



Career Pathways and Opportunities

Description

This activity introduces the practices of networking, informational interviewing, and asking questions of career area experts: all powerful strategies for young people to explore career pathways. It guides facilitators and youth to connect with career area experts and mentors in a way that honors young people’s own expertise and lived experiences. More specifically, in this activity youth write their own questions to ask career area experts, tailored to their own particular interests. Youth are primed to consider and share about their own career interests as well as what more they want to know about.

This activity is adapted from the activity “Question Cards” on p. 38 of the [Youth Career Pathways Toolkit](#) from CalFresh Healthy Living, University of California.

Objectives

Student Objectives	Create questions to ask career area experts.	Core Activity: Make meaning
	Learn and practice how to conduct an informational interview before meeting with invited guests.	Core Activity: Develop expertise
Educator Objectives	Lay a foundation for learning about real-world examples of possible career and educational pathways and help students make a networking or mentorship connection with an adult/elder.	Key Educator Practice: Frame the work globally and locally

Instructions

Time

50-90 minutes

Materials

- Index cards
- Pencils
- Printed copies of the [Career Interview Materials](#) pages 43-44.
- Printed copies of the [Career Interview Materials](#) pages 33 and 66-69, optional.

Getting Ready

- Familiarize yourself with the handouts and resources in the [Career Interview Materials](#).
- Ideas for speakers can be found in the [activity resources](#) spreadsheet.
- Think about what kind of forum you and your group would like to create to support career pathway exploration, and how you will decide which to choose. Some approaches to networking and informational interviewing include field trips, guest speakers, and panels. Additional ways to learn about career pathways include watching a recorded video of a speaker, reading case studies, and keyword searches online or at the library (see the [Career Interview Materials](#) pages 66-69 for some keyword suggestions). It can be especially powerful for youth to speak with people who share elements of their own backgrounds such as race/ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, immigration experience, and family education.
- Consider ways to encourage and support youth to play a leadership role in organizing or running the event.
- Send each invited guest or trip host some background information about your group.
- Have each guest send their bio prior to visiting. Consider providing (or having youth provide) a few prompts for the bio; these might range from asking about key moments in their career and education/training path to silly icebreaker-type questions.
- Plan to incorporate the invited guest adults into your group by doing an icebreaker or check-in to build a sense of relationship. This can set the tone that contributes to making the event stay youth-centered.
- If your group generates “Question Cards,” as explained in this activity, consider sending the questions to the guest(s) ahead of time.
- Invite guest speakers to come up with some questions they would like to ask the youth participants as well. Give support to invited adults to act as positive allies to youth.
- Leave time for conversation beyond Q&A. One way to build in informal time is having guests stay for snacks or a meal and any other activities: these “water cooler” moments make for serendipity!
- Some invited guest adults might be willing to be paired with youth for an ongoing mentoring relationship. In such a case, be sure to follow any best practices and guidelines a host school or organization may have regarding protection of minors. Check out structured mentorship programs in your area as well.

Facilitation

Explain that youth will be writing their own questions to ask career area experts, tailored to their own particular interests. Students will be creating one or more questions to ask career area experts. These can be used for an upcoming organized event (e.g., field trip, guest speaker, panel, etc.), and/or on your own for future opportunities. Prepare youth to meet with the new adults by asking the group:

- If you have an adult or elder in your life you consider to be a role model or mentor, what is one quality they have that helps you talk with them?
- What has your experience been like when talking with adults or elders, and what might make it (even) better?

As a group, review the [Career Interview Materials](#) pages 43-44 and ask for any clarifying questions. Invite youth to share examples of what they may have already done along these lines and what their experiences were like.

Brainstorm: First, work with youth to explore the characteristics of good questions about career paths. What makes for a question that will elicit a detailed response? Generate a list together and keep it visible to support their own question development (e.g., capture your ideas on flip chart paper and post it on a wall, project them up on a screen, etc.). Characteristics to highlight include questions that are clear, specific enough, open ended, respectful, not soliciting what might be private information, etc. Next, have youth draft their own questions.

Invite young people to each share their favorite or most important question(s), or ones they'd like to workshop. Invite others' feedback on how they might strengthen them to solicit useful information. Youth may take inspiration from any questions they hear and write them down; they may also decide whether or how they'd like to use the input they received from the group on their own question(s).

Refine the question cards: Have youth transfer their top questions to index cards (one question per card or piece of paper) or to an electronic tool. Consider what method works best both for the youth and for the option of sending the questions ahead of time to your invited guest(s).

When using the "Question Cards" with invited guests, youth can either ask their own questions or you can collect and then randomly redistribute the questions among the group so they get asked anonymously. The randomized method is useful for groups where participants may be shy or embarrassed to ask their own questions. The cards may be used in multiple ways:

- Have the students keep their cards and refer to them in an upcoming Q&A session or conversation.
- Collect the cards, sort them, and share some or all ahead of time with the guest speaker(s) or during the Q&A session.
- Have youth hang on to the cards for use in various settings.

Reflection

Practice using the cards for a Q&A session. Consider having them interview you (the facilitator) or someone important in their life (outside of the group meeting) and then debrief what works well and whether they'd like to make any changes.

Debrief as a group so that students can learn from each other's perspectives. Debrief question suggestions:

- Something new I learned through this activity is....
- Something that surprised me in doing this activity is....
- Something else I would like to ask a career area expert about is....
- Something I'm going to do next to build my career pathway network is....

Optional Post-Activity

After the visit/field trip/video/etc, give youth time for written reflections. Educators may also allow time for the group to generate a thank you note.

Youth-Driven Pathway Facilitation

For educators facilitating the youth-driven pathway, this final activity supports youth to develop a set of questions and interview a local expert to explore potential career and/or educational opportunities related to their chosen environmental issue. This can be a powerful way to help youth reflect on what they've learned over the course of this activity series and explore where they might want to go next with their enhanced knowledge and skills.

This activity can be facilitated as written for any topical area that your group may be working on. The most important modifications involve 1) identifying a relevant career area expert that is well aligned with your team's environmental issue and interests; and 2) choosing a process and format for organizing and conducting your youth team's conversation with the career expert that can best support their ongoing skill building and leadership development.