Informational Interview Guidance

An informational interview is a great opportunity to build your professional network and gain insight on potential careers. Below is basic information to help guide you in conducting informational interviews.

Informational Interview Purpose:
- To gain insight and perspective on specific public health positions/organizations.
- To gain individual career insight and guidance.

Who is an appropriate person to interview?
- Any individual(s) that can provide perspective and guidance to you on your future career goals and development.
- Someone in a position that you potentially might be interested in serving in within the next 5 years

The interview process:
- Interviews should be conducted face to face, if at all possible.
- You should approach these organizations as “yourself” (a graduate student in search of career guidance and advice). If requesting an informational interview it is NOT appropriate to ask for a job upon arrival (however, do update your CV and bring a copy with you in case they ask for it and if an opportunity arises at some point in the interview it is ok to then ask about future employment opportunities or other contacts)

Preparing for the interview:
- Research the individual and their organization in advance to be familiar with their work and the mission/aim of their organization. (Do your homework! As asking the interviewee questions that are available on the organization’s website does not reflect well on your preparation and attention to detail)
- Plan open-ended questions that will stimulate conversation.
- Bring updated copies of your CV

Conducting the interview:
Below are some potential topics for you to consider touching on during the interview. Note: These are just suggestions - feel free to add other topics of your own choosing. To keep the interview to a manageable timeframe (about 30 minutes), we suggest you limit your interview to 3-4 topic areas and ask no more than a total of 12 – 15 questions.

Potential Informational Interview Categories
- Their organization’s mission, sources of support, and its efforts to enhance population/community health in their targeted community(ies).
- Their perspectives and thoughts on addressing public health problems/policies in their community related to your areas of interest (e.g., healthy food access, HIV, access to care, etc.).
- Biggest challenges and opportunities they face currently and that they see on the horizon.
- Skills/knowledge that they think are critical for them to do their jobs and that they look for in future employees.
- Their own professional journey and how they got to their current position.
- Lessons learned and general career advice.
- Other professional contacts/organization that they suggest you reach out to for career advice and/or future employment opportunities

Interview follow-up
- Send a thank you note, as soon as possible (email can suffice) thanking the person for their time and their advice. If appropriate, mention that you will keep them posted on your next steps and look forward to continued contact.

Summary
We suggest you write up a brief summary of the interview to keep on file. Suggested content for the summary includes:
- The interviewee’s name, title, organization, and contact information
- Notation of any opportunities or promised follow-up (e.g., send the person xx information, or check in near the end of the academic year, etc.)
- Summary of interview discussion (key points, things to remember about the person and/or organization)
- Reflection on what you learned with regards to your own professional goals and possible fit/not fit of this position/organization and why.
- Any other comments/pertinent information