Informational Interview Guidelines

The Basics

What?

- A process for gathering career information from reliable, "inside" sources

How is it different from a job interview?

- You are gathering information, not marketing yourself for a job
- You set the tone and direction of the interview
- Generally takes only 30 minutes
- Can happen via email, phone, or in person. In-person is most effective
- Hiring, benefits and firing questions are acceptable at the first meeting
- You can ask questions about what type of people they want to hire
- You can ask for help on your resume, cover letter and/ or reference list

Why do it?

- To generate a network of professionals in your industry, location, occupation, etc.
- To identify gaps in organizations that you can fill
- To differentiate yourself from other job seekers/workers (value added)
- To gain a mentor specific to your goals
- To become an expert and build your reputation in a field
- To help determine if "career X" is a good fit for you

Expanding Your Career Network

Prepare

- Focus on 1 to 3 areas of interest (set targets), industry, geographic location, size of company, etc.
- Research companies and people (LinkedIn is a good resource)
- Practice sharing your goals, objectives and personal introduction
- Organize your resume

Implement

- Write 10 investigative questions; personalize these questions for the person you are interviewing
- Make in-person appointments, if at all possible
- Conduct informational interviews

Follow up

- Evaluate the process to find best practices
- Send a thank you note to the person you met with to thank them

What Do I Ask?
Sample Questions

About the Interviewee

- How did you get into this field?
- What is a typical day like for you? What processes or steps are done?
- What next steps do you have in your career?
- What professional organizations, books, journals or writers have had the greatest influence on your work? In what way?

About the Industry

- What or who are the biggest influences on your work or this field?
- What are the typical issues faced in the work/industry?
- What are the best ways to learn more about the industry?
- Where do you feel most individuals entering this field have room to grow?
- What is the preferred degree or major for entry into this field – where from? Exceptions?
- If you could improve one thing in the industry, your workplace or your department what would it be?
- What keeps you from making that improvement?

Job/Occupation

- What are the typical entrance requirements for getting a job in this field/company? How do people generally get in the door?
- What is the best kept secret about the work you do?
- What are the most rewarding and least rewarding aspects of the job/occupation?
- What qualities and skills do you feel a person in this field should have/demonstrate?
- What is the demand for people in this field?
- What are some fields people tend to go to after this/or come from before this?
- How does this job or field fit into the big picture of the organization? How is it valued?

Going Forward

- Who would you recommend I talk to in order to further my knowledge? Do you have contact information? Can I tell him/her that you referred me to him/her?
- Who best models the attitude and skills you feel most necessary for this job?
- Given our conversation, would you look over my resume and let me know what you would recommend me adding, changing or improving?
- If you were to select one book, journal article or author to read for a novice starting out, what would it be?
- What advice would you give to someone entering the field?
- At what places would you recommend I observe, volunteer or intern? Why?
- What organizations would you recommend joining?
- What certifications do you recommend earning?