

Networking Guide

Networking is about intentionally making connections with professionals in your field of interest. People network to: build connections/relationships, learn about different industries and careers, and meet people who have the potential to hire you. Networking is one aspect of the job search process that many individuals avoid, however, it is one of the most powerful means to get a job. There are many ways to network for your job search, ranging from joining a group on Facebook or LinkedIn to inviting a professional for a cup of coffee to learn about their career path.

How do you find people to start the networking process?

- **Alumni:** SUNY Potsdam has over 45,000 alumni; some alumni are working in a field of interest to you. Join the LinkedIn SUNY Potsdam Alumni group as a place to start connecting with alumni.
- **Social Media:** LinkedIn is one of the most effective social media resources to network and find connections. Start by creating a professional profile and make contacts with people you already know. One of the most productive way to network on LinkedIn is by joining groups in the field(s) of interest to you. Once you join the groups), you have access to message those professionals in the group and can search near the location you live. Learn more how to leverage social media by visiting the SUNY Potsdam website, on the job search page.
- **Professional and Trade Associations:** These are groups of professionals in a particular field or industry. For example, the American Marketing Association for marketing professionals. These groups are formed to network and learn from others in the field. Join as a student to connect with professionals!
- **BearTracker:** SUNY Potsdam's job posting site has an employer directory as well as a listing of alumni mentors; great starting points to finding organizations and professionals in your field of interest.
- **Faculty and Staff:** There are 700 faculty and staff on campus you can speak to about your job search. Faculty and staff are here to support you.
- **Student Groups, Organizations, and Departments:** Join SUNY Potsdam student groups and organizations to find peers with similar interests.

Once you have identified professionals to speak with, it's time to meet them! We often call these "informational interviews", however, we recommend you do not use this term when requesting to talk. An informational interview is an appointment you schedule with a particular individual for the purpose of gaining current, regional, and/or specialized information from an "insider" point of view. It may be used to explore a specific career or organization, or merely to enlarge your circle of "expert" contacts in the area. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and their careers and are eager to help those exploring career fields. Identify how you heard about them (school, program of study, common organization, or a referral from another individual), and the professional is more likely to agree to speak with you.

How do I arrange the informational interview?

1. Use phone, email, or LinkedIn message to explain your request and obtain an appointment. Be clear in all your correspondence that you are not looking for a job. Instead, you would like to learn information about the career field and/or company where they work to assist with your future career path.
1. Introduce yourself using a personal referral. (e.g., "I'm Jessica Long, a sophomore at SUNY Potsdam and I am interested in learning more about your career field.) and explain your request to schedule an appointment for gathering information about their field of work. Let the contact know how you got their name.
2. Ask for a 20-30 minute meeting at their convenience, such as their worksite or to grab coffee. If the present time is too busy for the person you contact, ask when would be a better time or ask if they can suggest another contact in the organization that could provide you with helpful information.

Sample Correspondence

Hello, my name is Jessica Long, and I am a sophomore at SUNY Potsdam majoring in Communications. Your profile on LinkedIn stood out to me because I am interested in pursuing a similar career field. Would you be willing to chat with me about your career path for 20-30 minutes? I could come to your office or buy you a cup of coffee. Please let me know if you are available.

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Tips for during the informational interview.

- Be professional. Dress appropriately, research the career area and organization, and come prepared with questions, a notepad, and pen to take notes.
- Prepare your elevator pitch, which is a 30-second speech that summarizes who are you. Be sure to include your relevant experiences, skills, and career goals. Inevitably, the professional will ask about you so be ready!
- Take the initiative in conducting the interview. You ask the questions; you interview the person. Ask open-ended questions which promote a discussion and cannot be answered with one word responses.
- Show curiosity in the person's career path and current position. Ask probing questions beyond your prepared questions, listen intently, and take notes.
- Do not exceed your requested time, but be prepared to stay longer in case the contact indicates a willingness to talk longer.
- Ask if they know other professionals who would be helpful for you to talk to, now that they know your interests.

Sample questions to ask during the informational interview.

- (Background) Tell me how you got started in this field. What was your education? What educational background or related experience might be helpful in entering this field?
- (Work Environment) What are the daily duties of your job? What are the working conditions? What skills/abilities are utilized in this work?
- (Challenges) What are the toughest challenges you deal with? What challenges does the organization as a whole have? How are these challenges being met?
- (Life Style) What obligation does your work put on you outside the work week? How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work hours, vacations?
- (Rewards) What do you find most rewarding about this work, besides the money?
- (Salary) What salary level would a new person start? What are the fringe benefits? What are other forms of compensation? (bonuses, commissions, securities).
- (Promotional) How does one move from position to position? Do people normally move to another company/division/agency? What is your organization's policy about promotions from within?
- (The Industry) What kind of future do you see for this organization? How much of your business is tied to (the economy, government spending, weather, supplies, etc.)?
- (Advice/Next Steps) When the time comes, how would I go about finding a job in this field? What experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend? What suggestions do you have to help make my resume more effective? What is the best advice you can give a person interested in this occupation? What professional organizations or readings do you suggest?
- (Hiring Decision) What are the most important factors used to hire people in this work (education, past experience, personality, special skills)? How do people find out about positions in your organization? Where are they advertised?

After the informational interview.

- Record important information you received, including referrals, reading suggestions, advice, and more.
- Evaluate your experience. What did you learn? What do you like/dislike about the job, organization, and/or industry? Did you get the information you wanted? What else do you still want to know? What can you do differently for the next interview? Who else could you interview to gain information?
- Send a handwritten or email thank you within 24 hours after your meeting. You may want to include your conclusions/decisions resulting from the interview.
- Find creative ways to stay in touch! For example, forward an interesting article to the professional. This person could help you in the future, and you could help them in the future. It is of mutual benefit to stay in touch.