestions

Be sure to make a positive impression when you conduct an informational interview. This person could potentially serve as a mentor or provide you with job and internship leads. When conducting an informational interview be sure to:

- Dress professionally, and be on time. If you know you will be late, call them.
- Read up on the occupation and/or organization before your meeting.
- Prepare a thoughtful list of questions before you go (see the back of this handout for ideas).
- Bring paper and take notes during your meeting and afterward.
- Ask for their business card and also ask if you can stay in touch if you have further questions.

After the Interview

- Send them a note thanking them for the time they spent with you and the information they shared.
- Follow up on their suggestions or call any contacts they shared.
- Keep in touch with the contact, letting them know how your job search is going or ask additional questions that may arise. Be cautious, however, not to take too much of their time.

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Preparation

- How does one go about getting experience in this field before and/or after graduation?
- What kind of experiences do employers value? (Internships? Research? Volunteering? Other?)
- What background, education, and work experiences are necessary or helpful for this position?
- What are the most important skills for this field?

Nature of the Work

- What are your job responsibilities?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- What do you like best/least about this job?
- How would you describe the work environment or workplace culture?
- What personal characteristics and education are employers looking for in this position?
- What are typical career paths for people in this field?

Trends and Availability

- How do people find out about jobs in this industry? Are they advertised? If so, where?
- When your organization has openings, how would I learn about them? How did you find your job?
- How does one advance in this field? Is relocation necessary? What is the turnover rate like?
- What are current trends, changes or controversies in the field?
- What is the occupational outlook (local, nation)?
- Would having a graduate degree benefit a position in this field?

Networking

- Can you suggest some recent publications that discuss this field?
- What professional associations do people in this field generally belong to?
- Can you suggest other people I could talk to? May I use your name as a referral?

Life Style

- Does your job require so much time that it impacts your personal life?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc?

Advice

- Could you review my resume and give feedback on things I should change to be more marketable?
- Is there any other advice regarding this occupation or tips for finding a job/internship in this area?

Questions to Avoid

- It is considered inappropriate to ask the professional if they have an opening for you.
- Do not ask the specific salary of the person you interview.