How to interview a potential PI and her/his lab members?

*Before starting to collect information about the potential host lab, it is advisable to have a clear idea of your own expectations from your PhD.

The decision of choosing where to do your PhD is an important one. Your future mentor will have a big impact on your academic life and future scientific career. As such, it is important that this choice is made with the most amount of information possible.
Below you will find a series of questions that will help you decide whether a PI and the lab are right for you, (the most important questions are highlighted in **bold**).
The questions are meant to be asked to your potential supervisor and to the lab members (especially the ones highlighted) in order to check if both responses match. Be aware that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

It is your right to expect an honest answer, but do not approach the PI with an aggressive attitude. A tactful approach is recommended. Lastly, the following questions are a general guide that we felt would help you acquire important information before your decision. However, feel free to modify the questions according to your own style.

Lab environment

1) Find out about the general structure of the lab. What is the hierarchy and the functional organization.
2) Find out about the composition of the lab. How many PhD students, postdocs are in the lab? (Please take into account that maximum 2 PhD students are allowed for each supervisor at the same time)
3) Find out who trains newly coming students?
4) **What about your particular case. Will you be followed by a postdoc or engineer? If not, who will train you?**
5) Is there a specific person in the group that you could go to with day-to-day questions about laboratory procedures and supplies?
6) How diverse are the projects in the lab? Are people working on projects in teams or individually?
7) Are projects discussed openly with other members of the lab or presented only after being published?
8) Is it possible to be involved in teaching/supervising?
9) Find out about the status of the lab. When the lab was created? Date for renewal or possible closure of the lab?
10) **Find out about the relation with others labs in the campus.**
11) What are the current positions of the previous students and postdocs (moved on to post-docs, tech, teaching)?
12) What is the lab's strategy for recruiting researchers? (useful to know if you want to do a post-doc in the same lab)
13) **Find out what are the funding options to pursue the PhD in the chosen lab. (i.e. if you don't get a certain fellowship)**

14) **Find out if you can speak to the students and postdocs. If not, try to understand why that is not possible. Nevertheless, check if it is possible to obtain an email or a phone number of previous students.**

PI

11) **Will you have regular lab meetings? if yes how often?**
12) **How many times per week/month will you be able to discuss your project one on one with the PI or the person supervising your project? How are urgent issues dealt with?**
13) Find out how much the PI is monitoring the students
14) Find out how often the PI is present in the lab
15) Find out how the PI is dealing with stress?
16) Are there established collaborations within the institute? and what about international collaborations?
17) Find out how new collaborations are established. Is it easy? Who is usually responsible for this (PI or students/postdocs)?
18) What are the expectations concerning the working hours in the lab, and how flexible are they?
19) How are feedbacks on the projects communicated, either positive or negative?
20) **Find out if (or under which circumstances) conflicts have occurred (PI vs Student, Student vs Post-doc, etc). How have they been solved?**
21) Find out what is the relationship between the PI and the Doctoral School to which the lab is affiliated. What are the specific requirements of this Doctoral School that may impact your PhD training?

Project

20) Will you have a single project, or different parallel/side projects?
21) **How risky is your main project. Is there a plan B if the initial project does not work as planned?**
22) How many other groups are working on similar subject within the campus and outside?
23) How hot is the subject and is there a high chance of getting scooped?
24) What is instead the probability of being helped/to start a collaboration?
25) Find out which is the policy regarding the use of core facilities in campus?
26) **In the lab is there someone who has competence in the techniques you will use? If not, will your supervisor help you establish collaborations and/or send you to labs where the required techniques can be learned?**
27) What about writing/presentation skills?
28) Will your project be shared with someone else or will you be the only one working on the subject?
29) Find out what is the role of collaborators (if it is the case)
30) How much independence will you have on the project?
31) Will you have opportunities to try your own ideas? Will you have the opportunity to order reagents if you want to try an experiment?

32) **In case you will need extra time for the PhD project, is there allocated budget for its financial support? What is the policy on this?**

Conferences/publications

29) Find out how often do students attend conferences/ workshops/etc. Does the lab have funding to support attendance in conferences?
30) **What is the expected outcome of your PhD in terms of quality and quantity of publications or other deliverables?**
31) Who is responsible to write the first draft of publications?
32) **Which is the role of collaborators in the writing process? Find out about the authorship positioning? (if it is the case)**
33) **In case of a collaborative project with an industry, find out about the policy regarding conferences and publications.**
34) What are the contribution requirements to be qualified as an author in a publication?

Specific questions for other members of the lab

Check publication record of previous PhD students and postdocs on pubmed or any other tool. How many first author and other publications do they have? Does this match with the impression that the PI gave you about the success of his lab?

33) **What is the general atmosphere of the lab?**
34) **Do you like working with the PI?** What are the things that you like/don't like about working with her/him?
35) Do you feel that the PI is respectful of the his/her employers and tolerant with mistakes?
36) **How is the funding situation in the lab?**
37) Does the PI help to place his lab members in their next desired career choice job or lab by making referrals to potential employers?
38) How does the PI resolve conflicts including authorship conflicts?
39) How the PI deals with partial or non-groundbreaking stories?
40) **What do you think of my proposed PhD project? Do you think it is promising/interesting/makes sense?**
41) Is there anything you wish you had known before you joined the lab?

useful link: (choosing a supervisor, expectations and responsibilities)
//www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Documents/supervision+guidelines.pdf