



Guide to **Effective & Authentic** Networking

provided by



Career Center

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What Exactly Is Networking?

Networking is the activity of connecting with others to gather and share information.

For some, the prospect of networking can elicit feelings of discomfort or concern about feeling fake. Finding points of connection is just the start, and there is nothing fake about putting yourself out there to connect with someone. As long as you focus on it being a process of curious exploration, those feelings can be replaced with excitement to build your professional community. Click here to learn more from [Celeste Headlee](#).

Networking is a two-way street.

You may initially feel like you are asking most of the questions to another person, as opposed to an even exchange. While this may be true in many cases, keep in mind that your ideas and experiences, both now and in the future, may also be interesting to your contacts. People with whom you network might be interested in hearing about your projects related to their line of work. The dynamics of a conversation may also reflect your personal preferences - consider getting out of your comfort zone, and it may invite others to do the same.

Networking happens across cultures.

Before connecting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, be sure to research and observe cultural norms surrounding networking. Communications that seem polite in one culture may be considered strange or rude in another. If you find that certain norms are very different from how you typically operate, find a partner with whom you can practice and hone your style.

In other words; be aware of your own salient identity markers and those of the individual you are asking something from. Consider how those identity markers show up in an ask and engagement with others.

Example: If I as a white person consistently ask professionals who are BIPOC to support my career, I should consider power dynamics and the value of connecting both with individuals of similar identities and across lines of difference.

“The currency of real networking is not greed but generosity.”

-Keith Ferrazzi, author, entrepreneur

Networking is NOT asking for a job.

When connecting with someone, remember that the goal should not be to ask for an internship or job. Instead, always interact with others through a relational - NOT a transactional — approach. Seek to learn and gain advice from others; you never know where it may lead.



Since nearly 70 percent of individuals are hired by companies where they have a personal or professional connection (according to LinkedIn), networking is a critical aspect of the career exploration process. Beyond making personal connections with others in roles of interest to you, networking allows you to gain insight into many aspects of work, including

- Trends within fields
- Personal career journeys (such as someone’s post-corps transition)
- Insights into organizations or companies (like workplace culture)
- Job search resources and interview practices
- Strategies for achieving your goals and roadblocks/hurdles to consider

Networking conversations can also open your eyes to career fields and jobs that you may not have considered. Approaching each conversation with both curiosity and an open mind will allow you to connect with others in an authentic and meaningful way.

Next: [PHASE 1: Lay the Groundwork](#)

PHASE 1: LAY THE GROUNDWORK

Know your “why”

Start by clarifying your goals and objectives for wanting to connect with others. There could be many reasons you may want to start networking, including:

- You are curious about navigating a career pathway given certain identity markers (e.g. navigating becoming a lawyer as a Latina)
- You are curious about exploring careers beyond those that are already familiar to you.
- You are considering internship opportunities and wonder which might be the best fit for you.
- You are very interested in a specific role and would like an insider’s perspective to determine if your understanding of the work is accurate.
- You have decided upon a specific location to relocate to and want to better understand how to find opportunities in that area.
- You are preparing for an interview for a certain role and want to gain insight and advice from someone who’s been through the same interview process before.

Figure out your “who”

Whether or not you realize it, you already have a network. Networks do not just consist of high-powered people, like CEOs or executive directors. Rather, networks consist of people we know, people they know and people we make an intentional effort to get to know.

Start by taking an inventory of your network. In the chart below, list individuals or organizations with whom you would like to connect and learn more about work that interests you.

Relationship	People (names) you already know <i>Talking with these people about their career journeys can help strengthen existing connections.</i>	Contacts you would like to make <i>These can be as particular as an individual you would like to connect with, or as general as someone in a specific role or organization that interests you (e.g. “Someone who works in a law office.”)</i>
Friends and family		
Educators <i>Past teachers, faculty members, preceptors, administrators, tutors, etc.</i>		
People you admire		

Alumni from your University		
Affinity groups <i>Extracurriculars, religious groups, athletic teams, professional associations in a career of interest, etc.</i>		
Coworkers or supervisors		
Community Stakeholders <i>People who have a vested interest in a community (physical community or a community of people like immigrant rights) and are leading parts of the work.</i>		

Next: [PHASE 2](#) "PLUG INTO" YOUR NETWORKS

PHASE 2: “PLUG INTO” YOUR NETWORKS

Find your people

There are many resources you can use to find people working in your areas of interest. A great place to start is online.

TFA Connect BETA

<http://www.teachforamerica.org/>

Find TFA alumni with whom you’d like to connect, including messaging them by using the Alumni Directory search tool on Teachforamerica.org

- **CM/Alumni sign up**
<https://youtu.be/TnbM9Pj0FPM>
- **Find a role & network as an alum**
<https://youtu.be/m8qyp4qBclo>
- **Send messages to employers**
<https://youtu.be/pRr-MUShgaE>

LinkedIn

www.linkedin.com

Identify individuals, organizations and specific roles that may be of interest to you. Be sure that your LinkedIn profile is updated and well organized, so new contacts who read your profile can learn about you. For more information check out Dallas Fort Worth’s [personal digital brand](#) resource.

Beyond online resources, opportunities to engage in face-to-face networking are all around you, including: speakers at professional development sessions and other employer events, coworkers and managers, contacts you have through professional conferences or through volunteer work.

Your Teach For America experience offers you chances to naturally engage in networking, sometimes without even realizing it. These include:

- Participating in organizations and volunteer opportunities
- Connecting with alumni and other associates during conferences and professional development sessions
- Getting involved with local initiatives
- Participating in your placement school’s PTA
- Participating in committees at your school
- Shadowing alumni and other professionals at their jobs

Talk with many people about what you are doing and what you would like to do. Also take the time to listen to what they are doing, their successes, and their pain points. This way, you can build a genuine connection.

Reach out for informational interviews

Once you have mapped out your “who” and “why,” start your outreach. When connecting with a new contact for the first time, you should email them to ask for the chance to set up an informational interview.

Informational interviews are informal conversations with others for the main purpose of collecting information for your own career exploration process. Informational interviews can act as entry points into networking with people working in jobs of interest to you.

If you’re feeling apprehensive about reaching out to new contacts, remember that many people are flattered by a request to connect and talk about their career journey!



Subject line: Request for career guidance from a TFA alum

Dear Inge,

As a 2nd year corps member, I am considering a career in Data Strategy and am excited to explore this career path. I [found, received] your information [on TFA Connect BETA, Alumni Directory, etc.], and am interested in learning more about [your experience at abcxyz company, your role as xyz, how you determined a career in this area was right for you, etc.].

I would appreciate an opportunity to learn more about your experiences, as well as any advice you might be willing to share with me. When time allows on your end, could I take you out for coffee at a location convenient to your office or schedule a time to talk with you for about 20 minutes on the phone?

I look forward to the possibility of connecting with you and thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Theo Tiger



Subject line: Fellow TFA alum connecting about your school leadership career path

Dear Amir,

As a TFA alum, I am curious about becoming a school leader. I was recently conducting some searches on TFA Connect BETA and noticed your profile.

I find your path from being a part of [xyz] at [xyz] and writing about [xyz], to working as a dean and becoming a school leader, to be very interesting and admirable.

I am involved in a variety of groups and feel that my time in the corps alongside my passion for connecting people with meaningful academic experiences may point towards a career as a school leader.

I’m currently exploring next steps for my career and was wondering: do you have a few minutes to connect via phone to discuss your career path and experiences with me?

Many thanks in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tamara Tiger

PHASE 3: PREPARE

Once you receive positive responses, you'll be moving into the next stage of networking: preparing for your first interaction or informational interview with each contact. A little preparation will go a long way.

Confirm logistics

Be sure to confirm all meeting logistics with your contact ahead of time: date, time, location, and method of communication (in-person, phone, video chat, etc.). In order to be courteous from the get-go, it is best to defer to the plans that would be most convenient for your contact.

If conducting your informational interview by phone or video chat:

- Be aware of time-zone differences between your and your contact's locations.
- Find somewhere quiet and private, where you will not be interrupted and where you have a reliable signal.
- Confirm ahead of time who will be calling and the best number or username with which to reach your contact in order to avoid any last-minute confusion.

If conducting your informational interview in person:

- Confirm the location ahead of time. Ideal settings are public places where you could talk easily and uninterrupted, such as a cafe or an office. Suggesting a location near your contact's office is always a plus.
- Plan your trip and give yourself more time than you think you'll need to get there.
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early; it sets a strong impression if you are at the location and ready to go before your contact arrives.
- If you're having a conversation over coffee/tea, offer to cover your contact's bill, if possible (note that this is not mandatory or expected).

However you connect with your contacts, be sure to be very responsive as you're making plans and then follow through on those plans. Being a no-show to a planned meeting or ghosting a contact is unacceptable and could damage your professional reputation.

Do Your Networking Homework

You should be ready to talk about yourself and ask informed and specific questions about your contact during a networking conversation. This requires some research ahead of time. Familiarize yourself with your contact's professional background and current affiliations so you can build your questions from this information, connect with your contact on similarities and demonstrate the level of time and attention you've given to preparing for the conversation.

Resources for gathering in-depth information about your contacts include (but are not limited to): LinkedIn profiles, company websites (particularly the staff or team pages), professional bios, publications written by your contact(s) and articles/news about them or their company.

If something in a contact's background strikes you as particularly interesting or similar to something in your own life, make a note of it and ask more about it when meeting with them.



Prepare your questions

When preparing the questions you want to ask in your networking conversation(s), keep in mind the information you've gathered in your research as well as your "why" (see Phase 1). Build your questions around the topics that genuinely pique your interest.

Examples of effective networking questions:



- How did you choose this career and get to where you are now?
- How has the field changed since you started? What are the leading professional organizations in the field?
- How does your organization compare with its competitors?
- What skills, personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What next steps would you recommend for my career search?
- Could you recommend anyone else in your network with whom I can connect?
- Can you tell me more about your workplace culture as I consider an opportunity with this company?

Some Questions to Avoid:



- How much money do you make?
- What do you hate about your job?
- Does your company have a job/internship opening I could apply to right now?
- Can you get me in touch with your company's hiring manager for a position?
- Can you recommend me for a position at your company?

Be professional during the conversation

Respect your contact's time.

Everyone's time is a commodity, even when someone is excited to connect with you. Consequently, you should keep your initial conversation to 30 minutes. Keeping tabs on the clock and wrapping up your conversation within this timeframe will demonstrate respect for your contact's time. This could also make your contacts more willing to schedule follow-up conversations with you and/or refer you to other contacts of theirs.

Listen twice as much as you talk.

Be attentive during the conversation and practice active listening. Give your undivided attention to your contact; refrain from having your phone or laptop out during the conversation in order to cut down on distractions. Ask open-ended questions to get the conversation going and ask clarifying questions when needed. Seek to understand, not to judge, what the other person is saying.

Stay positive.

Communicating a positive attitude through both your words and your body language is essential to making a good impression. When telling a story about a challenging situation from your past, be sure to frame it in a positive way and wrap it up with what you learned from it.

Re-frame sensitive questions.

For example, if you are genuinely curious about the tough parts of someone's job, instead of asking: "What do you hate about your job?", ask: "What are some common challenges you face in your role?"

PHASE 4: MANAGE THE RELATIONSHIP

Track your process

Any process can become overwhelming if not well-organized. A simple spreadsheet can serve as a useful tool. You can design your network tracking system however works best for you, but usually you'll want to capture the following information: your contacts' names; contact information; current positions and companies; dates of your conversations with them; notes/takeaways from these conversations; and follow-up steps you've taken or plan to take afterwards. You can find an example of a tracker here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1S-ejar4hWZ0TculK3e00K4IA9d2OOSK-7qCtq2wNHE4/edit#gid=0>

Follow-up and say "Thank you"

Sending a thank you email after each conversation takes only a few moments of your time and leaves your contacts with a strong impression of you as a courteous professional. Take the time to personalize your thank-you note; refer to specific topics or takeaways from the conversation that were particularly impactful to you or about which you plan to follow up.

Strategize if + how to keep in touch

How you remain in touch with a certain contact will depend on the nature of your relationship. There could be many outcomes from an initial conversation, including:

- After gaining insight into someone's workplace or career, you may no longer be interested in exploring that profession. In this case, it is fine to not pursue any further connection with a contact after sending a thank-you email.
- If you get along well, you both may be interested in staying in touch and possibly developing a mentor or professional relationship. In this case, you may end up communicating regularly.
- If you ever have a negative experience, don't give up on your networking efforts. Conversations that don't go well could be due to differences in personality or someone having a bad day. It's always best to send a thank-you email and move forward to other things.

You can use the network tracking system to stay in touch in ways that don't feel forced or fake. Record takeaways or follow-up items from your conversations. Then, use them as segues for keeping in touch and updating your contacts over time.



Subject line: Thank you!

Dear Inge,

Thank you very much for taking time to connect with me and share your wisdom and experience as a Data Strategist. I especially enjoyed hearing about your adventures abroad, as well as the many interesting places you have lived throughout your career.

Thank you also for referring me to your colleague Hector. I look forward to hopefully connecting with him soon. Many thanks again!

Sincerely,
Theo Tiger

Examples could include:

- If a contact suggests that you contact one of their colleagues, check back in with them once you've done so. You can discuss what you learned from their colleague, ask other questions that arose and thank them for their help.
- Ask if your contact would be open to sharing their thoughts about your [resume and experience](#).
- Add people on LinkedIn following your informational interviews with them.
- If your contacts mention a milestone in their lives, reach out to congratulate them.
- If something you discussed with a contact comes up in a class, the news, a publication or a project you're working on, tell them about it.
- Use transitions in the year (e.g. holidays, the start of a new school year) as excuses to reach out to contacts whom you haven't heard from in a while, wish them well and update them about yourself.

One day in the future, you may find yourself on the receiving end of a request for an informational interview or networking conversation from a student or a new professional. From your experiences here and now, you will know just how to pay it forward.

