

INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

What are informational meetings?

An informational meeting – also called an informational interview – is a meeting in which you talk to a professional in order to learn about practice areas, career paths, and employers. The purpose of an informational meeting is not to market yourself for a specific job; instead the purpose is to gather information and make contacts.

Many students are hesitant to initiate meetings, thinking it awkward to make a request of someone they do not know, or feeling uncomfortable with the prospect of leading a conversation with someone more expert in a field. Nevertheless, the vast majority of attorneys understand the purpose of informational meetings, and indeed have initiated such meetings themselves. Attorneys understand that students are seeking information, and are often happy to provide even the most basic information – additionally, you will find that people like to talk about themselves and give advice! The legal industry is comfortable with this convention.

Why do informational meetings?

It is impossible to overestimate the value of conducting informational meetings. Seeking advice and information in a low-pressure environment allows you discuss the particulars of a profession, learn about different career paths and fields, and develop a professional network to help you find your ideal job. Most people find that advice and suggestions given by professionals already working in their field of interest are more accurate and beneficial than information gathered from other sources.

Benefits of Informational Meetings

- Understand a new practice area or setting
- Clarify career goals
- Gain perspective on employment trends and opportunities
- Uncover the skills and training necessary for a particular practice area or position
- Establish contacts, and potentially advocates, in a field or particular organization (remember that people like to hire and help people they know!)
- Obtain referrals to other contacts who could also be resources
- Identify jobs in the “hidden job market” – those that you cannot find anywhere else

How to do it?

Below are five steps to guide you: 1) [Finding Contacts](#); 2) [Reaching Out](#) (including [samples](#)); 3) [Preparing](#) (including [sample questions](#)); 4) [Conducting the Meeting](#); 5) [Following Up](#).

1. Finding Contacts

Georgetown Law has one of the largest alumni bases in the country. Use [LinkedIn](#), [Symblicity Student Summer Evaluations](#), [Firm Prospects](#), and personal connections to find graduates. Do not forget about college connections, past employers, family and friends, and professors.

Be mindful that these direct connections may not have the information that you seek or work at the employer that you are targeting, but a particular referral from your connections may be the right person to meet with. Explore “second connections” after considering who your direct connections are.

Complete the Brainstorming and Creating Connections exercise for more guidance.

2. Reaching Out

- a. ***Craft a short email asking to meet in person or talk over the phone – in person is optimal.***
Email outreach is less direct than phone, and may avoid catching the attorney off-guard. Keep your email to three or four sentences, ask for 20-30 minutes, and be flexible when it comes to how and when the meeting takes place. A subject line that will grab a busy lawyer’s attention is important – make sure your subject line references the connection (e.g., “Georgetown Law student interested in capital markets”). While exceptions apply, do not include a resume in most cases; doing so makes it look like you are asking for a job, not information. (Often the contact will ask you to send a copy after you have set up the meeting.) Note that these emails may not differ much in content, and so you may be able to create a template to use for many attorneys.
- b. ***Send out more meeting invitations than you will need.*** Lawyers are busy – not everyone will respond. Make sure you have a critical mass of targets, and that you meet with several people before arriving at conclusions. You may follow-up after 10-14 days if you have not received a response; after that you may try one more email before calling the attorney.
- c. ***Sample outreach emails:***

SUBJECT: Georgetown Law student interested in civil rights work

Dear Ms. McWilliams,

I am a 1L at Georgetown Law, and am eager to learn more about civil rights law and working for the federal government. I was hoping to have the opportunity to speak briefly with you on an informational basis about your experience in the Civil Rights Division of DOJ and to get your advice on potential externship placements. I am available at this email address and at 202.853.8520, and would be happy to accommodate your schedule. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your time.

Best,
James Edwards

SUBJECT: Brown alum interested in Seattle legal market

Dear Mr. Ribiero,

I am a 2L at Georgetown Law, a recent Brown graduate, and a native of Washington State. I am interested in practicing in the region – specifically, Seattle – after I graduate, and am contacting practitioners to learn a little more about the legal market there. I am interested in your practice, the work that your firm does, and more broadly in litigation trends in the city.

I would very much appreciate 20 minutes of your time to discuss the above. I am available at this email address and at 202.853.8520, and would be happy to accommodate your schedule. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely, Jenny Li

d. *Sample outreach call:*¹ If you know the person well or have been instructed by a connection to call, here's how the conversation might start:

Michelle: Mr. Chin, this is Michelle Rivera. Sally Jones suggested that I call you to set up a time to discuss the securities work that you do. Is this a good time to talk?

Mr. Chin: Hi Michelle, you can call me Greg. I have some time. What's on your mind?

Michelle: I'd like to get a sense of your availability for a brief meeting. I am a third-year student at Georgetown Law. I'm interested in securities and business litigation firms and I am targeting smaller general practice firms with strong securities practices. Sally mentioned that your work with the Bar Association puts you in touch with the best small firms in the area and that you'd be a good person to help me understand the market. I would be particularly grateful if you could point out the firms whose practices you respect. Would you have some time when we could meet to talk?

3. Preparing

- a. ***Develop questions.*** You do the work in these meetings, so arrive with a list of questions. Read the attorney's bio, know what type of work her organization does, and develop questions that get at the heart of what you want to know. Do not waste the attorney's time (and make a bad impression) by asking for information you could easily find elsewhere. Go beyond what's available in a Google search, using information in the [Practice Areas](#) page and other OCS/OPICS resources to gain a basic understanding of the field of law or employer you are inquiring about.

In brainstorming questions, think about what you hope to get out of the meeting: An insight into the organization? Information about practicing a particular type of law? Practicing in a certain city? Develop your own list of questions, using the following as a guide.

¹ A call is a more direct method of outreach, and without context you may catch a busy lawyer off-guard. Make clear the connection early in the call. Do not assume the attorney has time at that moment to discuss in-depth the information you are looking for; offer instead to set up a time to meet.

b. You might ask about . . .

. . . what the job entails

- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- What types of tasks do junior attorneys in this field typically perform?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What are some of the most interesting cases/projects you've worked on?
- How much interaction do you have with colleagues and clients?

. . . the interviewee

- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- How did you get into your field? Into this particular job?
- How have this organization and your role changed since you've been here? Based on what you have seen in your career, is that level of change typical?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

. . . recruiting

- If I wanted to obtain a similar job, how would you suggest I go about it?
- Where might I find job listings?
- Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
- What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible about this field?
- What further steps should I be taking to develop my own niche in this area?
- What can I do to make myself more marketable to employers in this field?
- What are the key points to include in a resume or cover letter for a position in this field?

. . . an area of law

- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- In your opinion, is this a rapidly growing field?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?

. . . the legal market in a certain area

- What are the trends for legal practice in this geographic market?
- What are some of the unique opportunities in this area?
- Are there particular resources, such as bar associations or journals that a student should consult or join to become part of this market?
- What can I do to make myself more marketable to employers in this city?

. . . charting a course

- What types of courses are most valuable in order to gain the skills necessary to succeed in this field?
- What kind of work or internship experience would an employer look for in an applicant for this type of work? How can a person obtain this type of work experience?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What do you think of the experience I have had so far in terms of entering this field?
- From your perspective, what are the challenges you see about working in this field?
- Are there any seminars, conferences, or member organizations in your field that might be appropriate for someone with my background and professional goals? (Note: events of this type are often free of charge in Washington, DC.)
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?

4. Conducting the meeting

- a. **Professionalism counts.** Dress professionally (at least business casual) and be on time. Be mindful of the time, but if the attorney is willing to stay longer do not cut them off. Bring a pad, pen, and your resume (in case the interviewee asks to see it). Instead of asking only open-ended questions about the industry or organization, show that you have done some homework (e.g., “My understanding of the capital markets field based on my reading is [X]; has that been your experience?”). If you asked for the meeting, you should be prepared to pick up the tab for coffee (or the meal).
- b. **Ask for referrals!** Perhaps the most important use of an informational meeting is expanding your network. Your contact may not know everything there is to know about your desired subject, but they may be able to put you in touch with someone who does. It is often easier for the interviewee to respond to specific questions rather than an open-ended inquiry about whom you should talk to. For example, share with the attorney a list of other organizations you would like to learn more about, and ask if he or she has any contacts there. It is bad form not to follow-up with the referrals provided.

Can you suggest any other people who might be valuable sources of information and who would be willing to speak with me? When I call him or her, may I use your name?

5. Following Up

- a. **Reflect and record.** After the meeting, jot down notes about what you learned. Reflect on whether your values, skills, and interests would make you a good fit for the field or employer. Consider your impression of the interviewee, and note where the two of you might agree on points made (e.g., “getting thrown in the deep end is the best way to get legal training”) or where an opinion seemed overbroad or outdated (e.g., “if you are going to clerk, you really have to clerk at the federal appellate level to get employers to notice”).
- b. **Send a thank-you note.** Within 24 hours of the interview, email a short thank-you message. If any follow-up is required (e.g., resume, additional information about a point discussed) include it here. Mention that you would like to stay in touch in case you need additional information and that you would appreciate hearing about future openings. Consult our [thank-you note guide](#) at the bottom of the page for more information.
- c. **Maintain the connection.** Keep your contact updated: let them know that you followed up with a referral, send an interesting article related to a point you discussed, or make them aware that you will be coming in for a job interview. If you are interested in working for the contact’s employer, in their field, or in their city, try to reach out every eight to twelve weeks to keep the relationship going. It may be a good idea to keep a spreadsheet of contacts and outreach history.