

January 2018

FHI 360 WORK-BASED LEARNING MANUAL: A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

LISA JOHNSON, ROBIN WHITE,
IVAN CHARNER, JAMES COLE,
AND GAIL PROMBOIN

Table of Contents

1. Introduction to Work-Based Learning	1
2. Guest Speakers.....	15
3. Workplace Tours	27
4. College and Career Fairs.....	42
5. Informational Interviews.....	58
6. Job Shadows.....	67
7. Internships	85
8. Teacher Workplace Tours	112
9. Teacher Externships	122

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was developed and published with funding from the Hess Corporation.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions made to this guide by the North Dakota Regional Education Associations, Jon Godfreed of the North Dakota Chamber of Commerce, Wayne Kutzer of the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education, and Beth Zander of the North Dakota Department of Commerce. We thank them all for their support in the development and review of this guide.

Lastly, we want to give a big thanks to Stephanie Davison for coordinating efforts related to the guide.



FHI 360 is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives by developing, implementing and evaluating locally driven integrated solutions to health, education, economic development, environment and civil society challenges. Our domestic education work focuses on improving educational opportunities for youth through services that

include program design (e.g., the creation of models, protocols, tools and materials), project management, professional development, school-based coaching, creation of local and national networks, and collective impact and program evaluation. We have worked at the intersection of schools and communities for nearly 40 years, solving critical issues in education, health and youth development through projects in 48 states and with more than 400 school districts. Our staff are experts in education, health services, youth development, gender, school improvement, nutrition, communications, research and evaluation, technology and advocacy.

wbl.fhi360.org

Contact: NIWL@fhi360.org

5. Informational Interviews

5.1 Overview

What Are Informational Interviews?

An informational interview is a career exploration activity involving a structured interaction between a student and an employee¹, usually over the phone or by video conference. The interview is guided by the student's interest in learning more about a specific career and/or employer. The interviews can help students set career goals and focus future career exploration and education plans.

The skills developed through informational interviews are critical to learning how to seek information and interact professionally with employers. They are also a foundation for learning how to engage in a job interview. Because these skills are so important, informational interviews are often pre-requisite activities for job shadows or internships. Significant preparation and guidance should be provided to students prior to their interviews.

The student's primary roles are to prepare for and request the interview, schedule a time for the interview, conduct the interview, thank the employee interviewed, reflect on the interview, and share thoughts on the experience in the classroom.

Which Students Participate in Informational Interviews?

Informational interviews are conducted by students engaged in career exploration and are intended to help them further refine their career interests for subsequent exploration and preparation activities. Typically, this level of career exploration and interaction with employees involves early high school students who already have participated in some career awareness activities. As with other career awareness and exploration activities, informational interviews should reflect the student's desire to learn more about specific career fields and the education needed for entry and success in them.

How Are Informational Interviews Structured?

Typically, students identify employees in the careers in which they are interested and conduct interviews over the phone or by video conference. Informational interviews typically range from 15 to 30 minutes and may precede or be integrated into an activity such as job shadowing.

While there are no prescriptive guidelines, the usual components of an informational interview are:

- Introduction and purpose of the interview.
- Questions about the employer, industry, and career of the employee interviewed as well as the education required for entry and success in a similar career.
- Conclusion with a recap of highlights of what the student learned and thank you for the employee's participation.

Unlike some other WBL activities, students play a leading role in scheduling and conducting informational interviews.

¹ In this chapter, the term employee is assumed to encompass a wide range of workers, including solo practitioners in fields ranging from law and medicine to skilled trades and the arts.

5.2 How to Implement Informational Interviews

Successful informational interviews require collaboration, communication, and preparation by the WBL coordinator, school administrators, teachers, employers and their employees, and students.

Planning for informational interviews should begin at least two months prior to the time period targeted for this activity. As noted in the *Introduction*, the following steps should be followed when implementing informational interviews.

1. Work with school administrators and teachers to plan for informational interviews.
2. Collect information on students' career interests to use in identifying employees to interview.
3. Inform the employer community that students will be reaching out to make interview contacts during a certain time period.
4. Have teachers prepare students for the informational interviews, including helping them identify employers who can provide names of employees to interview.
5. Have students contact employers or employees and make arrangements for their interviews.
6. Have students conduct the informational interviews with employees.
7. Have teachers provide structured opportunities for students to reflect with their peers.
8. Obtain evaluations from students.
9. Recognize participating stakeholders.

The following pages provide more detailed descriptions of these steps, presented in the form of a time line. The time line is flexible and can be condensed, but proper student and employer preparation is important.

5.3 Suggested Implementation Time Line

Note: Throughout this manual, the term WBL coordinator (typically, a district or school staff member) is used to refer to the individual responsible for planning and implementing WBL activities. Depending on the activity and context, stakeholders from school sites (counselors, teachers, and administrative staff) may be involved. The WBL coordinator should be sure to use the WBL database, as described in the *Introduction*, to track employer and school contact information as well as the tasks each has agreed to carry out with respect to informational interviews.

The WBL coordinator should refer to the overall WBL plan (as described in the *Introduction*), if there is one, to be sure that the informational interview activities are coordinated with other WBL activities for the same employers, schools, and students. For this particular WBL activity, most of the coordination can be done by school staff, with the WBL coordinator focusing on the employer outreach process.

Note: The WBL coordinator is assumed to be responsible for completing or assigning each of the tasks listed below, except where otherwise noted.

Two to three months before the informational interviews

- Begin outreach to employers to make them aware that they may be hearing from students seeking informational interviews and encourage them to participate. This can be accomplished by asking chambers of commerce, other industry and trade associations, and service clubs to alert their members, placing an item in a local newspaper or school newsletter, asking school staff to reach out to their contacts, and/or sending emails to the contacts in the WBL database. A sample email is provided in the *Resources* section. While students are responsible for finding their own employees to interview, the WBL

coordinator can help by compiling a list of people who have responded to the WBL coordinator's email and volunteered to participate, have participated in informational interviews in the past, or have demonstrated their interest in working with students by participating in other WBL activities.

- **(School staff)** Identify which students or classes will conduct informational interviews.
- **(School staff)** Determine the time frame, typically one to two weeks, in which students will reach out to employers/employees and conduct interviews. Allow sufficient time for student preparation.
- **(School staff)** Determine how many informational interviews each student should be expected to conduct.
- **(School staff)** Determine how students should obtain permission to miss a class if interviews are scheduled during class time. A sample form for obtaining teacher permission to miss a class in order to conduct an interview is provided in the *Resources* section. Decide whether to send a notice to parents/guardians to let them know that some students may conduct their interviews from home.
- **(School staff)** Play a facilitating role, because informational interviews are student-led activities. Establish the process for students to use to reach out to employers or employees (via phone or email) to schedule and conduct interviews and ensure that they have access to the tools (telephones and/or computers) to do so. If some students are struggling to schedule interviews, school staff or the WBL coordinator may assist them.
- **(Teachers)²** Begin to prepare students in class by introducing:
 - The purpose and benefits of informational interviews.
 - Strategies for listening effectively and asking appropriate questions.
 - What to include in questions for informational interviews.

One month before the informational interviews

- Mine the WBL database (described in the *Introduction* to this guide) to help students who have trouble securing informational interviews.
- Send the employer checklist (sample in *Resources* section) to the employees who will be interviewed by students to help them prepare.
- **(School staff)** Schedule computer lab time, if needed, for student research and outreach to employers.
- **(Students)** Begin outreach by calling the employers in which they are interested, using a script to determine which employees in the company might be available to interview. A sample phone call script for students is in the *Resources* section. If a student or the WBL coordinator has already identified an individual employee who is likely to be willing to be interviewed, the student may call the employee directly. This can be accomplished in class if students use their own phones, or the school will need to make phones available to students for this purpose.
- **(Teachers)** Have students practice interview techniques and begin to develop questions about the job, career, employer, and industry of the employee to be interviewed. Additional questions might focus on skills required to enter the industry, work environment, salary ranges, and what the person likes and dislikes about his/her current job.

One week before the informational interviews

- **(Teachers)** Continue student preparation by having them write and revise their interview questions and practice interviews in class.
- **(School staff)** Make sure students have appropriate quiet places to conduct their phone or video conference interviews.

² The term "teachers" should be taken to include counselors, career advisors, and other educators working directly with students.

One day before the informational interviews

- **(Students)** Send confirmation emails to the employees to be interviewed with the date, time, and duration of the interviews as well as the telephone numbers to be used.
- **(Teachers)** Make sure students have completed their interview questions and have pencil and paper or a computer handy for taking notes.

Day of the informational interviews

- **(Students)** Make their calls, conduct the interviews, and take notes for later reflection.
- **(School staff)** Make sure there is an adult standing by to assist students during the interviews, if necessary.

One day to one week after the informational interviews

- Collect and review student evaluations and make note of any feedback that could be used to improve informational interview experiences in the future.
- Follow up with employers and their employees by sending thank-you emails, sharing some of the student comments that demonstrate the impact of their participation and soliciting informal feedback on the interviews.
- Recognize participating employers and their employees. Many districts and schools hold annual celebrations honoring employers who have participated in WBL activities.
- **(Students)** Send thank-you emails or notes to employees interviewed. Teachers should review the emails before they are sent.
- **(Students)** Complete evaluations of their experiences with the informational interviews and turn them in to their teachers. A sample evaluation form is provided in the *Resources* section.
- **(Teachers)** Conduct student reflection activities in class and compile written reflections for dissemination to all participating students (and their other teachers).

5.4 Informational Interview Resources

Note: These forms can be printed with expanded space for written responses or adapted in other ways.

WBL coordinator:

- Outreach email to employers

Employer:

- Checklist/expectations

School:

- Teacher permission form for absence from class

Student:

- Informational interview outreach script
- Evaluation

Sample Email to Employers from WBL Coordinator (Note: This email could be adapted to be sent to an employer association such as a chamber of commerce.)

Good Morning,

My name is John Doe, and I work for the XYZ (district or school). We have ## #th-grade students from (school) who would like to schedule informational interviews with employees who work in the careers in which they are interested. We hope you will be willing to have one or more students interview you or a colleague at your organization.

Informational interviews are part of a larger continuum of work-based learning opportunities that help students learn about careers and set goals for further career exploration and education. Typically taking 15-30 minutes, informational interviews are a small investment of time that can have a positive impact on a student's career planning. Interviews will take place between (date) and (date). To help them learn how to do so, students will make contact to schedule the interviews. Please feel free to contact me at (phone number) or (email) with questions or comments.

If your organization is willing to participate in one or more informational interviews, please reply to this email so that I can provide your contact information to a student who is interested in your industry. If there are other employees who can provide more detailed information about specific career in your organization, please provide their names, positions, and contact information. If you would like to learn more about other opportunities to work with students, such as being a guest speaker or hosting a workplace tour or job shadow, please contact me at any time.

Thank you,

John Doe, Title
XYZ District or School
Contact information

Employer Informational Interview Checklist/Expectations (Top part to be completed by WBL coordinator)

To help you prepare for your informational interview with (student name), we have created the following checklist of what you can expect. Please contact the work-based learning (WBL) coordinator with any questions. Thank you for your participation.

Time period during which interview may be scheduled:	
Student name(s):	
School:	
School contact name and title:	School contact phone:
School contact email:	
WBL coordinator name and contact information:	

Expectations:	Check:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students will reconfirm the interview time shortly before it is scheduled to take place.2. Before the interview, please have up-to-date information about your organization, industry, and the careers that are available. Any information about industry trends and the skills required for careers is beneficial to students, as are websites they can use to obtain more information.3. Students will likely ask about your own education, training, and career path.4. Allow the student to conduct the 15- to 30-minute interview.5. If you would like, provide feedback to the school contact or the work-based learning coordinator noted above.	

Teacher Permission Form for Class Absence (Only include periods that students will miss)

You are excused from (which period or periods) on (date) to conduct an informational interview with an employer. There are certain procedures that must be followed for this to happen. Any teachers whose classes you will miss must be informed, and you must obtain class assignments for the day of the interview. It is up to your individual teachers to decide when the assignments you miss will be due.

This form must be completed with all teacher signatures and turned in to (whom) by the established deadline in order for you to be excused from classes.

Student name:	Date and time of informational interview:
Period # teacher signature:	Assignment:
Period # teacher signature:	Assignment:

Informational Interview Student Scheduling Phone Call Script

(Adapted from *Roads to Success*³)

Directions: Use the script below to schedule your informational interview. Fill in the blanks for the first item before you make your call. The lines in bold indicate where you should be taking notes during the call. Make sure to record all of this information before you finish the call.

1. Hi, my name is _____, and I am a (what year) at _____ High School. Participating in an informational interview is an important part of my career education. I would like to interview someone at your organization for 15 to 30 minutes to learn about careers in (occupation/department/field) _____. May I speak with someone who might help me identify the right person for me to contact to schedule an interview?

If person is unavailable or out for the day, get his or her name and the name of the person with whom you spoke.

i. Name of person with whom you spoke: _____

ii. Name and phone number of informational interview contact person:

2. Repeat step 1 if transferred to another individual.
3. May I schedule an informational interview with one of your employees?
 - a. If the answer is yes, go on to the next question. If the answer is no, thank this person for his/her time and politely end the phone call.
4. Ask for the name, phone number, and e-mail address of your contact person.
 - a. Name:** _____
 - b. Phone Number:** _____
 - c. Email:** _____
5. Confirm that you have the name, phone number, and email recorded correctly. Thank the person who has helped you identify the contact.
6. Call or email the contact person. Introduce yourself and indicate who gave you his or her name and why you are calling.
7. Would it be possible to schedule my informational interview during the week of _____ [as by teacher or school]? Is there a day or time that is best for you? (Or suggest a day and time.) How would you prefer I conduct the interview--by telephone or by videoconference?
 - a. Date and time of informational interview:** _____
 - b. Method of interview:** _____ (phone or video conference)
8. Repeat date and time you scheduled. Send an email confirmation promptly.
9. Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to our interview and will confirm it with you the day before. If your schedule changes, please let me know by contacting (school contact, phone, and email), and I will get in touch to reschedule.

³ <http://www.roadstosuccess.org/ourcurriculum>

Informational Interview Student Evaluation

Thank you for completing your informational interview. Your feedback is important! Please complete the form and return it to your teacher.

Student name:	Name of employee interviewed:
Employer or organization of employee interviewed:	Title of employee interviewed:
Date of interview:	Phone/email of employee interviewed:

Please evaluate the experience in each of the following areas.

INTERVIEWEE				
Employee was helpful	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Below Expectations	Not Applicable
Employee was available at scheduled time	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Below Expectations	Not Applicable
INFORMATION				
The information is useful	Yes		No	
I became better-informed about careers?	Yes	No	Somewhat	Not Applicable
OVERALL EVALUATION				
Informational interview experience	Exceeded Expectations	Met Expectations	Below Expectations	Not Applicable

Would you recommend this employee to be interviewed by other students? Explain why or why not.

--

Did the informational interview help you identify career(s) you would like to explore further or careers in which you have no interest? Explain.

--

What did you find most interesting about the interview and why?

--

What did you find least interesting about the interview and why?

--

Please provide additional comments below.

--