

NETWORKING

Although searching through job postings can lead to a full-time position or internship, the majority of jobs out there are never posted. This means that the only way to find them is through networking. Networking is as simple as talking to both people you know and people you have never met. As you progress through your college experience and career, you will continue to expand your professional network. A strong professional network is the most powerful job search tool you can have.

WHO TO TALK TO...

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND PROFESSIONALS YOU KNOW

The easiest way to get started is by speaking with the people you already know well. Ask your parents, aunts, and uncles if they know anyone who they could introduce you to who is working in your field of interest. Let your past co-workers and old bosses/supervisors know what you are looking for and see if they can refer you to anyone. You just need one person to get the ball rolling.

WVU ALUMNI

West Virginia University has thousands of living alumni in the region, across the Mountain State, and country and you automatically have something in common with each and every one of them...WVU! Begin reaching out to graduates of the School of Public Health and you'll often find they are more than willing to provide advice on how to jump start your career.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Professional associations are made up of large groups of people who all work in the same field or industry. Many professional associations have job and internship boards where opportunities are posted. Joining a professional association may be an excellent way to connect with other professionals in your field of interest. If you are not ready to join a professional association, it could be useful to see who the active members are and reach out to them.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is another great way to find people to connect with. You can search by organization, title, geographic location and more. Once you find someone who you would like to connect with, you can send a request through the site. Once you have connected with the person, it is time to step out from behind the computer and set up a time to chat with them in person or over the phone.

WHAT TO SAY...

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Conducting informational interviews is the best way to reach out to people you have never met before. Informational interviews are a great way to learn more about a specific career or industry, and they also provide you with a structured opportunity to gain advice from someone in your field of interest.

INITIATING THE INTERVIEW

You can initiate an informational interview by sending an e-mail to the contact in which you introduce yourself, mention how you are connected to them, explain your interest in the field, and request 20-30 minutes of their time. See the following example:

Dear Mr. Conway,

My name is Jason Morrow. I am a Master of Public Health student at West Virginia University. I found your name using the WVU Alumni Directory and I was wondering if you would be willing to chat with me either in person or over the phone sometime over the next few weeks. I would really like to learn more about your career path, how you got into the field, and any advice you have for someone just graduating. I realize you must be very busy and would really appreciate any time and advice you would be willing to give.

*Thank you for your time,
Jason Morrow*

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If possible, you should try and conduct your informational interviews in person. Meeting in person makes a stronger impression. However, conducting the interview over the phone is acceptable if you are not located near the person. You will need to prepare questions for your informational interview because you will be the one in the driver's seat.

Before you jump into the questions you have prepared for the interview, it is important to spend some time introducing yourself. The person you are meeting with needs to know some key things about you before they will be able to help. This introduction will be very similar to your pitch (see the Career Fair Handout). Also, be sure to keep your introduction brief. Remember, you are there to interview them! In your introduction be sure to cover the following things:

Who you are (e.g. name, where you are from, where you go to school, etc.)

What you have done (e.g. major, areas of research, internships or jobs held, etc.)

What you are looking for (e.g. career goals)

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How did you get started in this field?

Could you describe a typical work week?

In your opinion, what is the best part about your job?

What are the greatest challenges in this field/position?

What skills and characteristics are most important for success in this field/position?

Could you describe a typical promotion path for someone in this industry?

How are professionals evaluated in this field?

What is the starting salary range for new professionals in this field? (Never ask them what their salary is.)

What type of training or experience should I have to be prepared to enter this field?

Can you suggest any professional associations for me to join?

*Where do people in this field look for job or internship opportunities?

*Can you recommend other people for me to talk to about this career?

The starred questions should always be asked. These questions will lead you to new contacts and/or to job or internship prospects.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Make sure you dress appropriately for the interview. Business casual is strongly suggested. (See the Professional Attire Handout.) Arrive at least ten minutes early and bring your list of questions, something to take notes with, and a copy of your resume (just in case). Be sure to listen carefully during the interview. Your interviewee may answer some of your questions before you have the chance to ask them. Try to avoid asking repetitive questions or questions that they have already answered. Also be sure to observe the surroundings. The work environment is very important when selecting a career field. You can learn a lot just by observing what is happening around you. At the end of the interview thank your interviewee for their time and ask for a business card.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Completing the interview is just the first step in this networking process. Next, you have to maintain this contact by keeping up with them.

This starts with a thank you letter. Send your thank you letter within two to three days of the interview.

Do the following in the letter:

- Remind them of who you are and when you met
- Thank them for their time
- Mention elements of the conversation that were particularly helpful

If they provided you with contact information for others in the field, be sure to follow up with those contacts as well.

You may want to start an Excel file to help you track your contacts. You will want to document when you met, when you last followed up with them, and when you sent thank you letters. This helps you keep it all straight. Touch base with your contacts every so often throughout your job or internship search. You never know when they will hear about an opportunity, and you want them to think of you right away.

