

Networking

PDCO Career Resources

Why Build a Network?

Connecting with professionals in your field helps you build relationships with others who share similar career interests. Building a network allows you to get advice from professionals working in a position or field that interests you and to learn about the “hidden job market” to find jobs that may never be publicly advertised. Building a network is also a great way to identify possible mentors and to seek insight into specific career fields.

How to Build your Network

You often meet new people at work, in school, in your community, and even online. These opportunities can happen all the time, and you should be open to them! The following are examples of different places you can meet professionals and fellow trainees in your field.

Conferences

Conferences are a great chance for you to meet others in your discipline. Connecting with professionals in your field at a conference allows them to remember your name in the future or share your information with others in the field who are looking to hire.

- Before attending a conference, you may want to consider making a plan.
 - Do you want to meet a specific person at the conference?
 - E-mail them in advance to set up a meeting.
 - Do you want to attend specific presentations and talks?
 - Many conferences have dedicated apps that can help you plan your schedule.
 - Do you want to meet five new people to expand your network?
 - Attend poster sessions and socials, and do not discount the value of getting to know other trainees and postdocs (not just famous PIs).
- Practice your “elevator pitch”—a 15-30 second introduction of who you are. Consider what you want to share about yourself and what impression you want to make on professionals in your field.
- Attend sessions that are of interest to you, and speak to the presenters afterwards.
- Find out if a specific professional society or institution is offering a party at the conference. This is a great chance to meet folks from your discipline who you have not gotten the chance to interact with before. Most often, professionals associated with the society or institution will attend.

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Make an appointment to develop a career strategy and optimize your job search tools

- Try to stay at the main hotel where the conference is being held, if possible. This gives you the chance to informally interact with participants after conference sessions and share your story with them, as well as to pick their brain for information on jobs in your field.
- Wear your nametag and do not be shy about introducing yourself. Bring business cards; don't assume people will remember you.
 - If you receive business cards, it may be helpful to write notes on the back of the cards detailing how you met each person, what you talked about, and what you want to say when you follow up with them.
- After you meet someone, make sure to reach out via e-mail or LinkedIn within a few days to strengthen the connection. In your message, include when you met them and what you talked about to jog their memory.

Informational Interviews

Looking to get the “inside scoop” on a career or job you are interested in? Then consider conducting an informational interview with a professional in a field that interests you.

Informational interviews give you the opportunity to learn more about a field, specific job or company and promote yourself in a positive, low-stakes situation. Informational interviews may even lead to job interviews! Informational interviews can be beneficial at all stages of your job search, from career exploration to job preparation.

- Start by making a list of the companies you would like to work for and the job titles or positions you are interested hearing more about. Remember to consider the size of the company and the role the individual has, as they may have a busy schedule.
- Take the time to look up individuals on LinkedIn. Whenever possible, use their e-mail address to contact them instead of sending a LinkedIn message. This limits the chance that your message will come across as LinkedIn spam.
- When reaching out to individuals, make sure your e-mail is clear and understandable. Explain who you are and why you are contacting them.
 - Make it clear that you are not looking for a job (even if you are), as they may just push you to the HR department. Be clear that you are looking to gain information about this person's career history and their perspective on the field.

You might not hear back right away, and that is okay! People are busy and responding to informational interview e-mails may unfortunately slip to the bottom of a professional's to-do list. After a week, if you have not received a response, send a follow-up e-mail and politely ask if your contact has had the chance to read the previous message. Use this opportunity to mention how much you would value speaking with them, even if the meeting is brief.

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View a list of common questions you may want to ask during an informational interview [here](#).

- When you first sit down, ask them about themselves. How did they get started in the field? What is it like working for their company? What projects are they working on?
- Be prepared to tell them about yourself. Why did you want to reach out to them? What are your goals?
- Next, move into the information you are really excited to know. How did they choose this company or position over others in the field? What is the most rewarding and challenging thing about their field? How can your previous and current experience help you in this field?
- Finally, tap into their network. Ask them if there are other people they can connect you with or if there are meetings or conferences that they think you should attend. Make use of their resources and advice!

Online Presence

Employers will most likely “google” you at some point, and you want to make sure that you have a professional internet presence. Social media is also a great way to build and maintain your network.

- Consider creating a LinkedIn page if you have not already done so. [\(Check out our LinkedIn guidelines here!\)](#) This is a great way for professionals to connect with you and see your educational and professional background.
- Another way to showcase some of your talents, interests and skills is through blogs or social media accounts such as Twitter. Connect with other professionals in your field, engage in topical conversations, and promote your own research by tweeting about your new publications.

Professional Organizations

Memberships in organizations can keep you updated on current events and job openings. They also serve to connect you with prominent professionals in your area or field.

- First, you must identify which professional association(s) to join. You can reach out to others in your field or department and ask them which associations they recommend.
- Do your homework! Take a look at what each association offers. Some might send journals, give access to social media networks, or provide discounts to annual conferences.

Use your Current Network Connections

Your program faculty and alumni are excellent sources of knowledge for a wide range of professions, including the academy.

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- To contact alumni, reach out to program administrators or the alumni office. If they don't have an internal contact, use LinkedIn to research alumni and send them a message.
- Faculty in your department often will hear from colleagues at different institutions or companies who are looking to hire.
- Attend seminars and speaker events, such as lunches and happy hours, to get to know prominent scientists that you may want to connect with further.
- Keep a high profile in your department so that faculty members think of you when they hear about these jobs offerings.
- Be in the know about where companies typically post jobs in your discipline.

Additional Resources

- [Nature Blogs: Skills for Your Next Networking Adventure](#)
- [Forbes: How to Network more Effectively](#)
- [How to ask for an Informational Interview](#)
- ImaginePhD has a good resource relevant to all PhDs on the informational interview and sample questions to ask ([Sign up for free here](#))