Networking is a career-related process that focuses on proactive interaction with others. Its purpose is to gather information, advice and referrals that will ultimately lead to interviews and employment offers. Since most job vacancies are not advertised and most people find their jobs through personal contacts and referrals, networking is a process that is key to career success.

Networking Facts

♦ Networking research indicates that if you network well, you are only three to six contacts away from meeting almost anyone you want to meet in the world.

♦ Most job vacancies are “hidden,” or not advertised by means of newspapers, the Internet, job bulletins, etc. This is true for approximately 70 percent to 80 percent of entry-level positions and 90 percent of non entry-level vacancies.

♦ Studies note that employers and employees prefer informal and personal methods of job searches. Both groups believe personal contacts produce more in-depth, accurate and current information.

♦ Individuals who use personal contacts to find jobs are reported to be more satisfied with their jobs and tend to have higher incomes.

Networking in a Nutshell

The procedures to follow in networking are based mostly on common sense and courtesy. A good measure of persistence and hard work is also essential to success. You might start by composing two lists, a question list and a resource list. One list should include all questions you would like to have answered and the other should include all people who may know some of these answers. Let’s consider these lists further:

♦ Question List

Before making the list of questions, decide whether you are seeking career information or job search information. Remember that networking is only about asking for information, not asking for a job. The question, “Could you tell me what you like best about your work in environmental consulting?” relates to seeking career information. The question, “Can you think of any employers similar to your organization who may be hiring at this time?” relates to job searching information. It is important to define the types of information and referrals you really need before starting to network. You can’t expect others to understand your informational needs until your understanding is strong enough to send a clear message. If you need assistance in developing your question list, see a CASNR Career Services staff member, advisor, professor or other resources person.

♦ Resource List

Developing the list of initial contacts may be difficult if you are hesitant to ask others for assistance, therefore, begin by listing those with whom you already have a strong relationship. It’s great if you have friends or relatives who are employed in a field that interests you, but realize that a list of such persons may be very short. Keep in mind that people whose work is different from your own interests may still be able to refer you to others who would have relevant
information. For example, the family physician or neighbor may be able to provide several great referrals. Add your other acquaintances to your list. Try to create a list of at least 50 people to contact.

**Networking Timeline**
The following general timeline should help you understand the process you should utilize to maximize the benefit of networking.

♦ **Before a Networking Opportunity**
  - Identify your potential network – family, friends, coworkers, etc. (Resource List)
  - Decide what you need to learn. (Question List)
  - Assess what you have to offer your next employer.
  - Prepare a TERRIFIC résumé.
  - Summarize your résumé qualifications onto a job search business card.
  - Prepare questions for formal networking sessions. Topics may include:
    - Career paths
    - Realities of the working world
    - Job responsibilities
    - State of the industry
    - Money and advancement
    - Education and experience
    - Career preparation
    - And many others
  - For informal situations, prepare a one-minute commercial and have several key conversation points in mind.

♦ **During the Networking Situation**
  - Be explicit about your purpose. Networking is a process for obtaining information, not the process of asking directly for a job.
  - Discuss your qualifications, but focus on the information that is being given to you.
  - Be courteous and concise.
  - Ask clear questions.
  - Distribute your personal business cards to your contacts, but be selective.
  - Ask for business cards from your contacts if you do not already have one.
  - Ask for additional referrals.

♦ **After the Networking Session**
  - Always follow up with a thank you note.
  - Keep in touch with your contacts through periodic phone calls or e-mails.
  - Maintain records about all of your contacts with people in your network. Indicate who, what, why, when, where, and how in an organized computer or paper file.
  - Make notes on the back of business cards that you receive for later reference.