



Networking 101

What is it? Why do it?

70-80% of jobs are found through networking.

Networking is the process of developing and maintaining relationships to build your professional network of connections. Your professional network can pave the way for access to professional opportunities, help you build knowledge of industries, roles, or companies, and establish meaningful connections for potential mentorship. Networking happens with every person you interact with but can also be pursued proactively through informational interviews, giving you an opportunity to continuously develop and refine your skills in presenting yourself and your professional goals, while also gaining insight into particular industries and career paths from professionals in the field.

What are informational interviews?

Informational interviews are not job interviews, but rather short conversations (about 20 minutes) where you gather information about a field, industry, organization or company that interests you. They are also opportunities for you to practice your interviewing skills while gaining valuable information, like the skills and experience required for various job opportunities or about the job market and how different kinds of organizations recruit and hire new people.

During an informational interview, the objective is to ask questions, gather information about a career field or organization, learn about job options and career paths, and connect with people who can help identify opportunities in their fields. Informational interviews are not about asking for jobs but rather about gathering information to help you determine how to move forward in your career search. Keep in mind that you can use this skill anywhere and any time you meet someone who has information about your job interests. Informational interviewing should become a cornerstone of your job search strategy, as it will help you become a better job candidate!

7 Steps to Build Your Network and Conduct Informational Interviews

Step 1: Set networking goals and develop a plan

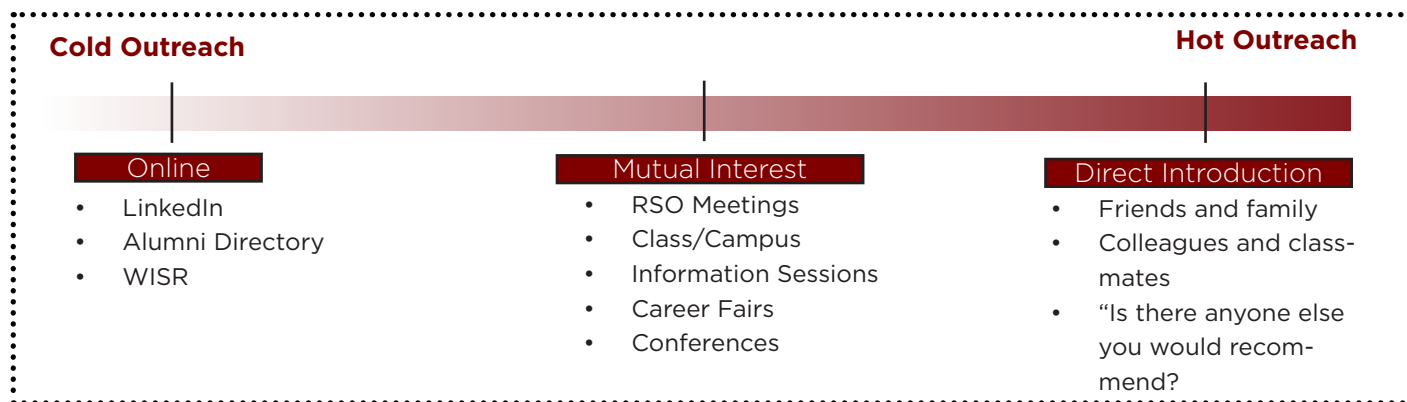
- Think about what fields you want to explore - what kind of work would you like to do? What job have you dreamed about doing in the past? What kind of work environment or industry appeals to you?
- Identify your purpose for networking. Are you looking for an internship, full-time employment, a mentor etc.? Your general goals may include learning more about the career path, the organization, and the type of work your contact does day-to-day, and wanting to meet additional contacts in the field. As you speak with more people, you'll develop more specific goals and focused questions.
- Begin earlier to build mutual interest and a relationship before you may need their help in a recruiting process.





Step 2: Inventory your network

- Include your current network—former and current classmates and/or colleagues, supervisors, professors, etc.
- Map out your potential network—people on campus (classmates, alums of student organizations you’re involved in, graduate students or teaching assistants, professors, staff, etc.); UChicago alumni at organizations of interest; other professionals of interest.



Step 3: Develop branding and conversational currency

- Practice introducing yourself compellingly – develop an elevator pitch. This mini self-introduction is key to providing information to your contact so they understand how best to help and what kind of information to provide to you. Incorporate elements of your branding statement, including interests, mission, relevant experiences, and skills.
- Develop conversational currency, i.e. interesting information to share with others: recent and relevant books you’ve read, podcast or shows you’ve watched, vacation you recently went on, etc.
- Do your homework and prepare a list of questions you want to discuss! Your contact will probably be more engaged and forthcoming with information during an informational interview if you are well prepared for your conversation. Research the industry, the company, and, whenever possible, the interviewee before the conversation.

Step 4: Reach out to contacts

- Start with those in your current network via email. Then reach out to those just outside your network by using LinkedIn or Wizr to identify those with whom you have shared connections and/or interests and leverage the UChicago Alumni Directory to gather email addresses.
- Conduct informational interviews. Be prompt, briefly introduce yourself, have your prepared questions ready, and keep to the agreed upon time limit. At the end of the conversation, thank them, and if it has gone well and you feel comfortable doing so, ask for the names of two or three people they suggest you additionally reach out to.
- Consider other ways to build relationships in addition to typical “networking events” – like catching up over coffee or a meal, attending conferences to connect with contacts in that area, or volunteering.

Step 5: Follow up and assess

- Always send a thank you note after meeting! Be sure to send it within 24 hours and include something specific and memorable about your conversation and convey enthusiasm about what you learned.
- Reaffirm whatever commitments you both made, i.e. if you discussed sharing your resume and following up with contacts they shared.
- Reflect and assess the conversation – What did I learn? How can I explore this field further? How can I help them?

Step 6: Maintain contact

- Send updates every few months. Provide an update on your career exploration or job search, or re-connect on a specific and memorable element discussed during your initial/last conversation.
- Share interesting or relevant articles.

Step 7: Keep your networking plan updated

- Record when and why you connected with someone, and highlights from the conversation so that you can maintain contact purposefully in the future.

Below are some resources to help you throughout the networking and information interviewing process.

Sample Questions

- How did you get started in this field?
- What is your typical day (week) like at _____? What different kinds of activities are you engaged in?
- How many accounts/projects do you work on? What kinds of clients/people do you serve? What kinds of services do you provide?
- What do you enjoy most about what you do? What do you enjoy least?
- What kinds of skills and abilities are required for this type of work?
- What kinds of people are successful in this field (this organization)?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- Can you describe the work environment in your organization in terms of individual effort vs. teamwork, pressure, deadlines, workload, etc.?
- What publications are especially important for people in your field?
- If you were starting out now, how would you get into this field? What strategies would you use to get your foot in the door? What advice would you give to your freshman/sophomore self? (Particularly for UChicago alumni)
- What makes a resume go to the top of the pile?
- How does your firm or organization differ from others in your field?
- Is there someone you would recommend I speak with to learn more about x?

Sample Emails

Requesting an Informational Interview: This can be done via email or phone. Email gives you time to craft your request and gives your contact time to respond. Do not request via text, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Briefly introduce yourself and express your intent to gather information only. Indicate why you want to interview your contact, and add a sentence or two about your own background and goals.

Dear Mr. Hireman,

My name is David Smith and I am a 2nd year at the University of Chicago majoring in Economics. As a result of school activities and alumni mentoring, I am exploring a career in asset management.

I would enjoy speaking with you and getting your perspective and advice on the profession. Would you be available for a 15 - 20 minute phone call in the next two weeks?

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Sincerely,
David Smith
773-555-6987 (cell)*

Follow up with a thank you note: Be sure to thank the interviewee for his or her time and advice as the interview is concluding as well as in a thank you note. Writing a thank-you note is not simply a courtesy but another chance for you to leave your name and number with your contact, and another chance or your contact to remember you when he or she hears of a great job available in your field. It is appropriate to send thank you notes via email, but not via text.

Dear Mr. Hireman:

I'm writing to thank you again for speaking with me this morning. I enjoyed our conversation about Credit Suisse, and the interesting turns your career path has taken. In particular, it was great to hear your perspective on how your University of Chicago degree prepared you for your first position in the financial services industry.

Our discussion regarding the role of hedge funds in this economy was especially enlightening. I'm enclosing an article I found on this subject from The Economist, which provides yet another point of view on this topic.

Finally, I wanted to thank you for providing me the names of Susan Brown and James Doe. I plan to contact them tomorrow morning.

*Sincerely,
David Smith*