

HOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL MEETING

When you're researching careers or actively looking for work, it's a good idea to talk to people who can provide you with current information about the area you're interested in. This is often known as an "informational meeting", "networking meeting" or "informational interview".

You can use these steps as a guide to arrange and conduct an informational meeting.

1. Identify a contact person

Here are three ways you can identify a potential contact:

- + Tell the people you know (friends, family, etc.) about your career research and ask them if they know anyone connected to the career area you're interested in.
- + Use industry and organization directories and social networking platforms like LinkedIn to identify potential contacts.
- + Identify an organization where this type of work is done. Contact the main reception area and ask if they can refer you to someone in the organization. Not sure what to say? Feel free to use the samples below as a script.

Sample request for a referral if you're researching career options:

Hello, my name is _____. I'm doing some research around a possible career in _____ to find out if this might be a viable career for me. I'm not looking for work at this point. I'm wondering if you could direct me to someone from your organization who might be willing to meet with me and provide me with some first-hand information.

Sample request for a referral if you're looking for work:

Hello, my name is _____. I just completed my degree in _____ at UVic and I'm in the process of connecting with various organizations to introduce myself and find out about current or future work opportunities in the area of _____. I check your job postings regularly and I'm aware that you don't have any openings right now. I was hoping you might be able to refer me to someone in your organization to discuss future possibilities.

2. Make contact

Prepare your introduction. You need four pieces of information:

- + Your name and some very brief background information about yourself
- + Your reason for making contact
- + A request for a meeting
- + A date that you will follow up

Sample introduction if you're researching career options:

Hello, my name is _____. I was referred to you by your receptionist. I'm working on my degree in _____ from UVic and I'm doing some research on careers in _____ to find out if this might be a viable path for me. I'm not looking for work at this point but I was hoping to get your take on what a career in this area might look like. Would you be open to meeting with me for 15 to 20 minutes so I could get your perspective?

Sample introduction if you're looking for work:

Hello, my name is _____. I just completed my degree in _____ at UVic and I have some experience in _____. I'm in the process of connecting with various organizations to introduce myself and to find out about upcoming work possibilities. I check your job postings regularly and I'm aware that you don't have any openings right now, but I wonder if you would be open to meeting with me for 15 to 20 minutes to discuss future possibilities?

3. Prepare for the meeting

Prepare a list of eight to ten questions for your meeting, and have them ready before you call. If your contact person can't meet with you, they might be willing to answer your questions by email or on the phone. Here are some sample questions that you can personalize for your own use.

Sample questions if you're researching career options:

- + What education or training do I need for this type of work?
- + With my current qualifications, what would be my starting point in this career area?
- + What skills, knowledge and attributes are important to succeed?
- + What are the typical job titles for entry-level positions?
- + What does a typical workday look like?
- + What are the most rewarding and challenging aspects of this work?
- + What is the average salary range for someone beginning their career?
- + What does a typical entry-level work opportunity look like (contract, volunteer, full-time, part-time, etc.)?
- + What are the employment prospects in this career area?
- + What are the major trends impacting the future of this sector or industry?
- + Who would you suggest I connect with to get more information and other perspectives about this kind of work?

Sample request for a referral if you're looking for work:

- + What are the key competencies (skills, knowledge and attributes) that you look for when hiring?
- + What kinds of experience, education and credentials do you look for?
- + How can I enhance my existing qualifications and competitiveness?
- + How do you see the organization growing or changing in the near future and what staffing needs might this create?
- + What does the recruitment process look like in your organization?

4. Meet with your contact

Arrive on time for your meeting and don't stay longer than the period of time you arranged for. Although this isn't a job interview, treat it like a professional meeting—dress and behave accordingly.

Bring your résumé, but remember that the purpose of your meeting is to gather information and build your network, not to market yourself too aggressively. If you're looking for work, offer it at the end of the meeting. If you're doing background research, only offer your résumé if asked.

5. Follow up

After each meeting or conversation, note any actions that you or your contact agreed to and be sure to follow up. Also, send a brief thank-you card or email. Be sincere and mention something specific that you learned during your conversation.

Sample thank-you message if you're researching career options:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me this afternoon to answer my questions about a career in _____.

It was very informative to find out that the starting point for me will most likely be as a _____. I have a much better idea now of what I have to do to get my career off the ground if I decide to take this path. Also, thank you for suggesting that I talk to Bob Smith; I have a meeting set up with him next week.

Thanks again. I'll keep you posted on my career progress.

Sample thank-you message if you're looking for work:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me this morning and for providing me with some very helpful insight into your recruitment process.

I really enjoyed the chance to tour your operations. I felt I got a clear understanding of the collaborative work environment you have established. I find this to be really exciting because it fits with my own idea of what an effective workplace is all about. I will check the careers section of your website regularly and will touch base with you in two months to keep you posted on my progress.

Thanks again for your time and advice.