

ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY



# NETWORKING GUIDE

CENTER FOR CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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# NETWORKING GUIDE

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## WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is a practice of building relationships by learning from others that are doing the kind of work you are interested in or by discovering connections between individuals. If you've ever had a conversation with a person around a shared interest, whether it be an industry or career interest, hobbies, goals, etc., then you've already started to network. The networking process allows you to gain valuable knowledge and perspective on career paths and can lead to referrals or tangible opportunities, like jobs and internships. As it happens, networking is the most effective job and internship search strategy.

## WHO IS IN MY NETWORK?

Believe it or not, you already have an existing network - the people you know in all aspects of your life – from family members to classmates to teachers to neighbors to coworkers, are part of your network. Chances are that these people also know other people you might want to add to your network – maybe your brother's friend works at a company you are interested in and your brother can introduce you to talk about his experience. Or a professor might know of a former student who owns a business that could have an internship opening for the summer. Think about who is already in your network that you can reach out to as you start your job and internship search.

You can also expand your network by reaching out to people you don't already know that share a common experience as you (went to the same university, work in a similar industry, live in the same city, etc.) through tools like The Roger Connection or LinkedIn.

When considering people to connect with, it's important to think about people who might expand your own knowledge or opportunities. For example:

- A current employee at a company you really admire can tell you about that company's culture and give you an idea of what it is actually like to work there.
- An alum who currently works in a field that you are interested in can give you insight into what the industry is like, and what it takes to succeed.
- A graduate student in a particular university's program can tell you what the research opportunities are, how accessible the professors are, and what the campus culture is like.

When determining who to reach out to and make a connection, keep an open mind and a determination to learn!

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is a conversational approach to learning that allows you to meet key professionals, gather career information, explore career options, build relationships in your field, get advice, and potentially even get referrals to opportunities. Unlike job interviews, informational interviews are not initially about hiring but about learning through conversation around a shared interest. Most people like to talk about their careers, so an informational interview can be a very effective first step in making a new connection in your network.

## REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

To request an informational interview, you can send an email directly to the individual (if you have their contact information) or send a message through a professional social media site like The Roger Connection or LinkedIn. In your message you will introduce yourself, state how you found their contact info, share what about them you find interesting/have in common, and make the request to speak with them. The message should be brief and concise.

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW REQUEST EXAMPLES

### The Roger Connection without a referral example:

*Hi DeAndre,*

*My name is Julie Jones, and I noticed you have an extensive background in public relations for both large and small non-profit organizations. I am currently a senior at Roger Williams University majoring in marketing, and I'd love to learn more about your path and ask you a few questions.*

*I know it is a busy time, but would you be open to meeting virtually over Zoom or a similar platform? If not, a quick phone conversation could work – any time you can share would be great. I look forward to hearing more about your work and your career journey!*

*Best,  
Julie*

### The Roger Connection with a referral example:

*Hi Jiahao,*

*My name is Shyla, and I am a psychology student at Roger Williams University. I am interested in unique ways to bridge the gap between homelessness and psychiatric and primary care in my future work. James Joyce said you were one of the original founders of the mobile Shower to Empower initiative in Providence, RI. I'd love to learn more about your inspiration for starting this initiative.*

*Would you be open to meeting virtually over Zoom or a similar platform early next week? I know your time is valuable, but if you have some time chat, I would really appreciate it and would love to learn more!*

*Best,  
Shyla*

### LinkedIn Example:

*Hi Pranjali,*

*I am a senior marketing major at RWU and saw your profile in the alumni tool here on LinkedIn. I'm trying to learn more about marketing careers in tech and was struck by your experience.*

*I am curious if you might have time to meet or have a quick phone call to answer some questions I have about the field.*

*Thank you!  
Alexia*

## DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Prior to meeting someone for the first time, whether in an informational interview or other networking setting, it's best to start by doing research into the person with whom you will be speaking. Try and learn about their career path and determine experiences of theirs you want to learn more about. You want to ask questions that are specific to their experience and your goals.

Here are some examples of questions to ask in an informational interview or networking situation. Again, you want to make the questions specific to the person's experience as best you can, so feel free to modify these general questions to specifically cater to your conversation.

- Can you tell me a bit about your career path and what led you to the role you're in today?
- What were some of your roles in the field when you were starting out?
- What does a typical day look like in your role?
- What are some notable projects that you've worked on in the last year?
- What do you enjoy the most about your work?
- What is the most challenging part of your work?
- What skills do you see as most important for someone to have in this field/position?
- Do you have recommendations for other people I should connect with or resources I can explore?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- How do most people get their start in this field? What are some common entry-level positions?
- What kind of education, training, skills, or background does your role require?
- What advice would you give to someone who is considering entering this field?
- What attracted you to this career path?
- What is something you wish someone had told you before entering this field?
- What advice would you give to someone who is job searching in this field?
- Where do you see this field going in the next 5 years? 10? 20?
- Can you describe what work/life balance looks like in this field?
- What does the salary range tend to look like at the entry-level and higher levels?

*NOTE:* It is good to have plenty of questions prepared but prioritize the ones you really care about to make sure you can stay within the agreed-upon time frame for the interview. Choose 3-4 questions that you definitely want to ask and get to the others if you have time.

## THE STARTER STORY

Your starter story is a way to briefly introduce yourself and share your professional experience, skills, and goals. Starter stories are used in networking scenarios such as a career fair, networking events, informational interviews, etc. and are meant to start a meaningful conversation.

A good Starter Story...

- **Is brief** – 50-90 seconds!
- **Is connected** – aim to cover your present (what are you doing now? What skills do you have? What are your interests?), past (what experiences have you had in the field?), and future (what are your career goals? Connect your goals to the person you are talking to – ask them to tell you more about their internship, experience, company, etc.)
- **Is well-articulated and rehearsed** – you want to avoid rambling or talking too fast, and you want to exude confidence. The best way to do this? PRACTICE. The more you practice, the more confident you will be and sound.
- **Ends with an engaging question** – Your pitch should be the opening for an engaging conversation with your audience. After you've made your pitch, ask your listener a question (can you tell me more about your company? Can you tell me about your position at XYZ company? Can you tell me about your career path in ABC field? Can you tell me more about the internship program?)

Example:

*"Hi! My name is Rose Flowers. I'm a senior psychology major at the Roger Williams University. I've completed a broad range of psychology courses, my focus being on interpersonal relationships and cross-cultural psychology. My interests led me to complete a 135-hour practicum related to Human Resources, researching discrimination claims, assisting payroll with paperwork and developing questions for employee interviews. The internship strengthened my analytical, problem-solving and communication skills and confirmed that I'm very interested in going into the field post-graduation. Can you tell me more about your Human Resource Department or suggest a colleague I may speak more with?"*

Notice in this example that Rose talks about her present (major, school, interest in the field), past (practicum experience), and future (interests, next steps/asking a question to gain more information).

Using the resources in the appendix of this guide, formulate your own starter story and then **PRACTICE**. The more you practice, the more prepared and confident you will be to introduce yourself in a real networking scenario.

## MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

### In-person

When in networking situations, you want to make sure you leave a good first impression. Your starter story is a big part of that, but there are things people will notice about you before you start talking, and you want to make sure those things are positive. Here are some tips to help you make a great first impression:

- Make eye contact – when you meet someone new, maintain eye contact while you're talking to demonstrate that you are engaged and paying attention to the conversation.
- Look your best – you don't have to have just come from the hair salon or be wearing the most expensive suit to make a good impression, but you want to look polished. This means wearing clean clothes that fit you well and are appropriate for the occasion, and keeping clean nails, hair, and skin.
- Remember names – the best trick for remembering someone's name is to repeat it back after they introduce themselves: "Hello, my name is Larry"; "Hi LARRY, nice to meet you." It also helps to write their name down with a note after your conversation is over: *Larry – brown hair, blue tie, recruiter from Fidelity.*
- Be on time – if you are meeting someone at a scheduled time, get there on time (better yet, get there early!). People don't like to be kept waiting, so being late won't get you any first impression points.
- Be polite – thanking people for taking the time to meet you goes a long way!
- Smile! – a big smile creates warmth, puts everyone in the conversation at ease, and opens the door for honest and meaningful conversation.

### Virtually

For virtual networking, a lot of the same strategies apply to make a good first impression. You still want to look your best, remember names, be on time, be polite, and smile! However, meeting virtually can mean a few extra ways to make a good impression:

- Cut out background noise and distractions – If meeting virtually, you want to eliminate anything that could distract from your conversation, such as construction outdoors, a loud roommate, a barking dog, or background TV noise.
- Sit in front of a neutral/distraction-free background – Depending on your living space, you might not have the perfect, white wall background. However, you can make sure that your background is free of major distractions, such as an unmade bed, inappropriate wall decorations, mess or clutter, or even another person.
- Check your technology beforehand – make sure your camera and microphone are working well before your meeting to ensure that technical difficulties don't delay the start of your conversation and derail your chance at a great first impression!

## CONVERSATION OVERVIEW

After you've prepared for your informational interview, it's time to talk! When you meet with someone new, you'll want to:

1. Start with your introduction/Starter Story
2. Start asking questions
  - a. During your preparation, you might want to organize questions in an order that makes sense to you and prioritizes the information you are most interested in.
3. When the person gives their response, don't just move on to the next question – engage! Make comments on what they've shared with you, ask follow-up questions about things they said, or connect what they've shared to something you've done or experienced. By engaging and building on what they share, you are building a deeper connection and getting a more meaningful conversation.
4. Ask if there are any other people they think that you should connect with, and ask if you can use their name when reaching out to those individuals.
5. Thank them! Thank them at the end of the conversation and again in a follow up email/message/note.

## MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

Once you've made a new connection, it's important to maintain it! You might meet someone now, and then in a few weeks/months/years they might have the perfect job opportunity for you. Maintaining your connection over time can ensure that you don't miss opportunities or knowledge in the longer term. Some ways to maintain a connection:

### INITIAL FOLLOW-UP/THANK YOU

You want to follow up immediately after the first time you meet with someone to thank them for their time and reiterate what you talked about. For example, after an informational interview you might write something like this:

*Dear Monica,*

*Thank you for taking the time to meet with me over Zoom this afternoon. I greatly enjoyed hearing about your career path in the fashion industry and appreciated getting your insight on what it means to be a fashion merchandiser at Macy's. I am eager to start my professional career in fashion merchandising and will utilize the knowledge you shared with me this afternoon.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alejandro*

### CONNECTING ONLINE:

If possible, connect with the person on LinkedIn so that you can follow each other's career journeys moving forward. If they are someone who posts on LinkedIn, be sure to engage with their posts (through likes and comments) to keep your connection going.

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Global Heritage Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | [ccpd.rwu.edu](http://ccpd.rwu.edu) 401-254-3224



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# APPENDIX

## BUILDING YOUR STARTER STORY

A concise, compelling starter story is an essential part of your networking toolkit. Use the activities outlined here to begin to develop your own!

### STEP 1 – REFLECTION

#### **Perform a Brain Download**

Grab a blank piece of paper and write down everything you can think of about your interests, your skills, your personality, your values, your strengths, your identities and culture, your needs, and other influences. Then, see if you can identify any patterns in what you wrote down. What themes come up most often? How do these different aspects of yourself connect to one another?

#### **Consult with Trusted Individuals**

If you are like most people, you might overlook key characteristics about yourself that will be critical in your academic and career planning decisions. So, ask other people in your life – people who know you well and care about you – to do this same brain download exercise, but with you in mind. For example: What insights does your best friend have about your interests, your skills, your personality, your values, your strengths? How does it all look from your mom’s angle, or your favorite high school teacher’s point of view? You will be surprised, often pleasantly, by the things others see in you that you simply cannot see in yourself.

#### **Do a Guided Reflection**

Once you’ve gotten your creative juices flowing, try a guided reflection to organize your thoughts. Complete the following sentences, reflecting on the patterns that emerged in your Brain Download to identify what is most important to communicate about yourself.

*I am curious about...*

*I am interested in...*

*I am excellent at...*

*I want to learn more about...*

*I want to be able to...*

*I hope to achieve...*

*I need...*

*I value...*

*I will...*



## STEP 2 – BUILD YOUR STORY

<p><b>Introduce yourself.</b> Who are you? What do you study?</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> <i>My name is Tanisha Flores and I am a senior studying political science at Roger Williams University.</i></p>
<p><b>Introduce your mission.</b> Combine some of the sentences you created above to convey what is important for this person to know about your experience, interests, skills, and values.</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> <i>I'm passionate about gender equity in leadership and I hope to inspire a new generation of women leaders by advocating for increased representation at all levels of government.</i></p>
<p><b>Share about your experience.</b> What have you done so far or what are you currently doing to put your mission into action?</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> <i>I'm currently interning at the Statehouse and am working with a team drafting a policy to expand family leave for members of the legislature, which has really helped me sharpen my negotiation skills.</i></p>
<p><b>Make a connection.</b> What inspired you to speak with this person? What do you know about them or their organization?</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> <i>I understand you worked on a similar project at your company.</i></p>
<p><b>Invite a conversation.</b> Close with a compelling question that prompts conversation.</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> <i>Could you tell me more about what that experience was like for you?</i></p>