



**NYU | WAGNER**

NETWORKING &  
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS



# NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS GUIDE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>II. NETWORKING PRINCIPLES</b>	
Framing Yourself to Be Remembered Positively	2
Tips for Your 30-second Pitch	2
<b>III. WHERE TO NETWORK</b>	
Career Expos, Fairs, & Social Networking Events	4
Virtual Networking	4
Staying Organized	5
Following Up & Maintaining Your Network	5
<b>IV. INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS</b>	
Informational Interview Basics	7
Getting an Informational Interview	8
Sample Informational Interview Request Letter	8
Preparing For and Conducting the Informational Interview	9
Following-Up on the Informational Interview	11
<b>V. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</b>	12

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is the pro-active 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 networking. Referred to as the "hidden job market," many of these positions are never even advertised to the 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 study, 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.

# 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 they 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, listen carefully to their comments, and respond accordingly.

**Be direct.** Do not assume that a contact will make the right inferences about you. If you want them 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.

**Sample Pitch 1:** “I am an MPA student in my second semester at NYU Wagner. Before Wagner, I served as a public school teacher, and I’m using my education to build on my teaching experience and gain the technical skills to enter the education policy field. I’m passionate about educational equity issues and am currently looking for a policy-focused internship role where I can apply what I’m learning in class and gain hands-on experience in the field.

**Sample Pitch 2:** “In May, I will graduate from NYU Wagner with a Master of Urban Planning degree. While at Wagner, I’ve spent time interning for both the DOT and MTA NYC Transit. Growing up in LA, I always had a strong interest in improving public transportation and I’m hoping to move into a full-time role in transportation after graduating. I’d love to hear more about your experience in the field and what you think are some of the skills necessary for success.”

## WHERE TO NETWORK

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

- Career Expos, Fairs, and Networking Events
- Online Networking Sites like LinkedIn and Violet Network
- Informational Interviews (see page 7)

Networking can occur both intentionally and organically. You may encounter opportunities to network with classmates, capstone clients, and others you interact with, so be on the lookout for unexpected networking opportunities!

## 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
- Dress in interview attire, even for virtual settings.
- For in-person events, bring plenty of business cards; when you take a card from someone, offer your card in return. For virtual events, be sure to fill out any sign-in or interest forms that will be sent to employers.
- 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. In a larger virtual setting, you can utilize the private message feature or affirm someone's comment in the chat box.
- 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. Thank them for speaking with you, ask any additional questions you might have, and/or provide additional information as appropriate.

## VIRTUAL NETWORKING

Virtual networking is one of the most effective ways to build your pool of professional contacts, and it is important to strategically add people to your virtual network. LinkedIn is a great venue for sharing information about your professional interests and qualifications and can provide you with access to people who you would not otherwise encounter.

You can also leverage your networking capabilities in larger group settings online, such as panel discussions and online class sessions. Use the chat or raise hand feature to offer thoughtful

comments and questions, and take note of interesting questions and comments from others in order to follow up afterward via LinkedIn.

It is important to remember to be careful and strategic about the information you make available online. The following strategies will help you to successfully use online networking sites while avoiding their potential pitfalls:

- Restrict networking activities to professionally oriented websites, such as LinkedIn.
- Remember that potential employers often use online sources to investigate candidates. Ensure that the information you make publicly available is suitable for potential employers, and use privacy settings to manage the visibility of your content.
- Your LinkedIn profile should be at least partially public so employers and recruiters can find you.
- When posting a resume to your LinkedIn profile, be sure to remove personal contact information (unless you want it to be publicly available).
- When communicating online, uphold normal standards of networking professionalism (send thank you notes, use professional language and grammar, follow up on referrals, etc).

## 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, 2022")
- 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 their 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. 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 20-30 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 informational interviews.

## SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a current MPA student at NYU Wagner, specializing in Social Impact, Innovation, and Investment. I came across your profile on NYU Wagner's LinkedIn alumni page, and I see that you attended Wagner right after earning your Bachelor's degree. I'm in the same position now and I'm curious to hear about how you maximized your time and professional opportunities as a student.

I am also interested in learning about your work in social impact consulting and your professional trajectory post-graduation.

Would you have 20-30 minutes to speak with me in the next few weeks for an informational interview? My schedule is flexible and I am happy to work around your availability.

Thank you for considering my request and I hope to speak with you soon!

Sincerely,  
Your 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, 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?
  - What skills and knowledge does someone need to be successful in your role?

- 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?
  - How has this field responded and/or shifted in response to COVID-19 and remote work?
  - 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?
  - What steps has the organization taken to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into its work?
  
- 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 is a typical salary range for someone with my experience? What are the opportunities for salary growth in this position?
  
- And the last two questions:
  - Do you have any specific advice for me?
  - Can you recommend anyone else for me to contact?
  
- ❖ **NOTE:** *When you ask for additional contacts, it is especially important to follow up! The person you are interviewing may offer to facilitate connections with other professionals in their network, or they may not. If they do, follow their lead when responding to introductions. You may want to reiterate your interest in connecting with their contacts in your follow-up email.*

### **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 for taking time to meet with me yesterday. It was a pleasure speaking with you and learning about your experience at XYZ organization. In particular, I enjoyed hearing about your time at NYU Wagner and your suggestions for me as I pursue a career in international development.

Our conversation helped clarify how my skills in program development, strategic management, and conflict management will be useful in my job search. It was helpful to hear that I need to gain field-work experience in my region of interest in order to elevate my candidacy and that grant proposal development makes up a significant amount of the work in this field.

I appreciate your support and encouragement and I will keep you posted on my progress. Thank you again for your time and assistance!

Sincerely,

Your Name

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As you prepare for and conduct informational interviews and grow your professional network, you have access to a wide range of resources across NYU.

### NYU Wagner Resources

- [Career Advisement](#): Schedule a 30-minute appointment with a Career Services advisor via the Career Directory. Career advisors can help you make a plan for strategically building your professional connections.
- [Wagner Career Directory](#): Wagner's online job database – Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Career Guides](#): Comprehensive guides for all areas of career development, including resumes, cover letters, interviewing, salary negotiation, and more!
- [Wagner Student Groups](#): Join groups to network with other Wagner students who share your professional interests.
- [Wagner Alumni LinkedIn Page](#): Search for and connect with alumni in your field of interest.

### NYU Campus-wide Resources

- [NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development](#): NYU's central campus career provides advising, professional resources, and events available to all NYU students and alumni.
- [NYU Handshake](#): Handshake is the NYU Wasserman Center's online job and event database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Violet Network](#): NYU's online networking tool provides access to students, faculty, staff and alumni across all career fields and interest areas. Use it to request informational interviews and join affinity groups with like-minded people from around NYU.