



**NYU | WAGNER**

**CAREER GUIDES**

# **NETWORKING & INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Where to Network	1
III.	Your 30-second Pitch	3
IV.	Informational Interviews	4 - 8
V.	Using Generative AI for Your Networking Prep	8
VI.	Additional Resources	9

# INTRODUCTION

Networking is the pro-active process of building and maintaining professional relationships.

It's more than just telling friends, relatives, faculty, or career services, *"I'm looking for a job, so let me know if you hear of anything."*

Effective networking is strategic. It's about connecting with people, sharing information, and exchanging insights on career opportunities, industry trends, and professional practices.

Online job postings matter, but person-to-person networking greatly increases your chances of getting interviews and offers.

Networking is one of the most important skills you can develop, and it can be both energizing and rewarding as you discover new ideas, opportunities, and connections that can shape your career.

## WHERE TO NETWORK

Networking can happen anytime and anywhere, including unexpected places like cafés, social events, or even your commute! Common settings include:

- Professional events, such as job fairs, career panels, networking nights, or conferences
- Online networking sites such as LinkedIn and NYU Violet Network
- Via scheduled informational interviews

Networking can be intentional or spontaneous. Be alert for opportunities with classmates, colleagues, capstone clients, guest speakers, alumni, and others you interact with in your time at NYU Wagner.

## PROFESSIONAL EVENTS (Job fairs, career panels, employer meet and greets, conferences)

These events allow you to meet multiple professionals in one place, all with the shared goal of making connections. Conversations are often short, so prepare by researching attendees and practicing your 30-second pitch. Strategies for success include:

- Research employers ahead of time
- Dress professionally
- For in-person events, bring business cards and exchange them with new contacts
- For online events, complete any sign-in or interest forms provided to employers
- Prioritize your top contacts first
- If large groups feel intimidating, approach someone standing alone or in a smaller group
- Use your 30-second pitch to guide conversations
- Make eye contact, speak clearly, and listen without interrupting
- Follow up with each person you meet to thank them and, if appropriate, continue the conversation

## ONLINE NETWORKING

Online networking is one of the fastest and most effective ways to expand your professional circle. LinkedIn is a powerful platform for showcasing your background, connecting with industry professionals, and accessing opportunities you might not find elsewhere.

You can also connect in online group settings such as panel discussions, webinars, and virtual class sessions. Contribute thoughtful comments or questions and follow up with people afterward on LinkedIn.

Best practices for online networking:

- Focus on professional platforms such as LinkedIn
- Remember that employers may review your online presence, so keep public content professional and manage privacy settings as needed
- Make at least part of your LinkedIn profile public so recruiters can find you
- Remove personal contact details from your publicly posted résumé
- Maintain professionalism in all online communication, including thank-you messages and follow-ups

## STAYING ORGANIZED

Track your contacts so you can follow up effectively. For each new connection, record:

- Name, title, and organization
- Contact information
- How you met
- Key points from your conversation
- Follow-up actions or referrals
- Dates and details of past communication

Store this information in an easy-to-access format, such as a spreadsheet or contact management app, and review it regularly.

## FOLLOWING UP & MAINTAINING YOUR NETWORK

Following up is essential. Send a thank-you note after meeting someone, and let them know how their help made a difference.

Stay in touch after you land a job by sharing updates, congratulating them on their achievements, or sending articles and resources relevant to their work. Networking is reciprocal—be a resource for your contacts just as they have been for you.

Connect with contacts on LinkedIn so you can stay informed about job changes, new roles, or industry updates, and continue to share useful information over time.

## YOUR 30-SECOND PITCH

Some networking encounters are very brief. Be ready to share the most important things about yourself in a few sentences. This is your 30-second pitch, also known as the answer to “Tell me about yourself.”

Your 30-second pitch is a short introduction that says who you are and highlights relevant details about your background and interests. It is especially useful at career expos, mixers, and other events where conversations are short. A longer version, your one-minute pitch, can serve as an interview introduction.

Your 30-second pitch should include:

- Your name and current school or job
- Your professional interests and relevant background

You might also include:

- Why you are interested in speaking with the contact
- Interest in a follow-up conversation, along with the best way to connect again

### TIPS FOR YOUR 30-SECOND PITCH

- **Ask questions.** Keep your pitch conversational and brief. Avoid listing your experience for 30 seconds straight. Allow space for the contact to join the conversation. Ask a few thoughtful questions, listen carefully, and respond.
- **Be direct.** Do not assume people will infer your passions or skills. For example, if health care reform matters to you, say so clearly: *“I am passionate about health care reform.”*
- **Practice.** Your pitch should feel natural, not robotic. Practice in front of a mirror or with another person so you can recall key points in unexpected networking situations. Career Services can also help you refine your pitch.

#### Sample Pitch 1

I am an MPA student in my second semester at NYU Wagner. Before Wagner, I served as a public school teacher, and I’m using my education to build on my teaching experience and gain the technical skills to enter the education policy field. I’m passionate about educational equity issues and am currently looking for a policy-focused internship role where I can apply what I’m learning in class and gain hands-on experience in the field.

#### Sample Pitch 2

In May, I will graduate from NYU Wagner with a Master of Urban Planning degree. While at Wagner, I’ve spent time interning for both the DOT and MTA NYC Transit. Growing up in LA, I always had a strong interest in improving public transportation and I’m hoping to move into a full-time role in transportation after graduating. I’d love to hear more about your experience in the field and what you think are some of the skills necessary for success.

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

One of the most valuable networking tools is the informational interview—speaking with someone who works in your field of interest to gain insider insights.

Informational interviews can help you:

- Identify organizations in your area of interest
- Learn about industry trends and innovations
- Understand organizational structures and work environments
- Explore career paths and advancement opportunities
- Clarify job duties and requirements (education, training, certifications)
- Learn typical salary ranges

This information helps you refine your career goals and make informed decisions. You can also find insights from reputable websites, industry publications, annual reports, career services staff, employer meet and greet sessions, faculty, alumni, and peers, but an informational interview offers a specifically unique and firsthand perspective.

### **3 THINGS YOU WANT FROM AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:**

#### **1. Information**

The main purpose of an informational interview is to learn. It gives you insights you cannot find in a book, on a website, or in an annual report. You might discover what skills are valued in a specific role, who the key players are in the field, or what typical career paths look like. This helps you decide if the work and environment are right for you.

#### **2. Advice**

Informational interviews can point you toward next steps for success. You might learn which courses to take, what experiences employers value, or get connected to other professionals who can help you.

#### **3. To be remembered positively**

An informational interview is also a chance to build relationships in your field. A good impression makes it more likely that your contact will think of you when opportunities arise, whether in their own organization or elsewhere. People refer candidates they trust and respect, so professionalism matters.

## GETTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

### Who can I approach for an informational interview?

You can interview individuals that are:

- In a policy area that is of interest to you
- In a functional role within an organization that you're interested in
- Who work at an organization that you are curious about
- Who seem to have a career that matches your goals

You can interview and/or request introductions for interviews from:

- Alumni
- Peers at Wagner
- Faculty
- Friends and family members
- LinkedIn connections
- People with whom you have no connection but are interested in knowing more about

### How do I arrange an informational interview?

If you know the person, a brief and friendly email or LinkedIn message may be best.

If you do not know them well, send a more formal request, including:

- How you found out about them
- Why you are uniquely interested in speaking with them (What is it about their background, experience, or career trajectory that is compelling?)
- A request to meet for 20–30 minutes at their convenience
- How they can contact you

To connect with people you do not know, you can also ask friends, classmates, colleagues, members of the Wagner community, or your LinkedIn contacts for introductions.

### Sample Outreach Email

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a current MPA student at NYU Wagner, specializing in Social Impact, Innovation, and Investment. I came across your profile on NYU Wagner's LinkedIn alumni page, and I see that you attended Wagner right after earning your Bachelor's degree. I'm in the same position now and I'm curious to hear about how you maximized your time and professional opportunities as a student. I am also interested in learning about your work in social impact consulting and your professional trajectory post-graduation.

Would you have 20 minutes to speak with me in the next two weeks for an informational interview? My schedule is flexible and I am happy to work around your availability. Thank you for considering my request and I hope to speak with you soon!

Sincerely,  
Your Name

### **What if I don't get a reply?**

If you have not heard back after two weeks, send one follow-up message. If there is still no reply and you were introduced through a mutual contact, let that person know—they may be able to help.

Many people will respond, but if they do not, move on and focus your energy on those who are receptive.

## **PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

### **How do I prepare for an informational interview?**

Decide what you want to learn and what information will be most useful. Research the person, their role, and their organization so you can ask thoughtful, relevant questions. Prepare your questions in advance and dress professionally.

### **How do I structure the informational interview?**

Begin by thanking them for their time. Share a brief overview of your background and interests, then ask four or five open-ended questions. End by expressing appreciation again and asking if you may follow up or stay in touch.

### **What questions should I ask?**

Tailor your questions to your needs and to the *interviewee's* expertise. Don't ask questions that you can easily Google or find on their website. Sample questions to consider include:

#### **Career Journey & Lessons Learned**

- Can you tell me about your path into this field and how your career has evolved?
- Looking back, what do you wish you had known before you started?
- Were there any pivotal moments or decisions that shaped your career direction?
- What skills or experiences from your early career have turned out to be the most valuable?
- What advice would you give someone entering the field today?

#### **Skills in Action**

- Which skills do you use most often in your role, and which were the hardest to develop?
- Are there skills you didn't expect to use that have become essential?
- From your perspective, what skills do people underestimate in this field?



- What abilities from your graduate program or earlier education have been the most helpful?

### **Industry & Trends**

- What changes have you noticed in this field over the past few years?
- Are there emerging trends or challenges that you think will shape the next few years?
- How has technology, policy, or social change affected the work you do?
- Are there common misconceptions about the field that you often hear?

### **Organizational Culture & Realities**

- What is the culture like at your organization, and how does it compare to others you've worked in?
- How are decisions typically made here?
- What's something about your workplace that wouldn't be obvious from the outside?
- How do people collaborate or communicate across teams?
- What does professional growth look like within your organization?

### **Daily Work & Challenges**

- What does a typical day or week look like for you?
- What aspects of your work are most rewarding? Most challenging?
- How do you balance strategic work with day-to-day tasks?
- How do you know you're doing your job well?

### **Final Questions**

- What's one piece of advice you'd give to someone who wants to thrive in this field?
- Is there anyone else you recommend I speak with to learn more?

### **Should I share my résumé?**

Do not offer your résumé unless asked. This is not a job interview. However, it is fine to ask for feedback on how to present yourself effectively. If you receive suggestions, you can ask if they would like to see the updated version.

## **FOLLOWING UP AFTER AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

### **How do I follow up after an informational interview?**

Send a thank-you email or note within a day or two of your meeting. Express appreciation for their time, mention a specific takeaway from your conversation, and share how you plan to act on their suggestions. If a referral or tip they offered leads to a positive outcome, update them. If they asked for your résumé, you can include it with your thank-you.

## Sample Informational Interview Thank-You Email

Dear [Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday. I enjoyed learning about your experience at [organization] and hearing your perspective on [specific topic discussed]. Your insights about [key takeaway] were especially valuable as I think about my next steps. I plan to [briefly state how you will act on their advice], and I will keep you posted on my progress. I truly appreciate your support and generosity in sharing your experience.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

## USING GENERATIVE AI FOR YOUR NETWORKING PREP

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT can be helpful when preparing for networking and informational interviews. They can assist with drafting outreach messages, identifying common ground with contacts, and brainstorming thoughtful questions. However, AI should support your preparation, curiosity, and communication style, not replace them.

AI can help with tasks such as:

- Crafting concise, personalized LinkedIn connection requests
- Identifying shared interests or background with a contact based on their profile
- Generating thoughtful questions tailored to a contact's role, career path, or industry
- Rehearsing responses or planning how to introduce yourself in an informational interview

## USING AI RESPONSIBLY

While AI can strengthen your networking strategy, it is important to use it ethically and thoughtfully:

- **Verify relevance and accuracy.** Make sure AI-generated questions and insights are appropriate for your specific contact and situation.
- **Maintain authenticity.** Use your own voice and tone. Review and edit AI-generated content so it reflects your personality.
- **Protect privacy.** Do not input sensitive personal details or private information that someone else shares with you.

## TIPS FOR USING AI IN YOUR NETWORKING PREP

- **Draft personalized outreach messages** by prompting AI to write short LinkedIn connection requests tailored to the person's background or shared interests.
- **Analyze LinkedIn profiles** by uploading a PDF to AI and asking what you have in common or what to ask during an informational interview.
- **Generate thoughtful questions** by asking AI to suggest specific questions that align with your career goals and the contact's role or industry.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

As you develop your networking strategy, you have access to a wide range of resources across NYU.

**The NYU Wagner Office of Career Services (OCS) provides direct support to students and alumni of Wagner via:**

- [Career Advisement](#): Schedule a 30-minute appointment with a Career Services advisor via the Career Directory. Career advisors can help you make a plan for strategically building your professional connections.
- [Wagner Career Directory](#): Wagner's online job database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Career Guides](#): Comprehensive guides for all areas of career development, including cover letters, networking, interviewing, salary negotiation, and more!
- [Professional Development Resources](#): A collection of job boards, professional associations, and other helpful industry resources to assist in your career exploration. Learning more about your chosen field will help you identify networking opportunities.
- [Wagner Student Groups](#): Join groups to network with other Wagner students who share your professional interests.
- [Wagner Alumni LinkedIn Search Page](#): Search for and connect with alumni in your field of interest.

**Additionally, all NYU students and alumni can access these campus-wide resources:**

- [NYU Wasserman Center for Career Development](#): NYU's central campus career provides advising, professional resources, and events available to all NYU students and alumni.
- [NYU Wasserman Industry-Based Career Communities](#): Career Communities help you explore career paths, prepare for the job search, and connect with opportunities based on chosen industries
- [NYU Handshake](#): Handshake is the NYU Wasserman Center's online job and event database. Use it to search and apply for jobs, internships, and fellowships, and to RSVP for career events.
- [Violet Network](#): NYU's online networking tool provides access to students, faculty, staff and alumni across all career fields and interest areas. Use it to request informational interviews and join affinity groups with like-minded people from around NYU.