### **Informational Interviewing**

There are several steps involved in informational interviewing, including identifying someone to interview, preparing for the interview, conducting the interview, and reflection on the process afterwards. While each of these steps has a corresponding worksheet (participant packets), it’s too much material to cover in depth in a 90-minute session. The facilitator should focus on areas that they feel best address the needs of the particular group.

Effective informational interviewing requires social skill, and since many of our participants struggle in this area, **conducting the interview** may be a good choice of focus. Participants can review and practice other aspects of informational interviewing in their counseling sessions.

**AGENDA**

* 1. Topic

Presentation & Discussion

* 1. Break
  2. Activity: Role Plays
  3. Reflection
  4. Evaluations

**WARM UP**

Have you ever done an informational interview? What was your experience like?

**TOPIC PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION**

Review definition provided in handout. Make clear the distinction between informational interviewing and interviewing for a job.

Explain that there are several steps to effective informational interviewing, which include: identifying someone to interview, requesting the interview, preparing for the interview, conducting the interview, reflecting on the interview. Indicate which areas will be focused on

in today’s session. For areas that are not a focus, explain where participants can find additional information/tools and suggest that they build in practice in their counseling sessions.

Direct participants to turn to the “Conducting an Effective Informational Interview” page of

their handout.

Four techniques (write on board, explain each, and provide examples for each): Body Language, Open-Ended Questioning, Reflection, Summary.

**ACTIVITY: Information Interview Role-Plays**

*In order to help people to feel comfortable, open up, and share honestly with you, they need to know that you are listening and are interested in what they have to say. But how do you show someone that you’re interested and paying attention? Use active listening skills.*

**Demonstration**

Facilitators engage in a role play to demonstrate these skills in action. One instructor will be the interviewer; the other will play the interviewee. If both facilitators are comfortable with improvisation, allow participants to choose the scenario. (If you are decent actors, encourage participants to choose something humorous but appropriate).

The facilitators will engage in three “takes” of the role play, each lasting a couple of minutes. In the first “take”, the instructor conducting the informational interview will make a number of errors (e.g., poor body language – arms crossed; close-ended questions – “do you like your job”; awkward transition from question to question – “awesome...so...”). In the second take, instructor will make improvements but still make errors. In the third iteration, instructor will exemplify each skill – body language, open-ended questioning, reflection, and summary.

During the role play, participants play the role of careful observer. After each “take,” you will ask them to provide feedback. Before you begin the first role play, ask participants to watch closely to see how well you employ each of the four skills discussed. At the end of the first “take”, ask participants what the “interviewer” did well and what they needed to improve.

Repeat after the second and third takes.

**Practice**

Depending on number of participants, break up into groups of three or four participants to practice. (There should be one instructor per group). Participants will take turns being the interviewer, while the other participants will serve as observers and provide feedback. The instructor assigned to their group will be the interviewee. Allow participants to choose their scenarios. Each participant should do role play. Feedback structure should be as follows:

* + *Keeping in mind the four active listening skills, what did Jamal do* ***well*** *this time?*
  + *What is one thing Jamal could improve to make this role play* ***even better****?*

**Note:** it is important for participant’s confidence to begin each round of feedback with positive observations. If participants try to jump to “negative” feedback too early, instruct them to hold that feedback until the group has finished identifying what Amy did well. When it comes to “negative” feedback, take only one solid constructive suggestion. When participants engage in the next take of the role play, they should have one thing their focusing on improving (i.e., more frequent eye contact). After take 3, participant feedback should only focus on the positive.

**SUMMARY & REFLECTION**

After engaging in this activity, what listening skill would you say you do best? Which do you most need to improve? Which phases of informational interviewing would you like to work on?

### **Informational Interviewing**

###### **What is Informational Interviewing?**

***It’s a professional conversation.*** An informational interview is not a job

interview! As the name suggests, it’s an informational meeting with someone who can share their advice and insights into a certain occupation, company, or industry.

***It’s a research tool.*** When you conduct an effective informational interview, you gain insider information on the job, occupation, or industry you’re interested in, which can help you determine if it’s a good fit for you.

***It’s a networking tool.*** Informational interviews can also help you to establish professional connections in your field of interest. If you stay in touch with these new contacts, down the road, they may be willing to give you further advice and feedback. In some cases, they may be able to help you identify job leads.

###### **What Role Do I Play During an Informational Interview?**

In an informational interview, ***you are the interviewer***, and you are steering the conversation. Examples of questions you might ask include:

* What does a typical day at work look like for you?
* What do you like most about your job?
* What did you do to prepare for this occupation?
* What advice do you have for people considering this career?
* How does technology play a role in your occupation?
* How could I start working in your field?
* What are reasons people leave this occupation?
* What other local companies hire people in this occupation?

### **Conducting an Effective Informational Interview**

###### **During the Interview**

* Listen through **body language**. Remember SOLER (sit squarely, open posture, lean slightly towards the person, make eye contact, relax).
* Listen through thoughtful **open-ended questioning**. Ask questions that

start with “What?” and “How?”.

* Listen through **occasional summary** and **reflection**. Occasionally take time to briefly summarize what you heard. Repeat back interesting points in different words.

###### **Ending the Interview**

* **Acknowledge how the person has helped you**. “It was really helpful to talk to you because…”
* **Thank them**. “Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy day to talk with me.” (Also make sure to send a written thank you note, either by email or snail mail, within 24 hours).
* **Ask for permission for future contact**. “Would you be willing to talk with me again if I have any questions?”
* **Get their contact information**. “Do you have a card I can take with me?”

*Adapted from “Vocational Empowerment Photovoice”* (Restrepo-Toro et al., 2015)

### **Sample Informational Interview Email Request**

Subject: Informational Interview Request

Hello Mr. Abeye,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Sonia, and I recently spoke with Paul Stevens, a family friend, who gave me your name and contact information. I am currently considering enrolling in a culinary program and am hoping to eventually work in a bakery. As someone who owns and runs a successful bakery, I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about your job and how you got to where you are in your career. Please let me know if you might have fifteen minutes to meet with me within the next couple of weeks. My schedule is very flexible, so let me know what would be convenient for you, or if you would prefer to speak over the phone. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Sonia Ocasio

### **Informational Interview Checklist**

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| **Date, time, and location of my meeting** *(e.g., August 31st at 2:00PM, 5 Grant St., 2nd floor)* |
| **Name and job title of person I am interviewing** *(e.g., Marjorie Haskell, Director of Operations)* |
| **Professional attire I plan to wear** *(e.g., khakis and white collared shirt)* |
| **How I will get there** *(e.g., leave house at 1:00PM, take Green Line to Govt Center)* |
| **What will I find out before the meeting** *(e.g., skills required of a Director of Operations)* |
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| **What I will bring to the meeting** *(e.g., my resume, my portfolio, my list of interview questions)* |
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| **Questions I will ask** *(e.g., What attracted you to this type of work? What is most challenging?)* |
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| **After the interview** *(e.g., Send a thank you email, request a regular mentoring meeting)* |