

Networking

Why Network?

Networking refers to the practice of developing a set of professional contacts and cultivating relationships with acquaintances in your field. When you are looking for a job, networking can help you learn about a particular career field, specific organization, or position. By contacting individuals who might hire for an organization or connect you to other great professionals, you can explore possible opportunities and uncover sources that can assist you in the future.

How to Network

- Arrange a meeting or an “informational interview” with a contact from an organization, a former employer, Maxwell alumnus/a, or a faculty member with a particular background.
- Participate in classes that have opportunities for applied or community-based projects.
- Volunteer/intern with organizations that interest you.
- Join a professional organization.
- Attend conferences or career fairs.
- Make it a practice to share your interests with new people you meet. You never know when someone will be able to assist you with your career planning.

Getting Started

- Determine who you would like to talk to, or what field(s) you would like to learn more about. For example, if you are interested in what a budget analyst does, arrange to meet with an analyst for a real perspective.
- Establish a method for how you will connect with people, such as the alumni database, social functions, family contacts, etc.
- When contacting a new person, explain how you got their name and why you are reaching out.
- Emphasize that you are contacting them for information, versus a job. Be specific about how they can help, whether it is advice or more contacts.
- Be clear about how much of their time you are requesting. About 30 minutes is typical.
- Suggest a location, such as a coffee shop, near your contact’s office, so the meeting is convenient for them.
- If your contact is long-distance, arrange to have a conversation over the phone or Skype.

Before Your Meeting

- Do your homework. Make sure you do some research beforehand. You want to avoid asking questions you could have learned the answers to on your own or online.
- Determine what you really want to know and come prepared with a list of talking points or questions.
- Be prepared to tell them about yourself and your interests. Know your elevator pitch: a 60-second explanation of your background, skills, and aspirations.
- Confirm your meeting a few days ahead of time to make sure your contact is still available.

During Your Meeting

- You do not need to dress up, but make sure you are still dressed professionally and presentably.
- Respect the other person's time. Show up early for your appointment.
- Be open minded about the experience, even if the experience is not what you expected.
- Listen more than you talk. This is your chance to hear from them, more so than an opportunity to sell yourself. You do, of course, want to leave a good impression.
- Do not burden the individual by asking them to make decisions for you. It is your own career search.
- Be positive throughout the conversation. Do not vent or complain.

After Your Meeting

- Send a thank-you expressing your appreciation.
- Make contact with any suggested references and let your initial contact know the outcomes.
- Develop a system for keeping track of the contacts you meet. Note where you met the person and through whom you met them, where they work, their contact information, and how they might be able to help you in the future.
- Once you get a job, be sure to let your contact know the outcome of your search.

Networking Email

When reaching out to alumni or other professional contacts, email is a great first step. Use your initial note as a request for a phone or in-person meeting. In your email, introduce who you are and why you are contacting them. Mention your interests and what you are looking to discuss with them.

Subject: Current Maxwell MPA interested in Nonprofit Management

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Hello Gloria,

I am a current MPA student at Maxwell focusing on nonprofit management. Previously I interned at regional offices of organizations like Ronald McDonald House and the American Cancer Society doing fundraising and assisting with event planning. While researching organizations and where Maxwell alums have found success, I learned that you do Volunteer Management for the American Red Cross in DC. I am hoping you might be available for 30-minutes or so for a phone call or coffee chat. I am interested to gain some insight into your experience working for and experience working at the National Capital Chapter within your specific function.

I greatly appreciate your time. Thank you very much!

George Maxwell