

## **Networking: Making it Easy**

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- You have just moved to the Bay Area and are job-hunting.
- You are wondering whether consulting might be a good move for you.
- You are curious about what it might be like to work in the environmental sector or for a hospital.
- You are still trying to find a special events manager.
- You would like to spend some time volunteering for a good cause.

The most effective way to respond to any of the needs above may be to network. While networking may sound like hard work, it does not have to be. According to Wikipedia, networking can be defined as “an interconnected system of things or people.” Think of it as maintaining personal relationships and building and nurturing new ones. These are skills that many of us have perfected as development officers, so networking should be natural to fundraisers. While networking can help your career, it can also become a way of life.

### **Why Should You Network?**

Networking can help you accomplish any of the following and more:

- Locate a new position
- Become involved in a new volunteer activity
- Find a new staff member
- Advance within your career
- Improve your professional skills
- Sell your car
- Find a new babysitter
- Make a lifetime friend

### **How do you network?**

Since networking is about building and maintaining relationships, you can network anywhere. Think about the groups, both professional and personal, to which you belong. Who might have ideas on your question? Once you think of possible connections, contact those individuals in a way that is respectful of their time.

At business events you attend, target people whom you may want to specifically meet. Carry business cards and pass them out when you have a relevant connection. Keep track

of the conversations you have had and make a note about specific issues where you can follow up afterwards. As well as the conversions focused specifically around business, are there other ways that you can be helpful to the person with whom you wish to connect? Think of it as a relationship that you are forming with a major donor. Is there an article or link of interest? Do you have leads for this individual about something they are seeking, whether it is a new movie or a special event at your nonprofit?

You may know people in your Book Club, Investment Group, Giving Circle or baseball team, who can be great connectors, even if they are in a different sector than you are. Be sure to contact them for referrals and guidance. And if you do not have an informal group in an area of interest to you, consider forming your own.

An effective way to network is through volunteering. Become active in your professional organizations, such as AFP, DER, and YNPN. You can contribute to the sector, improve your skills, and meet other people who share similar professional concerns. Volunteer for causes in which you are interested and you will build a network of connections with similar personal passions.

### **Tips for effective networking:**

- Identify questions and issues on which you would like some input and advice.
- Think about individuals or groups where you might be able to find others who can provide responses.
- Keep track of the people you meet and their areas of expertise and personal interest.
- Be respectful of the time and schedules of individuals you contact.
- Circle back and let people know how you resolved the situation about which you contacted them.
- Volunteer for nonprofits to provide yourself with the opportunity to meet connect with people and improve your skills.
- Attend events where you are likely to meet people who share similar interests, professionally and personally. Keep track of the individuals and the conversations that you have had about which you will want to follow up.
- Form your own interest groups, whether personal (running clubs, wine groups) or professional (a group of professional colleagues). Make sure your groups meet regularly, so that you have the chance to get to know and trust each other.
- Remember that networking is reciprocal. Help others who contact you. Return phone calls and emails. Pass on information that may be helpful to others in your network. Be generous with your time.

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