



Science
Societies

Networking—What? Why? When? How?

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What Is Networking?

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines it as “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions.” In the most basic terms, it is building connections with others to exchange information and develop professional or social relationships. Sometimes networking is intentional while other times it happens organically without much effort. Career networking can include personal, professional, academic, or familial contacts, and it has been shown to be a key factor in job placement and recruitment (Adler, 2016).

Why Should I Network?

If you are looking for a job or change in career, reaching out to your network of contacts is typically the first step. Your network can also help you develop professionally, achieve career goals, and learn more about your field. In science, building a network of collaborators working in the same area of interest is essential—sharing lessons learned, pointing to mutual contacts who may be working on a project key to your work, and talking through challenges with those who understand scientific research. None of us work in isolation as much as we sometimes like to think we do. Have you ever talked to a colleague and found they have already figured out a solution to a problem you are currently encountering or been introduced to a person who is working on research projects very similar to yours? These instances provide great opportunities to collaborate. Conversations among scientists are strike points for new ideas, solutions, and life-changing discoveries.

When Is Networking Important?

The short answer to the above question is always! If you are just getting started as a graduate student, start building and maintaining a network to expand your knowledge

in your field of study and beyond. If you are feeling a little stuck or uninspired in your current job, expanding your network may reinvigorate your passion for your work or provide opportunities for a career move. Later in your career, you may be looking to share your findings or continue your work after your retirement. Many opportunities can arise from the contacts in your network, and benefits exist in every direction of the network.

How Do I Build or Grow My Network?

Decide on the objective(s) of your network as this will help you determine where to target your efforts. It is important to remember that networking is not just about how many people you exchange business cards with at a meeting, it is about the lasting relationships you build with those contacts. Professional organizations such as the Societies are a great place to start. Be an engaged and active member of organizations during conferences, meetings, workshops, and committees. It can be intimidating when you are first starting out, but start small with your existing network of colleagues—talk to them about what they are working on to strengthen your interpersonal communication skills in a comfortable setting. Be a good contact—actively listen, engage in conversation, and ask questions. Another great way to start is to reach out to connections you have made via social media to discuss projects they have shared in a recent post. Networking is about relationship building, information exchange, and supporting each other to achieve success!

Editor's note: This article is part of a series written by members of the Women in Science Committee, for all Society members. For more information, visit www.agronomy.org/membership/women-in-science, www.crops.org/membership/women-in-science, and www.soils.org/membership/women-in-science.

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