

## Informational Interview

### Email template

Use these four tips as a skeleton for drafting your email request:

**1. Be Thankful.**

You need to show gratitude for the respondent's time. You always have to expect that whoever you're contacting is getting similar requests from elsewhere. The first thing you need to do is thank them for taking the time to read your message. It lets them know you're appreciate and that you value their limited time.

**2. Tell them why you thought he or she was a great resource AND how you heard about them.**

Highlight what you know about their background, your goal and how a conversation with them will get you closer to achieving it. The goal should not be to turn the discussion into a job. It should be to make you a better overall applicant or job seeker.

Let them know if a specific person/organization referred you to them. This could help sway their decision to make time for your interview.

**3. Briefly tell them about your team and serving with NCCC.**

Don't surprise them with long explanations about what NCCC is and why there will be up to 10 other Members in the same uniform staring at them at the interview. Find a succinct way to explain your service to NCCC, your role as the LAA Rep and who their potential audience is. Most people will love to share with young people what they've done if they know what they are agreeing to.

**4. Propose time blocks.**

Don't make them do all the thinking. They should be able to look at the times you said worked and quickly reference their calendars. You also want to convey you're willing to work around their schedules. There is no entitlement, only humility.

**5. Thank them again. And if they can't accommodate, be prepared.**

Reinforce your gratitude. It'll help you begin and end on a high note. Be prepared for a no. Let them know that if they can't accommodate, they're free to point you in the right direction. You may be thinking but doesn't that give them an out? The truth is that if they're going to say no, they're going to say no. But maybe they know someone that may be able to help you. On top of that, always be prepared for just one response.

Samples:

Hi Mr. Johnson,

Thanks for taking the time to read my message. My teammates and I are trying to figure out what it takes to work as an \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ company and we were referred to you by (insert name) from (insert organization). It looks like you've been successful in turning a dream job of ours into your reality, and my team and I would love to chat with you about how you made it happen.

We are currently serving with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps on (insert project) with (insert organization). I serve as the Life After AmeriCorps Representative on my team and find interesting people like you to meet with my team for a brief informational interview each Round.

We know your time is valuable, so we plan to limit this conversation to a half hour. We are available Wednesday and Thursday from 11am to 3pm. Please let me know if any of these time blocks work for you. If you're not free, I'm happy to chat the following week to make new arrangements. I'm also willing to reach out to anybody you think could help me further my career.

Thanks again for reading my message, and we look forward to hearing back from you!

Your name

Signature

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Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am an AmeriCorps volunteer with the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and my team is particularly interested in learning more about working for an organization like yours that serves \_\_\_\_\_.

In a recent conversation with \_\_\_\_\_, s/he suggested I contact you about your organization because of your extensive experience and outstanding reputation in your field. I am not approaching you to obtain a position with your organization; we would simply appreciate any general advice or information you could offer us as we explore opportunities.

Since we will be in (insert location) between \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ dates, I would be very grateful for the opportunity for my team to meet with you for 20 to 30 minutes that week. Alternatively, if you are unable to meet with me in person, I hoped you would be willing to correspond with me by phone or email in the near future.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,  
Your name  
Signature

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Dear Mr. Shaneson:

As a AmeriCorps volunteer with the National Civilian Community Corps, my team and I are currently serving with (insert organization) in (insert city, state). I would love the opportunity to schedule an informational interview with you so my team and I can learn more about the field, more about how you got involved in this career, and the day-to-day activities of a (insert their job title) .

(insert example of why you chose this person and how you found them i.e. I was fascinated with the approach to physical therapy that you describe in your blog postings on PhysicalTherapyBlog.com, and I felt you would be one of the most enlightening people in the field that I could possibly interview.)

I know that you must be quite busy, so I assure you we will be brief -- taking up no more than 30 minutes of your time.

I will contact your office next week to inquire about a convenient time for scheduling this informational meeting. You can also reach me at (insert your phone number) or (insert your email address).

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,  
Your name  
Signature

#### Phone call template

If your prospective interviewee seems too busy to talk to you, ask a convenient time when you could call back to discuss scheduling an appointment.

Although there are many techniques to requesting the informational interview, the following are good approaches:

1. "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm conducting career research in your field. My team and I would like to meet and talk with you for about 30 minutes so that we can find out more about your field of expertise."
2. "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm an AmeriCorps Member the National Civilian Community Corps. I got your name from \_\_\_\_\_. You're in a line of work that I'm interested in, and I was hoping that you could help my team and I gain insights into the profession. I'm sure that our questions could be answered in a 20-30-minute informational interview."
3. If you prefer to arrange an appointment in person and cannot get past the front desk, treat receptionists and assistants as resources. They hold the key to getting inside the unit or section of that organization if you do not already have an inside contact or referral. Ask them some of your questions. You will usually get good information. Receptionists and other support staff know much more about their company than we often realize. They know how it works, the names of key people, job requirements, etc. It is important that they understand what you want. If you ask them something that they feel could be more fully answered by someone else, they will usually give you a referral.
4. You can use your own creativity, but the most important thing is to emphasize that you are simply trying to get first-hand information, and whatever the prospective interviewee shares with you will be appreciated.

Most of the time, your interviewee will be more than willing to take 20-30 minutes to answer your questions. Sometimes the person will want to talk over the phone, but often he or she will invite you to his or her workplace. When you can, choose that the interview be at their workplace because you'll learn more and make a stronger connection with the person.

Identify yourself and explain that you are researching careers in the contact's field, and that you obtained the person's name from \_\_\_\_\_ (if you were referred).

#### Sample questions:

##### **Never ask:**

Are you hiring?

Questions that you could easily answer yourself (do your research)

## **18 Great Informational Interview Questions**

### **1. Can you tell me about a typical day on the job?**

This is a good opening question because it will provide you with a good overview of the day to day requirements of the job. It is an easy question to answer and will help your contact open up and start sharing information.

### **2. How did you get started doing this type of work?**

This informational interview question can provide you with some insight into the typical career path of someone in this line of work as well as information about the skills, education and experience you may need to develop to be marketable in the field.

Notice the question is focused on the person you are interviewing. This tactic is helpful at the beginning of the interview because people generally enjoy talking about themselves. You will show your contact that you are genuinely interested in him or her and build rapport while, at the same time, gathering extremely helpful information.

### **3. What is your favorite part of your job?**

Another open ended question focused on the person you are interviewing. It can draw out surprising and rewarding aspects of the job that you might not have considered.

#### **4. What is your least favorite part of your job?**

Asking this informational interview question can help draw out any potential downsides of the job that might not be obvious to an outsider.

For example, a workshop facilitator might tell you he dislikes all of the paperwork he is required to deal with. If you had simply attended one of the facilitator's workshops, you would see the public part of the job (running workshops), but you wouldn't know about the private side of the job (managing a lot of paper work).

#### **5. What surprised you the most when you started working in this field?**

This question is also great for drawing out the kind of inside information that only someone in the job could share with you.

#### **6. What is the typical starting salary for someone in this line of work?**

People are typically uncomfortable stating their salaries. Do not directly ask the person how much he or she makes; you will make them extremely uncomfortable and break down any rapport you had built up! However, if you ask about salary in this more general way, you can often get an idea of the range.

#### **7. How do you see this industry developing in the future? How is your industry changing?**

This informational interview question can give you insights into skills you might need in the future. If you develop those skills now, you'll be more competitive when looking for work in the industry.

Additionally, the job might be ideal for you now, but it might be changing in a direction that is not a good fit for your needs. It's important to find that out in the beginning of the career planning process, so you can make informed decisions about the career choices you will make.

#### **8. What advice would you give to someone who wants to get started in this industry?**

This question starts to shift the focus of the interview from your contact to you. It is a great question to help you discover insider tips for making yourself as marketable as possible in a specific industry.

#### **9. What are employers typically looking for when hiring people in this line of work?**

Another question that will help you determine how to ensure you are employable in the industry.

#### **10. My background and experience is (briefly note your major qualifications). How does that compare with employers' expectations when hiring in this industry?**

This question is key if you are conducting an informational interview as part of a job search (as opposed to doing the interview as part of a career decision making process).

This question gives you the opportunity to present some of your qualifications to your contact, and, if your contact is aware of a job opening, it can prompt him or her to mention that opportunity if your qualifications are a good fit for the job.

This question can also lead to your contact asking for your resume. Never offer your resume in an information interview unless your contact asks for it, but do be prepared to provide one in case you're asked. If your contact does ask for your resume, you can take that as a great sign that he or she is impressed with you.

#### **11. May I have your business card?**

Always ask for a business card at the end of the meeting so you have all of the information needed to contact this person in the future and to send a thank you note.

**12. Is there anyone else I might talk to about this? May I use your name when I contact that person?**

Always ask this informational interview question. If your contact knows about job openings, this question can prompt him or her to mention those opportunities. Alternatively, your contact may give you the name of another person who you can interview, and when you mention your contact's name to the next person, your next interview will be that much easier to arrange.

**13. What kinds of experience and preparation helped you best prepare for/be a strong candidate for this job?**

**14. Who would you say has been the most help in your career? How did they help you?**

**15. What personal qualities or abilities, are important for doing well in this kind of work?**

**16. If you were going to change direction now, where would you go? How would you do it?**

**17. Can you recommend any professional journals I could read in this field?**

**18. What organizations would you recommend joining?**