

NETWORKING

How to build professional connections that lead to mutually beneficial relationships

In this tipsheet, you'll learn about where and why to network, how to prepare, and we'll show you some examples to help you get started.

What is networking and why should you do it?

Networking is all about cultivating mutually beneficial relationships with a professional focus. At its worst, networking can seem to be about schmoozing and using other people, but at its best networking is about making authentic and genuine connections between people. Networking allows you to build a community around you to leverage your strengths and connections to get further than you could have gotten alone. Once you have a career direction and plan for future steps, networking is an important part of your job search strategy for connecting yourself to potential employers.

Where can you network?

Networking happens in both formal and informal ways. Connections can be made through an informal chat with your neighbor or classmate, or more formally at a career-related or professional events.

Formal networking opportunities might include:

- Career fairs
- Conferences
- Networking events
- Industry mixers

To find out about formal events, stay connected with your department and classmates to learn about opportunities, and keep an eye open for interesting events where you might make a connection.

Formal events usually allow you more time to prepare yourself by researching who is attending the event, who you want to speak with, questions you want to ask, and what you might want to share about yourself. Check the Career Services website to learn about our [career fairs](#) and [information sessions](#) and review our [Career Fairs tipsheet](#) for ideas on how to make the most of these opportunities.

Here's networking in action:

Gurpreet is an English major with an interest in government communications jobs. He is interested in building connections that could lead to work when he graduates next year.

Gurpreet writes down a list of names including friends, family, classmates, professors, and past co-workers. He identifies 5 people from the list to connect with over his career options.

One person on his list, a past professor, offers to make an email introduction to a friend who does marketing for the City of Kingston. Gurpreet introduces himself through email to Suzanne, his professor's contact.

After making a good impression during the meeting, Gurpreet is encouraged to apply to a summer position in the Communications and Customer Experience department at the City of Kingston. He is offered the position.

Gurpreet continues to make connections at school and at his summer job to increase his opportunities at graduation with the City and beyond.

Informal networking opportunities might include:

- Friends, family, and classmates
- Community or cultural organizations
- Alumni associations
- Current or past employers

LinkedIn is a professional social media platform that can help you develop and foster a network of professional contacts online.

LinkedIn is becoming increasingly more powerful as a tool for finding career information and making connections. Check out our [LinkedIn Strategies tipsheet](#) for advice on how to best use the platform. You might also want to join our [LinkedIn workshop](#), as well as becoming a part of the [Queen's Connects Career Network for Students and Alumni](#).

Make a plan to make it happen

As with most good things, networking takes time. To build a healthy network requires ongoing effort to build and sustain connections – you can't just do it at the last minute. Build your network intentionally by making an action plan. Think about what areas you want to explore (in terms of careers, location, and specific organizations), who you can connect with about this, and how to talk to them.

Power up your conversations by being prepared

1. Know your interests and what you can offer. Learn to describe your interests and value in a succinct, positive, and memorable way. Give a snapshot of you in action.
2. Ask for information and advice. Determine what you are interested in knowing about, such as information about trends in a field of work, the nature of a profession, or advice from knowledgeable workers on career direction. Be prepared with specific questions. Look at the [Information Interviews tipsheet](#) for ideas about what questions you might ask.
3. Help people remember you. Give them a "contact card" with your name, address and phone number. (A local printing/copying business can provide you with an inexpensive supply.) Mention what you are doing at Queen's University (in your program, volunteer work or extra-curriculars) to remind them of the context. If you have been referred by someone, say so.

5 simple steps to get started

1. Start with your current contacts. Map out who you know and from where. You will be surprised to find out who they know.

2. Conduct information interviews. Read our [tipsheet](#) for more advice.

3. Join a professional association (or two). Search *Associations Canada*, a resource available in our Career Information Area.

4. Participate in an online community. Sign up for our LinkedIn & Social Media workshop for more information.

5. Get involved on campus. School can be a great place to make new connections.

Here's a sample introduction for a networking event:

"Hi, I'm Helena Javitz.

I see that you have experience in the food production industry. I'm currently studying chemical engineering at Queen's University and I'm interested in production-related work in the food and brewing industry. I have some experience in quality control and I recently completed a major project on yeast culture enhancement.

Could I ask you more about what you do? What's your area of interest?"

Top 6 tips for building your network

1. Start early

Developing a helpful network can take time. Making connections is like planting seeds that may later become opportunities, so don't wait until school is over to start cultivating your network. Take advantage of opportunities available to you right now in the form of clubs or student memberships in associations. In classes, consider choosing essays or projects with your potential career goals in mind. For example, are there assignments that will allow you to investigate or work with organizations within a sector that interests you?

2. Be open-minded

Sales clerks, taxi drivers, and your aunt's second cousin can be just as helpful to you as a director of marketing. Networks are different from bureaucracies. In a bureaucracy there is a hierarchy or a ranking, but in a network everyone is equal. Focus on exchanging information.

3. Set realistic and achievable goals

No matter how good your network is, other people cannot make things work out perfectly for you. You might not always find exactly what you are looking for, but you'll always learn more.

4. Ask

In your summer work as a receptionist or in a restaurant wait staff position, you probably got to know some of the customers or sales representatives quite well. Perhaps a few gave you their business cards, telling you to call if you needed anything. You do now—you need information. So, don't dismiss their offers of help—call them. Most people like to help others.

5. Give as well as receive

Networking is a two-way street. People are more inclined to help you if you help them. If a friend is looking for information about a career in journalism and you happen to know someone that could help, offer to introduce them. Think of the information, knowledge or skills you have that could be useful to someone else and share it.

6. Say thank you

Express your appreciation to the people you meet. If someone has helped you, let them know that you are grateful for their time and assistance. You can simply say thanks in person, or you can leave a voice mail, send an email or write a letter.

Want to learn more?

Check out our [Networking Strategies workshop](#) to refine your understanding and start developing your networking skills – practicing helps build skills and make the process less stressful.

Career Services offers [Drop-in Career Advising](#) to answer quick questions related to all aspects of your career planning and job search.

For more in-depth explanations, enroll in the [Career Prep Modules](#) free, self-directed course on onQ.