

## Informational Interviewing Webinar Transcript

- 00:08           Hi everyone. Welcome to the Informational Interviewing Webinar as part of the ASPIRE Challenge with Toronto Finance International. First off, I want to say congratulations for making it this far in the ASPIRE Challenge. You've already come up with your idea and now the next step is to reach out to an employer and present that idea for feedback. If you don't do that, you can't really move forward in the challenge. I know informational interviewing can be nerve-racking sometimes, so we wanted to create this webinar to make it a little bit easier for you.
- 00:40           This webinar is going to go over five easy steps of informational interviewing. By the time we're done this, you will find it so easy to reach out to this employer and we know that you'll be successful. The first step, of course, find the person you want to meet. The second, reach out to them and request a meeting. The third, prepare to speak about your idea. The fourth, of course, go to the meeting. Five, follow up after the meeting. We'll go through each of these five and we'll give you tips and templates for each section.
- 01:12           Who am I? I am Bailey Parnell and I'll be hosting this webinar today. I actually didn't start my career in finance. I started in broadcast journalism, moved over to marketing and digital marketing, and then I worked more in the education space. I've seen a lot of informational interviews and I've given a lot of informational interviews. Now though, I run a company called Skills Camp, which is soft skills training. We work with businesses and educational institutions to build soft skills in their staff and students.
- 01:43           Okay, let's go over the basics so that we can make sure we are all on the same page for informational interviewing. An informational interview generally, this is an informal conversation with someone who has experience that you're interested in learning more about. Whether that experience be a role that you're interested in, a field that you're interested in, a company you want to work for, or even an identity that you share that you're interested in learning more about. For the ASPIRE Challenge, however, it's a bit different. You are reaching out specifically to share your innovative idea and get feedback. Having that reason to reach out actually makes it a little bit easier.
- 02:23           Like we said, step one, you want to find the person you want to interview. How do we do that? Well, we want to find the right person for your ASPIRE idea. For example, if the problem you were trying to solve was that it's hard for children to access books in your community, you might consider developing a kid friendly library app. Someone with experience as an app developer, perhaps a technology specialist, a librarian, a primary school educator, or a project

manager might all be people that could offer you good and relevant advice for your specific idea.

- 02:59 How do we find the right kind of person? The kind of people you're looking for might be people in an industry that's related to your idea. For that example, it might be librarians, but it could also be maybe a politician who's responsible for libraries. People in a specific company related to your idea. Perhaps if you want to develop a kid friendly library app, you might talk to a company that's already developed an online book app.
- 03:29 You want to talk maybe with someone who has familiarity on your issue. Like I mentioned, a technology specialist in a library could probably give you the most relevant advice. Or, people with particular skills to solve your issue. We also mentioned a project manager. A project manager could be a project manager in various companies, various industries, but if they're good at their job they have transferrable skills that might also be relevant to you.
- 03:53 Now, where do you find these kinds of people? The easiest way to do this is to think about who you already have access to. If you've done some paid work, perhaps you've done some volunteer work I imagine part time, are there any people in these organizations you volunteered with who have experiences you're interested in? For example, perhaps you volunteered with a charity and there's a developer there or there's an accountant there or there's even a project manager there who has skills building something out of nothing, and would be able to give you really valuable feedback on your idea. Maybe you already have access to them through your part time job or your volunteer work.
- 04:40 Perhaps you're part of a professional association or you attend their events. For example, students have cheaper access to certain organizations like the Human Resources Professional Association. If you're a member, are there any other members you wish to meet? Me, for example, I'm not a member of the Institute for Performance Learning, but I do go to their events because there are events that non-members can attend. Perhaps you'll meet someone there that you could interview.
- 05:09 Three: alumni and alumni events. Often at your schools, even though you aren't alumni, your schools will put on events that you can attend to meet alumni. Or, if you find alumni out in the world or on LinkedIn, you already have that shared experience of going to the same school so it's already easier to reach out. Professors, faculty, and guest lecturers. Often, our profs have had full careers before they end up teaching us, or they're currently out there doing it. Your profs, your guest lecturers or other faculty that might be in your program but haven't taught you yet might have a wealth of experience and could provide really valuable feedback for your idea.

- 05:57 Five: career fairs and employer presentations. Again, often your schools will host career fairs or they'll bring in employers to present to you. It might be at these presentations that you find the person who would be really valuable to interview for your idea. Number six is conferences. Most of us have been to some form of a student conference. Maybe you saw this person speak there, and that's how you learned about them and their work. Now that you've seen them speak, you can reference their talk when you reach out to them to ask for an informational interview. Seven: are there any referrals from people you're already interviewing or perhaps friends? Maybe you've already gone on informational interviews for another reason and you can ask them, "Is there anyone you think I could talk to?" Or perhaps friends in an industry related to your idea, you could ask for a referral.
- 06:49 Number eight, perhaps the easiest these days is of course online. Finding people on LinkedIn is the easiest because of course, you can search by field, you can search by industry, you can search by company, and of course you can search by Toronto. You can search by first connection, you can even search by second connection if you want to ask for a referral. I included Instagram because this has actually become the second most lucrative professional network for me. I find a lot of people I end up collaborating with on Instagram, and of course 10,000 Coffees. If your school has a hub you can join and these people have already indicated that they are willing to take interviews, so lucky you.
- 07:35 Okay, what if you don't find them? If you don't find this perfect person who has the perfect set of experiences, I want you to think about looking into similar roles or similar skill sets. I mentioned the project manager earlier, and I mentioned that they might come from a variety of fields. If you can't find the perfect person, finding a talented project manager in another industry would probably still have the same skill sets to provide valuable feedback on your idea.
- 08:06 Now, whoever you decide, whoever you choose, you have to research them. Luckily, Google has made this very easy for us all. You just have to Google their name. When you reach out to them, you need to make them feel like you have reached out to them for a specific reason. Like, they are important to your idea moving forward and that you didn't just send out 20 emails all over the place. Again, you can Google them, but if you can't find them online, perhaps you received a referral and you might ask your friend, "Is there anything I need to know about them?"
- 08:40 Okay, step one. You found the person you know you are going to interview. Step two is to reach out to them and request the interview. Now, this interview can look like a few things. It can look like a one to one conversation, which is often the most common. You know, this is the, we're meeting over a coffee or tea and we're talking about my project. It can also look like a phone call maybe if they can't meet up in person. More and more these days, it looks like a video chat, so perhaps you ask them to meet you over Google Hangout, Skype, or Zoom.

- 09:14 I've also heard of and been part of, actually, group interviews. Sometimes someone is really busy and they have a lot of people asking for their time. What they'll do is they'll say, "I'm going to have all three of you together at the same coffee," or I've even seen this online where it's, "I'm going to host a group video chat where there's going to be four of us on the chat." I wouldn't shy away from this. You can still go, you can still get their time, and you can still ask your questions. Then finally, it might even look like a lunch or dinner. This person might be really excited about hearing your idea and say, "Let's extend it to a lunch. I'm interested." That's okay.
- 09:55 Let's think about what you want. The most common again, is the one to one conversation over the phone or video call. Now you're going to send them the initial email. You can find their email address on their business card, if they gave it to you. You can find it from a friend. You can check LinkedIn. It might be on their company website or directory, or again, you can Google it. If you really cannot find their email address anywhere, then I would suggest sending a LinkedIn message.
- 10:23 We are going to give you templates. You're so lucky, because this is already done for you. You're going to be able to download these from the website, and it's going to look a little like this. The subject: informational interview request to share an idea for feedback. It's very clear, it states what you're doing, it's not just saying coffee request. Again, we've made it easy for you with a template.
- 10:46 Hi, whatever their name is. You say your name and what school you're from and that you're taking part in the ASPIRE Challenge. Then it's what exactly the ASPIRE Challenge is and that as part of this program, you are required to come up with an idea. Here's your idea. Here's why you're reaching out to this person specifically. Of course, you're requesting time to meet with them, even 15 to 20 minutes if they're busy. Again, you have these templates so I'm not going to spend too much time here.
- 11:15 Okay, now what if they say no? Don't worry. I have received a ton of nos, and sometimes I've even had to give a no. You know what? I never think it's about me. It's not personal, so I don't want you to assume that it's about you. Don't give up and always respond kindly. "Thank you for your time. Could you by chance recommend someone else with whom I could speak?" Or, "I understand you're busy and appreciate your response. Is there a more convenient time for us to talk?" You always respond kindly. You don't know what's going on on their side of the screen.
- 11:54 Now, what if they say yes? That's great. They might send you to an assistant, but if they don't, you have to set up a time, suggest a location, and always send a calendar invite. Here is an example of how I might label my calendar invite. I just assume everyone is busy and that they need to clearly see what's on the calendar invite even just to remember who I am.

- 12:18 Okay, now you have the interview set up with your person. How do you prepare for the interview? Of course you have to prepare ahead. There's lots to do. I would suggest writing down the questions you want to ask in priority order, but still allow time for natural conversation. You don't just want to be there saying, "No, sorry, I just have to get to this next one," because that doesn't allow for a real relationship to form. Ahead of time, prepare any materials you need to explain your innovative idea. Perhaps you have developed a diagram that makes it really easy to understand, then bring a printout of that diagram. Always bring a resume in your bag, but don't offer it unless they ask. It's just a safety.
- 13:03 Etiquette. Of course, first impressions are key so it's really important that you follow even these small rules. I recommend arriving 10 minutes early to wherever you are going. Even if it's a video chat interview, make sure your internet is up and working, your hardware is charged, that sort of thing. I actually am neurotic, so I will sometimes arrive an hour early and work at a coffee shop nearby just so I know I'm not stressed about TTC delays or traffic or whatever it might be.
- 13:34 In terms of what you wear, you want to wear what you would wear to a job interview. It's always better to go a little bit overdressed than it is to go underdressed and seem disrespectful. Of course, you buy the coffee. You've asked for their time, so you don't want to put them out. You, of course, always assume you are buying the coffee. Sometimes what will happen if they're nice people they'll say, "Oh, you're a student. Don't worry about it. I'll get it this time." Of course if they insist, you're not going to fight with them in the coffee shop, but you always go in assuming that you are buying the coffee.
- 14:12 You've prepared, now you need to go to the interview. It's probably the part where you're most nervous. This is the meeting time. When you get to the meeting, I just recommend recapping why you asked them to be there. Again, I always just assume that they're really busy, they probably have an assistant managing their calendar, and maybe they just showed up to where they were told to go. Again, if I assume that, most people will probably be prepared, but at least then I'm just putting them in a safe position, saying, "Thanks again for meeting me about my ASPIRE idea. I really appreciate you taking the time."
- 14:53 If you want to take notes during your interview, which I imagine you will, what I'll say is, "Sorry, do you mind if I just write some of this down? I don't want to forget." Then I also recommend bringing a notebook to take notes. Even though I actually prefer to take notes on my iPhone, it's easier for me because I don't have to transcribe it later, we're still in their weird transitional phase of history where some people might think it looks like you're ignoring this person or they might just get a little thrown off by the fact that you're in a phone. Again, it's a weird transitional phase of history, so just bring a notebook for safety. Of course, be wary of time. You might only have 15 minutes with this person, so you need to use that time effectively. One thing I like to do is actually set a silent

vibrate alarm on my phone five minutes before the end of the meeting, so that I feel and know when I have to wrap it up, but I don't have to check my phone the whole time and be disrespectful.

- 15:54 You want to build rapport with anyone you're interviewing. Really, just any professional relationship you're building. Jumping right into the questions as soon as they sit down, "Okay hi, lets get to it," is a bit abrupt and harder to build the relationship. It might throw them off. By building rapport, you want to ask questions like, "Have you got any plans for the weekend? How was your Thanksgiving?" Or whatever holiday might be coming up or had just finished. This is how you build rapport. That being said, you still like I mentioned, always have to be mindful of the time you have been given. If you only have 15 minutes, you might spend only one of those minutes saying, "Hey, how's it going? How about this weather?" You're not going to spend 10 minutes if you only have 15.
- 16:43 Some of the questions you might ask them, after you share your idea or solution, some of the questions you might ask would be, do you think this idea is relevant and valuable? Do you think this idea would be practical? What kind of impact do you think this idea would have? Are there any major blind spots I'm missing in my solution? How could this idea be improved? Or, what do you think would be the biggest barrier to implementing my idea? You're asking them for an interview because you appreciate their perspective. Their perspective on the whole idea will be very valuable to you.
- 17:20 Of course, the main question you are never going to ask on an informational interview in and outside of this program are, you do not ask for a job. That is wholly unprofessional. You've asked them to come there for a reason, and to blindside them by asking for a job is really disrespectful.
- 17:40 Okay, now what if they start asking questions? This is a question we've had from students. If they start asking you questions, well one, that is a good sign. It means they're genuinely interested in this idea that you're presenting. Again, it is still up to you to stick to time, so let's say you only have about 10 minutes left, you'll say, "I'm sorry, I don't want to take up more of your time than I need to so I just want to get back to these questions." You make it about not using up their time. You don't want to say, "I'm sorry," you don't want to say, "Can we get back to this?" That would be really rude.
- 18:18 I just want to stay here for a sec, actually. What if they offer you a job in the meeting? This has happened. Maybe you've come up with such a good idea that they say, "Come work for me." Again, what you don't want to do in this meeting is just derail the challenge questions and start talking about your job. You can politely say, "Wow, thank you. I appreciate that. I'll think about it. May I just finish asking these questions in this time?" You can do that really nicely with a smile. It doesn't have to be rude or anything.

- 18:49 Ending the meeting. If you say, because your silent vibrate has gone off or you see a clock on the wall, you say, "All right, well, we're just about at time. Again, I don't want to go past, I know you must be busy. This has been really helpful." One thing I like to ask people is, "Is there anything that I might be able to help you with right now?" Sometimes they giggle, but I'm being genuine. Sometimes they might say, "Oh, well actually I'm looking for a person who does this, if you know anyone, even if it might not be you." I always want to try to provide value and be helpful.
- 19:20 What I never ask is, "May I send my resume?" In the past, I haven't really liked when people have asked me that, just because I've already given you an hour and I just don't have the time to then go back, review your resume, give edits. That's not what you asked for, and you know, don't put them in the position to have to be a nice person. If you want them to review your resume, as if you can bring that to the interview ahead of time. Anyways, but the ASPIRE interview is specifically to give the idea and get feedback.
- 19:53 Now finally, step five. You've had such a successful interview. They've given you really valuable feedback. Now you need to follow up with your interviewee. Again, we have made this super easy for you by providing a template that you can download. I recommend following up between one to 24 hours later. I know that's very specific, but you don't want to follow up more than 24 hours later because, again, they might be busy and forget. I say one hour because sometimes I've had people email me two minutes after the interview and I haven't even really had time to process what I've said. At least give an hour, just to give them time to process.
- 20:34 Again, that follow up, you're going to have a template. It was such a pleasure meeting you. Thank you so much for taking the time and providing feedback on my ideas. You want to reference something they specifically said to you and you want to ensure that you're going to follow up. If you said you're going to send them anything, ensure that you do what you say you were going to do, and you look forward to staying in touch. Again, you will have a template.
- 21:02 Now to end, this is the last thing. I've had lots of students ask me, "What if I go on this informational interview, whether it's in or outside the program, and I want to stay in touch with this person? I want to see them again." There are ways that you can stay top of mind. Perhaps you send them professional updates. For example, if you win the ASPIRE Challenge and it was partially due to them, you're going to want to tell them that. Maybe you attended a class that they recommended or you got a job based on what they said. Then you'll want to follow up and tell them.
- 21:32 I also recommend being social on social media. People often forget that part. It's liking their posts, commenting on their blogs that they write, maybe sharing a post that they write. This will of course notify them and your name will stay top

of mind. Maybe you forward them relevant articles, videos, industry event invitations, or news that you think they'd be interested in. Try commenting on new projects that your contact is involved in or, especially if that project has been featured in the news. If anything has been featured in the news by their company or them, you definitely want to message them about that.

22:10

Maybe congratulate them on new roles or work anniversaries. Again, LinkedIn has made this pretty easy. Or, you send them birthday or holiday greetings. I actually legitimately had a job offer from personal Christmas cards that I sent. I send out personal Christmas cards every year, handwritten. How I got my CBC job was because someone received their card, responded and said, "Actually, I have this role that I think you'd be good for." That is how you stay top of mind if you want to keep in touch with this person after the ASPIRE Challenge.

22:45

Hopefully these five steps have made it really easy for you to successfully go on your informational interview, improve your idea, and move forward in the ASPIRE Challenge. Now it's time to go apply, and I wish you the best of luck.