CASE

Activity 2.2.5 Casting a Net for Information

Purpose

Now that you have proposed a solution to the problem, you will need to learn more about what is already being done. Finding research and resources can be difficult. Many researchers and developers access a vast, global network of other scientists and developers to provide feedback and ideas. But how do you go about accessing these networks the first time? You may have heard the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know." This will be true for you as you contact researchers you have never met before. Often, an introductory email will go to a spam box, and phone calls are easily disregarded by busy professionals.

Most likely, you and your teacher know one, two, or more researchers at an educational institution, a private business, or even a family member who may have a connection of value to you. These contacts may not have the answers you are looking for at first, but they may know of others who do.

You belong to a vast network already. You have been part of an agricultural education community for a few years and have access to the National FFA Organization network. Many of you may also have access to social media, where experts are just a "follow" or "friend" away. There are many other students across the nation embarking on the same type of research and development process as you and they may have similar local networks to you and your classmates.

How can those networks benefit you? How do you go about making the right first impression to yield the results you need to get started on your research project or product development?

Materials

Per pair of students:

- Computer with internet access
- *Solution Proposal*

Per student:

- Pencil
- *Agriscience Notebook*

Procedure

Begin by identifying what type of help you need. Do you need questions answered, advice for research protocol, or even equipment to borrow? Then polish your communication skills and begin exploring your network for help.

Part One – Identifying Needs

1. First, review your *Solution Proposal*. Copy Table 1 below into your *Laboratory Notebook* and fill in the materials, equipment, and supplies you have available. Your teacher may provide a list of what is easily available around the school building.

Table 1. *Materials, Equipment and Supplies*

Available Locally	Items Still Needed	
	Specific items, including size and number	Potential Resources
Yes at gas stations	Onroad and offroad diesel and materials to test the fuel with.	Fuel stations

2. Next, list the materials, equipment and supplies you need that you do not have access to.

3. Then, brainstorm potential venues or resources that may be able to help supply the items. You may have items you do not know how to access. Just leave them blank for now. As you receive replies from

contacts in Part Three, you may be able to come back and fill in the potential resources column. You may also find alternative ideas or substitutions through your research.

4. Review your *Solution Proposal* again and make a list of questions you have regarding specific protocol and procedures. Copy Table 2 in your lab notebook and fill in the questions. Brainstorm a list of any potential resources. Again, if you do not have a specific resource, you may be able to return later to fill in the potential resources column. You may also find contacts with greater expertise through the new network you are about to build.

Table 2. *Questions*

Questions About Your Research	Potential Resource(s) to Contact
1. How many differences are between the Two types of fuels?	Manufacturers of offroad and on road diesel

Part Two – Finding Potential Partners

1. As you review your lists from Part One, begin to think of who you know who might know someone or something that might help you.

- Who do you know who might be able to help you?
- Who do your classmates know who might be able to help you?
- Who do your friends know who might be able to help you? (Think about friends who might be in college, especially).
- Who does your family know who might be able to help you?
- Who does your teacher know who might be able to help you?
- Who do your fellow agriculture education students across the U.S. know who might be able to help you?
- Who do your social networking contacts know who might be able to help you?

5. Once you have identified a few names or organizations that might provide some help, find the contact information for each, including phone number, email address, social media account, and/or mailing address.

Part Three – Maintaining Professionalism

1. Once you have identified targets for your questions and communications, begin to develop a communications plan. For example, what type of communication will you attempt to engage them in? Will you use email, phone, letter, personal visit, or social media?

2. Depending on the type of communication you choose, your teacher will lead a discussion regarding professionalism in communication. How you introduce yourself in your very first message will create a lasting first impression. Use Table 3 to help formulate a plan for your first communication with each contact.

3. Although sometimes the first message is misplaced, overlooked or lost, it helps to state who you know in common so the recipient is aware of your network and relationship to him/herself. Allow some time to pass before making a second contact, as you do not want to annoy or irritate a potential resource.

4. If and when you begin receiving replies, remember to use etiquette and professionalism as you interact with each potential resource. Take care that you do not waste their time with confusing or ill-crafted communications. Be clear, concise, direct, polite, and professional.

5. Record contact information in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 3. *Business Communication Etiquette*

Mode of Communication	Etiquette Tips
Phone	• Speak at a volume that will allow the other person to hear you (not too soft, not too loud). • Introduce yourself in a pleasant manner and ask for the person you hope to visit with. If appropriate, let the recipient know who referred you to them. • Be prepared to leave a message with your name, phone number and a simple description of what you're requesting. • Do not multi-task phone conversations with other activities. Focus on the conversation. • Let the other person know if you need to put them on speakerphone.
Email	• Use a professional address (avoid account addresses that are immature or inappropriate). • Introduce yourself. If appropriate, let the recipient know who referred you to them. • Keep your initial message brief and to the point. • Use a professional signature on your email (avoid nicknames, references to relationships, or personal contact information to ensure safe digital citizenship). • Use exclamation points sparingly. • Avoid humor.
Written Letter	• Use a letter template if you have not written letters before. • Be sure to include return address, recipient name and address, date, and salutation in the header. • Use the three-paragraph request format (1) introduction to yourself and your topic as well as who referred you, (2) specific requests/needs, and (3) closing with a positive to encourage the recipient to respond. • Include a signature with your name typed below it at the end of the letter. • Be sure to correctly address the envelope.
Social Media Network	• Use an appropriate account name or handle for yourself. • Clean up or develop your account so that if your target views your account it is professional to ensure safe digital citizenship. • When possible, use proper spelling and grammar. • Use social media to build a network and make contacts. Save the details for more confidential private messages and/or emails that all users on the social media platform do not need to see.
Text Messaging	• Do not make a first professional contact via text message. • When possible, use proper spelling and grammar. • Save the details for more platforms that allow more explanation (email, phone).
Videoconference (Skype™, GoToMeeting™, FaceTime®, etc)	• Do not make a first professional contact via videoconference. • Look at the camera to make eye contact. • Speak loudly and clearly. • Avoid using too many gestures. • Have visuals ready to share if appropriate.
Adapted from Giang, V. (2013). *15 communication etiquette rules every professional needs to know.* Business insider. Retrieved from **http://www.businessinsider.com/professional-communication-etiquette-rules-2013-12**	

Conclusion

1. What is one benefit of professional collaboration?

Getting more opinions.

2. How does a professional network help a person achieve a goal?

   It helps get a professionals opinion on a topic.

3. What are three things to remember when communicating with professionals?

   Make sure you are speaking clearly, you look professional, and that you know what you are going to want to say.

4. Why is it important to have a clear message when communicating?

   So that the person understands what you're asking or talking about.