

Networking

It is becoming a vital skill to have a well-developed professional network. This can play a vital part in the preparation of your applications. When considering certain vacancy announcements, put yourself in the shoes of the hiring manager to better understand what they may be looking for in a candidate. Use your networking skills to find out what is critical for the position. If possible, ask, email or contact the hiring manager or a contact within the organization/department or section for which you are applying.

In building your own professional network, you should create a record (mindmap, flow chart etc) of the various contacts you have already established, or wish to establish in the future: Supervisors & Colleagues (past and present); Participants in trainings/workshops attended; Alumni/contacts from your academic background; Professional Associations; Social groups, etc. Keeping a record of their contact details updated is a critical aspect of networking. Remember that any of those contacts will almost certainly have their own network of contacts, and in this way you will be connected to a wider range of experience, expertise, knowledge and information.

Become comfortable with the concept of **Informational Interviewing**, that is seeking to establish contact with a referral for the purpose of seeking specific information (Example: screen jobs, places or offices before deciding whether to apply; getting answers to specific questions about a field or function from someone actually doing that work)

Simple guidelines for this type of exchange are the following:

- Identify yourself
- State who referred you
- State the purpose of your call and how the contact can be of assistance
- Ask for permission and time for the conversation
- Give a two-minute statement on your background to put the interaction in context
- Have ready-prepared specific questions to elicit the information you need
- Ask for names of two or three others who could be helpful
- Leave the door open for future contact
- Keep the person informed of your progress
- Thank the contact for their time and effort.

Building professional networks and using them appropriately is still under-used within the culture of the international organizations generally, and is somewhat culturally sensitive to many people within the organizations. This should be borne in mind when making an informational networking call. If responses are less than successful, that does not mean they should not be made. A respectful call for information may well yield results.

Finally, remember that professional networking is an information seeking and sharing concept, and practised appropriately, also a vital communication skill.