



## OFFICE OF CAREER & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

# Informational Interviews

### **Informational Interview:**

The informational interview is one of the most effective methods for gaining more detailed information about a particular job, organization or professional area. This is a chance for you to ask questions, gather advice, and gain a better understanding. An informational interview can take place over the phone or in person.

### **Why should I conduct an informational interview?**

- To explore and clarify your professional goals
- To expand your professional network
- To access the most up-to-date professional information within your field
- To identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- To build confidence for job interviews
- To discover employment opportunities that are not advertised

*\* This is a chance for you to ask questions, gather advice, and obtain information. It is not designed to get a job. (But it can develop contacts that will later be of assistance)*

### **How do request an informational interview?**

The best way to request an informational interview with someone is via email or through LinkedIn if the individual is a contact or a member of a group you belong to. Keep the email short and to the point. Let the individual know who you are and provide them with a brief background regarding your professional focus and interest. Below is an example of an email introduction and request:

Dear Mr. Williams:

I am a second year graduate student at Columbia University School of Social Work. My concentration is in Advanced Clinical Social Work with a focus on Health, Mental Health and Disabilities. I was referred to you by Professor Caroline McClintock who teaches Health Policy & Practice at CUSSW. I am currently doing career research and gathering information for my job search. I am very interested in learning more about your organization, and wanted to find out if you might be available to meet for a brief informational interview (10-15 minutes) either in person or via phone.

My schedule is flexible, so I would be more than happy to accommodate whatever works for you

Any time you might have available to meet with me would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Smith  
Cell: 646-385-2367  
Email: [js2372@columbia.edu](mailto:js2372@columbia.edu)

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**How do I prepare for an informational interview?**

*Know Yourself*

Because you are arranging the meeting you need to take the lead. Determine what information would be most beneficial as you explore your career options. Make a list of 5-10 questions to ask and bring it with you.

*Know the Individual*

Make sure that you are familiar with the contact's professional history and current position.

*Know the Organization*

Research details about the organization in which the contact works. You can find out specific information using company websites, newspapers, etc. – use Google!

*Be Professional*

Present yourself in a professional manner. Allow the person being interviewed to do most of the talking. Be positive and assertive – not overly flattering or obnoxiously aggressive. Be courteous and keep a time limit of 20 minutes unless the contact agrees to more time.

**What kinds of questions do I ask?**

About the Professional Area

- What types of positions are most often found in this area?
- What are some general skills that are needed to perform well in this area?
- Do you recommend any specific training or education?
- What are some of the disadvantages of this area?
- What is the future of this area in terms of new and expanding opportunities?

About the Job/Organization

- What are some of the short and long term goals of the organization?
- What is the mission/goals/philosophy of the organization?
- What types of training are available?
- What are the major responsibilities of your position? Specific duties?
- What types of personal qualities are necessary for this occupation?
- What is the level of pressure on the job?
- What is the optimal level of performance to achieve career success?

About the Individual

- How did you become interested in this area and field?
- What has been your career path?
- What do you like best/least about your job/career?
- If you had to do it over again, would you choose the same career?
- What would you change?
- What do you think of my background so far in terms of entering this field?
- What would you suggest to improve my qualifications?

Before you end the interview, think about your original objective. Has it been met? your closing, you should pull everything together. Close on a happy note. Thank the contact for his/her time and knowledge. Ask for permission to contact him/her again if you find a need for further information. If you have met in person, ask for a business card.

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**What do I do after the interview?**

Send a thank you note within 24 hours of the informational interview. Thank the contact again for his/her time and generosity. Encourage the contact to keep in touch with you and promise to keep him/her informed of your plans. Always acknowledge how appreciative you are of their help.

**Questions for Alumni**

1. What was your career path after CSSW?
2. What led to your career choices and your present position?
3. What are your current job responsibilities and what does your daily work look like?
4. What was your method/field of practice and placements at CSSW and how did they prepare you or didn't prepare you for your area work?
5. What advice would you give to students/alumni wanting to get into your area of work?
6. What skills, knowledge and experience do students/alumni need to get into your area of work?
7. What networks have you developed to support you in your work?
8. Have you utilized the Office of Career and Leadership Development?
9. Would you be willing to talk to current students or alumni about your work?
10. Can you help us create a partnership with your organization?

**Questions for Employers**

1. What types of entry-mid level positions are most often found in your organization?
2. What is the current outlook for these positions?
3. What do skills and experience do you look for in hiring new employees for your organization?
4. Do you look for any specific training?
5. What types of personal qualities are necessary for this occupation?
6. What tips would you give to students/alumni interested in working for your organization?
7. What is the best way for students/alumni to find positions within your organization?
8. Would you be interested in:
  - a. using our online recruiting site to post new positions in your organization?
  - b. conducting informational interviews with strong students/alumni interested in your organization?
  - c. hosting information sessions at CSSW?