



NYU | WAGNER

NETWORKING &
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS



NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

NETWORKING

Networking is the systematic process of developing and cultivating a pool of professional contacts. Networking is not just telling a few friends, relatives, faculty, or Wagner's OCS, "I'm looking for a job, so let me know if you hear of anything or know anyone." Rather, it is a strategic approach to building professional relationships through which you can share information about career opportunities, important industry trends, and even methods of practice.

THE POWER OF NETWORKING

While responding to online postings is an important part of the job search process, networking significantly increases your chances of landing an interview and/or job opportunity. Depending on which figures you read, as many as 80 percent of jobs are obtained through networking¹. Referred to as the "hidden job market," many of these positions are never even advertised to the general public.

This is not a new phenomenon, nor is it likely to go away anytime soon. In 1973, Mark Granovetter, a Sociology Professor at Stanford, illustrated the power of networking in his research and analysis on the "strong link of weak ties." According to Granovetter's study², big networks (including the acquaintances of friends) can help you connect to people you would not otherwise meet. These indirect connections often provide a direct link to the hidden job market. In fact, over 80% of people who get their jobs through networking reported that their opportunities came from people they occasionally (or even rarely) see.

The strategies in this guide will help you to become an effective networker and open doors to professional opportunities that will help shape your career.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Although there are many good ways to network, only one method can provide you with insider information from someone who has firsthand knowledge of an occupation and an organization: informational interviews. The second part of this guide provides details and guidance for conducting research through informational interviews. Through informational interviews, you can learn more information about career tracks and organizations which perform work in your particular interest areas.

Gathering information is an important part of the career planning process. It can help you to refine your interests and goals. You may want to know:

- Which organizations work in this issue area
- Trends in the field; recent innovations
- Agency structures and work environments
- Career paths and positions at various levels
- Details about job duties
- Requirements (education, training, license or certification)
- Salary ranges for positions

Some of this information can also be obtained through a variety of sources including, but not limited to, books, websites, professional journals and periodicals, annual reports, OCS staff, employer information sessions, career panels, Wagner faculty, alumni and classmates.

¹ Collamer, N. (2013, August 12). 6 ways to crack the 'hidden' job market. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2013/08/12/6-ways-to-crack-the-hidden-job-market/>

² Granovetter, M. S. (1973) The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380. <http://www.immorlica.com/socNet/granstrengthweakties.pdf>

NETWORKING PRINCIPLES

In addition to gathering information, the goal of every networking encounter is to leave a lasting positive impression. This will help you to establish and cultivate ongoing relationships with professionals in your field. It will also help ensure that the people you meet (referred to as “contacts”) will want to tell others about you, keep you updated on job leads, and provide you with valuable information about your field of interest.

FRAMING YOURSELF TO BE REMEMBERED POSITIVELY

Some networking encounters are very brief. Thus, you must always be prepared to tell a contact the most important information that she/he should know about you in a few short sentences. This interaction is also known as your 30-second pitch or the answer to the question “Tell me about yourself.”

A 30-second pitch is a brief introduction that tells a contact who you are and offers a few interesting and **relevant** details about your professional background and interests. It is most useful at public events, such as career expos and mixers, where networking encounters tend to be brief. An extended version of this conversation (your one-minute pitch) can also be used as an introduction in an interview.

Your 30-second pitch should include the following elements:

- An introduction (give your name and current school/job as appropriate to the situation)
- Your relevant professional interests and the relevant aspects of your professional background

You might also include the following elements:

- The reason that are you interested in speaking with the contact
- Your interest in having a follow-up conversation (inquire about the best way to get in touch with the contact in the future)

TIPS FOR YOUR 30-SECOND PITCH

Ask Questions. Your pitch should feel like a natural—albeit succinct—conversation. Do not rattle off a list of your professional experience for 30 consecutive seconds. Instead, allow room for the contact to join the discussion. Feel free to ask a few strategic questions and listen carefully to her/his comments and respond accordingly.

Be Direct. Do not assume that a contact will make the right inferences about you. If you want her/him to know that you are passionate about health care reform, say, “I am passionate about health care reform.”

Practice. While your pitch should never sound rehearsed or robotic, practicing in front of a mirror and/or with another person will help you remember important information when you encounter an unexpected networking opportunity. In addition, the Office of Career Services can help you craft and hone your pitch.

WHERE TO NETWORK

Networking can occur at any time and in any place (including unexpected places like in a café, at a social function or on the subway). Common networking settings include:

- Career Expos, Fairs, Social Functions, and Networking Events
- Online Networking Sites
- Informational Interviews (see page 4)

Remember that networking can occur on the fly, and you should always be as prepared as possible.

CAREER EXPOS, FAIRS, & NETWORKING EVENTS

Career expos, fairs, and networking events offer excellent opportunities to meet with several professionals at one time and in one place. Because most people who attend these events already have the primary intention of networking, it can be much easier to engage in conversations about your professional interests and goals. Keep in mind that networking encounters in these settings are often very brief. As such, they require even more effort on your behalf (background research and preparing a 30-second pitch) to communicate important information about yourself within a short period of time.

The following strategies will help you to successfully network at career expos, fairs, and networking events:

- Conduct background research on the employers who will be attending (if known in advance)
- Dress in interview attire
- Bring plenty of business cards; when you take a card from someone, offer your card in return
- Write your first and last name and the name of your organization/school clearly on your name tag
- Use your time wisely; connect with the individuals on your priority list first
- If you are apprehensive about approaching a large group of people, try approaching someone who is standing alone or in a small group
- Use your 30-second pitch to help frame your conversations with new contacts
- Make eye contact, speak clearly, and listen intently without interrupting
- Follow up with each person you have a conversation with, thanking them for speaking with you, and asking any additional questions you might have, or providing additional information as appropriate.

ONLINE NETWORKING

Online networking, through websites like LinkedIn, has become one of the most effective ways to build your pool of professional contacts, and it is important that you strategically add people to your online network. Online networking are great venues for sharing information about your professional interests and qualifications and can provide you with access to people who you would not otherwise encounter.

Online networking is not without its drawbacks. It is important to realize that information on the internet, if not properly managed, is entirely public and can be found by anyone including potential employers and networking contacts. The following strategies will help you to successfully use online networking sites while avoiding the potential pitfalls of them:

- Restrict networking activities to professionally oriented websites, such as LinkedIn
- Remember that employers and potential employers often use these websites (including socially oriented sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) to investigate candidates
- Make sure that the information and pictures posted on your profile are not professionally damaging. Use privacy settings to manage the visibility of your content
 - Ensure your profile picture(s) is professional
 - Check your Facebook privacy settings regularly. You may also want to make it so that people cannot find your Facebook profile by using a search engine.
 - Your LinkedIn profile should be at least partially public so employers and recruiters can find you.
 - Regularly review the privacy settings of all your social media accounts and adjust as appropriate

When communicating online you should uphold normal standards of networking professionalism (send thank you notes, use professional language and grammar, follow up on referrals, etc).

OTHER NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

For a listing of Wagner sponsored events visit the following websites:

- Wagner OCS Events—<http://wagner.nyu.edu/careers/events/>
- General Wagner Events—<http://wagner.nyu.edu/events>

For a listing of NYU sponsored events visit the following websites:

- NYU Wasserman Events—<http://www.nyu.edu/careerdevelopment/>
- General NYU Events—<http://events.nyu.edu/>

For a listing of professional associations visit:

- <https://wagner.nyu.edu/portal/students/careers/resources/associations>

For a listing of events around the world visit:

- Idealist.org Event Listings— http://www.idealist.org/search/v2/?search_type=event

STAYING ORGANIZED

As you begin networking, you will find that staying organized is an essential aspect of cultivating your pool of professional contacts. Be sure to gather as much relevant information as you can about the people you meet. Collect business cards, and (on the back of each card) write notes about where you met the contact, what you spoke about, and next steps for follow-up. Keep your business cards organized. If you are not able to get a business card, keep a list of contacts that contains all of the aforementioned information. Using Word, Excel or Google Apps, create a list that keeps track of the following items about each contact you make:

- Name, Title, Organization
- Contact Info (Telephone Number, Email, etc)
- How you met
- Details of the conversation you wish to remember
- Further action you discussed or desire to take
- Any referrals they provided
- Details of follow-up conducted (e.g., “Sent email requesting informational interview on February 10, 2016”)
- Any other information that will be important to remember

Always store your information in an accessible location and in a user-friendly format. This will make it easier for you to review and update key information about your professional contacts on a regular (and at least semi-annual) basis.

FOLLOWING UP & MAINTAINING YOUR NETWORK

For the savvy professional, following up on networking encounters is not an option—it is a necessity. Follow up on your networking interactions with a thank you note, and always let people know when and how they have been helpful. This positive feedback will encourage your contacts to do more on your behalf.

Once you find a job, stay connected by updating your professional contacts on your progress and share relevant articles and announcements whenever appropriate. This is extremely important for individuals who network in fields where turnover is high, as contacts can easily move to other organizations, positions, and even geographic regions without your knowledge.

Remember, networking involves reciprocity. As you utilize your network's resources, be willing to act as a resource to your contacts. If you see articles, tips, conferences, events, or other resources that can be of use to a contact, sharing them is a great way to stay in touch while assisting them in their work. Additionally, most contacts will want to be kept up to date on your progress as you go through your search, secure employment, or make a shift or change. By connecting with your contacts (after you've conducted an informational interview) on LinkedIn you can keep them informed of your progress, and share interesting and useful resources with them.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW BASICS

An Informational Interview is a meeting that you initiate with a contact whose job, organization, industry or career path interest you. The goal of the informational interview is to gather important information about your field of interest while establishing and cultivating a professional relationship with your contact. It is important to note that informational interviews are **not** a place to ask for a job or internship opportunity!

Informational interviewing is one of the most effective networking strategies. When managed correctly, your conversation and follow-up correspondence will make it very easy for your contact to keep you in mind when opportunities arise within her/his organization or in a peer institution. Informational interviewing can also be useful in exploring opportunities to collaborate, partner on projects, and for basic exploration and curiosity.

There are 3 basic things you want from an informational interview:

- 1. Information**
- 2. Advice**
- 3. To be remembered positively**

The primary purpose of an informational interview is to learn and seek out information. It is never to ask for a job though employment leads can be a byproduct of conducting an informational interview. Informational interviews are a critical step in accessing the “hidden job market” and possibly learn about positions that might not be posted.

What INFORMATION can I obtain from an informational interview?

The information you are looking to gather through an informational interview is the kind you won't find on a website, in an annual report, or in a book. Hopefully, it is information that can help you decide whether or not this type of work is for you. You may want to learn what skills are valued in a particular kind of job, who the main players are in a particular field, or if there are common career paths in order to be successful.

What ADVICE can I get from an informational interview?

Informational interviews can be invaluable in discovering next steps you may want to engage in so you can be successful. You can often find out what courses you should take, what additional experiences or activities look good to an employer, and if the interviewee knows anyone else who might be helpful to you.

Why should I BE REMEMBERED POSITIVELY?

Informational interviews are a way for you to develop professional contacts in a particular field. After conducting a few informational interviews, you may begin to recognize that the world is a very small place. Making a good impression will make it easier for your contact to keep you in mind as opportunities arise – whether in their organization or in a similar one. Your interviewee will only refer you to someone else if they are favorably impressed by you.

Because a specific job is not at stake, the informational interview is often perceived as less stressful than other interviews. However, this does not mean that you should take an informational interview any less seriously than an interview for a job. In an informational interview, it is up to you to keep the discussion going. You need to be prepared to ask thoughtful questions. And remember, this is part of building your professional network. Ideally, if you leave a positive lasting impression, this new contact may call you later with job leads or pass your information on to someone who is hiring.

GETTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Who can I approach for an informational interview?

You can interview individuals that are:

- In a policy area that is of interest to you
- In a functional role within an organization that you're interested in
- Who work at an organization that you are curious about
- Who seem to have a career that matches your goals

You can interview and/or request introductions for interviews from:

- Alumni
- Peers at Wagner
- Faculty
- Friends and family members
- LinkedIn Connections
- People with whom you have no connection but are interested in knowing more about

How do I arrange an informational interview?

If the person you'd like to interview is someone you know, you may just want to pick up the phone and call.

If you do not know the person well, it is appropriate to write a formal email (see *Sample Informational Interview Request Email*). Your outreach should include:

- How you found out about them
- Why you're writing
- A request to meet with them for approximately 30-45 minutes at their convenience
- How they can contact you

To access individuals you do not know, you can ask friends, classmates, colleagues, members of the Wagner community, as well as your LinkedIn connections for introductions to individuals with whom you wish to conduct information interviews.

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL

Dear:

I am a graduate student at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, and I got your name through Wagner's Alumni page on LinkedIn. Upon graduation, I will receive my Master of Public Administration degree with a specialization in Finance. My goal is to apply this degree along with the experiences acquired through internships and capstone to obtain a position in public finance.

Given that you are a graduate of NYU Wagner and you work at XYZ Public Finance Agency, I am writing to request an informational interview with you. I hope that you will allow me to speak with you either in person or over the phone for approximately thirty minutes to discuss your NYU Wagner and professional career experience. I am particularly interested in hearing about what you do at XYZ Public Finance Agency, how you got there, and if you have any advice for someone looking to enter this field.

My schedule is flexible, and I am happy to work around your availability to meet in the near future. I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or firstname.lastname@nyu.edu. Thank you in advance for your time, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

First & Last Name

What if they don't get back to me?

If after two weeks you haven't heard from your potential informational interviewee, send a follow-up email. If after one follow-up you still haven't heard from them and you got that person's information through a previous contact of yours (including Wag-Net), let your original contact know. Perhaps they can intervene on your part.

Most people will get back to you. If you don't hear from them, let it go. Instead, focus on those that are responsive to your request.

PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

How do I prepare for an informational interview?

Think about the kind of information that will be helpful to you and what you hope to learn from this particular individual. Do as much background research as possible so you can ask insightful questions that will get you useful information. Prepare questions in advance. Dress professionally for the interview.

How do I structure the informational interview?

Start by thanking the interviewee for their time. Give them a little background on yourself and your interests. Then, be ready with four or five really good open-ended questions. At the close of your meeting, express again your appreciation for their time, and ask if you can follow-up/stay in touch.

What questions should I ask?

Your questions should be tailored to your needs and the experience/knowledge of the interviewee. Questions often fall into the following categories:

- Career Path:
 - What is your professional and academic background?
 - How did you get this job?
 - What are typical entry, middle, and senior level positions?
 - What factors are hiring decisions in this field based on?
 - What academic training is most appropriate for someone entering this field?

- Issue area:
 - What other organizations are doing work in this field?
 - Who is doing the most innovative work now?
 - What are the trends in this field?
 - What professional associations are connected to this field?
 - Do you have specific suggestions on things I should be reading?

- Organization:
 - What is the work environment like?
 - Who do you interact with/work with most often?
 - What is the agency structure?
 - How would you describe your office's work/life balance?

- Job function:
 - What are typical responsibilities in this job?
 - If there's such a thing as an average week, what is it like for you?
 - What are you most satisfied/challenged by?
 - What are the salary ranges for entry, middle, and senior level positions in this kind of work?

- And the last two questions:
 - Do you have any specific advice for me?
 - Can you recommend anyone else for me to contact?

Should I share my resume?

Since you should not ask for a job during an informational interview, providing an unsolicited resume may give the wrong impression to your new contact. However, it is not unusual for the interviewee to ask to see your resume. It is also okay for you to seek advice on how to best present yourself

through a resume. If you do get advice on your resume, you can ask your contact if they would like an updated version once you have incorporated their suggestions.

Is there anything else I should pay attention to?

If the interview takes place where the interviewee works, you should keep alert to your surroundings and ask yourself if you could imagine working there.

Also, recognize that the feelings your contact may have about an individual employer may differ from their feelings about the nature of the work.

Finally, networking is about building a relationship, is a two way exchange, and requires follow-up beyond the interview and thank you note.

FOLLOWING-UP ON THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

How do I follow-up after an informational interview?

Always email or send a thank you note to the person who provided you with information. Thank them for their time and tell them how you plan to follow-up on their suggestions. If a suggestion, tip, or referral they gave you turns out to be fruitful, let them know. If they specifically asked for your resume, you can send it with your thank you note.

Sample Informational Interview Thank You Text

Dear:

Thank you so much for taking time from your busy schedule to meet with me yesterday. It was a pleasure to meet you and I found our conversation very helpful. In particular, I enjoyed hearing about your work at Acme International Development Agency, the path you took to get your job, and the suggestions you had for me as I embark upon entering this field.

Based on our conversation, it became clear to me that my skills in program development, strategic management, and conflict management will be useful for me to highlight as I look for work in this area. It was helpful to hear that I need to gain field-work experience in my region of interest in order to elevate my candidacy in the eyes of a potential employer, and that grant proposal development is a big piece of the work that I may be called upon to do.

I appreciate your encouragement of my career plans, and as you suggested, I will keep you posted on my progress. In the meantime, should you wish to contact me, I can be reached at 212-998-0000 or at firstname.lastname@nyu.edu. Thank you again for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

First & Last Name