

# Expanding Your Opportunities Through Networking

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## Work-Based Learning Benchmark:

Learn the importance of networking and identifying resources within their networks.

## Note to those providing service:

These activities are developed in a way that allows the learner to gradually build upon their skills. Each student has different foundational skills so some students may need more support or instruction than others. With that being said, you can choose what activity you start with based on your learner's strengths and needs.



### Extended Pathways

Students who are interested or enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) or postsecondary education, regardless of disability (remember to presume competence!), may or may not need some of the information that seems introductory in nature. Take as much or little time as needed based on student knowledge. More specific activities related to CTE and postsecondary education are identified as extended activities and pathways.

## Preparation and Materials Needed:

- Know the student's knowledge or awareness regarding communication and social skills (this helps with knowing how much time you may need to spend on an activity)
- Prepare needed assistive technologies and/or accommodations (ex: communication supports (visual, objects, pictures, voice output devices, etc.), physical supports/space access needs, vision supports, hearing supports, sensory needs/supports).
- Computer to access videos. Print materials in advance if necessary.
- Consider sharing the [My Network Worksheet](#) with students before delivering this lesson so they have time to complete at home or school prior to Activity 2 and 3.



### Print

- [The Language of Networking](#) (PowerPoint)
- [My Network Worksheet](#)
- [Elevator Speech Social Script](#)
- [Graphic Organizer for your Elevator Speech](#)
- [The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences: Writing Your Elevator Pitch](#)
- [Pitch It! Rubric](#)

# Activities to Meet Benchmarks:

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## Activity 1: What is Networking and Why is it Important?

This activity aims to review vocabulary related to networking.



**Watch:** [Insights on Networking \(1:34\)](#) This video from Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities explains what networking is and why it is a helpful tool.



**Discuss:** How do you find a volunteer opportunity? An internship? A job or career? [Note to Instructors: Allow students to share answers like applying online, in-person, job sites like LinkedIn or OhioMeansJobs, personal contacts, and others.]

Success with finding opportunities like volunteering, internships or apprenticeships, even employment can happen because of what you know but also because of someone you know. Networking means meeting and talking to people who can share ideas, advice, or opportunities with you. It is a powerful tool and skill. It's about building relationships that can help you learn and grow in school, work, or life. You can network in many ways, like talking to people you already know or new people at events or using websites like LinkedIn. Learning how to network can help you find support, learn new things, and discover opportunities to reach your goals.



**Review:** [The Language of Networking](#) (PowerPoint) is arranged from foundational to more detailed and includes prompts in the slide notes to facilitate any discussion. Feel free to modify the vocabulary list to meet the student's needs.

- **Networking:** Using existing relationships or meeting new people and building relationships that can help both of you in your interests or careers.
- **Networking Event:** A gathering where people meet and talk to make connections.
- **Connection:** Someone you've met and can reach out to for advice, help, or opportunities.
- **Collaboration:** Working together with others on a common goal.
- **Introduction:** The first time you meet someone and exchange names or a quick greeting.
- **Being Present / Active Listening:** Focusing closely on what someone is saying to show you're interested. This includes asking questions if needing more information or if not understanding.
- **Icebreaker:** A simple question or activity that makes starting a conversation easier. [Feel free to practice an icebreaker with students, there are some ideas in slide notes.]
- **Cold Call / Cold Email:** Calling someone or sending an email to someone you haven't met.

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- **Elevator Pitch:** A short summary about who you are and what you do, shared in about 30 to 60 seconds.
  - **Informational Interview:** A meeting where you ask someone questions to learn about their job or field.
  - **Worksite Tour:** Visit a workplace where you can see what happens there, learn about different jobs, and meet people who work in those roles. It's a chance to explore a career, ask questions, and see what a typical workday looks like.
  - **Job Shadow:** Spending time with someone at their job to see what they do during a typical workday.
  - **Follow-Up:** Reaching out to someone after you first meet to stay in touch. Depending on how you communicate with someone, this can be done through an email, card, or text.
  - **Mentorship:** A helpful relationship where an experienced person guides someone newer to the field.
  - **Professional Profile:** An online summary of your skills and work experience, often on professional networking websites like Handshake or LinkedIn.
  - **Social Media Networking (Social Networking):** Using social media sites like Handshake or LinkedIn to meet and connect with people professionally.
  - **Handshake:** A networking website for college students and alumni focused on career connections and advancement. It has opportunities to connect with employers, career fairs, and job or internship opportunities.
  - **LinkedIn:** A professional networking website for people to expand their professional connections, showcase their skills, and find job or internship opportunities.

## Activity 2: How to Chart Your Connections

This activity aims to demonstrate how to identify people in existing networks who can offer advice, guidance, or connections.

[Note to Instructors: Activity 2 and 3 of this lesson will focus on building a personal network using the [My Network](#) tool. The activity has students identify their career interest and people they know along with their connection to them. Depending on the student, they may have the necessary information to complete the worksheet during this lesson. If not, this worksheet may be given to the student to complete at home or school prior to these activities to better prepare for discussion. This information will be helpful for setting up additional opportunities in [Lesson 2: Ask, Listen, Learn: The Informational Interview](#) and [Lesson 3: Worksite Tours and Job Shadowing](#). Encourage students to reach out to their network to share what they are doing as a part of Work-Based Learning and see if anyone in their network would be interested in doing an informational interview, worksite tour, or job shadow experience with them or other students.]



**Discuss:** Networking isn't just about connecting with strangers; it often starts with people you already know. You can begin by using the relationships you already have, such as family, teachers, professors/instructors, academic advisor, family friends, coaches, classmates, mentor, coworkers, and more. These people can provide guidance, share their experiences, and even connect you with other professionals who can help you grow. These relationships can lead to opportunities like job shadows, informational interviews, and job tours.

To help us get started, we're going to use the [My Network](#) tool to write down names of people in your support network. First, I'll show you an example before working on your network. [Note to Instructors: Using a space where all students can see (e.g. a board in the classroom, flip chart paper, or projection screen), use the [My Network](#) tool to highlight your network connections.]

I am going to show you how you can start to create your own network. This is just an example, and you can find other ways to list your network if this one does not work for you. I'm using the [My Network](#) resource. I will start with my name in the middle circle and a career interest. For this example, I am going to say I am interested in learning more about computers and technology. [Note to Instructor: Feel free to change the interest to something different if needed.]

Now, I am going to think about people I know. These could be people from school, work, church, or even family and friends. I want to think of someone who works with computers, technology, or people who help with hiring people for these jobs. I know someone and I'm going to write their name into the space for Person 1. I am going to write where they work, what they do, and how I can get in touch with them. This can be an email address, phone number to call or text, or another way to chat them.

*[Note to Instructors: Complete the information for Person 1 to model how to fill in the [My Network tool](#). Depending on students' understanding of the activity and time, you may continue to add names. It may also help to see if students know someone at the school that works with computers or technology (or whatever example field you chose). This will help them draw the connection to the networking activity.]*

Since I have a contact that works in computers and technology or has a connection to computers and technology, here are a few things I could do next:

- If I don't know much about computers and technology: I could reach out to them to see if they would be willing to answer some questions I have about their job and to learn more about what they do. They may also be open to letting me shadow them for part of their day to learn about their work and responsibilities.
- If I know a lot about computers and technology: I have some experience and believe I am interested in network security, which is keeping computers and devices safe from hackers or viruses. I could reach out to my contact to see if they do this type of work or know anyone who does.



**Resources:** [My Network Tool](#)

### Activity 3: Building My Network

This activity aims to have students identify people in existing networks who can offer advice, guidance, or connections.



**Discuss:** As we discussed before, networking isn't just about connecting with strangers; it often starts with people you already know. Let's start to think of your interests and create your network. Think of people you know, these can be people such as family, teachers, professors/instructors, academic advisor, family friends, coaches, classmates, mentor, coworkers, and more. Think of a job or career that you think is interesting and want to learn more about. This information can help you start building your own network. These relationships can lead to opportunities like job shadows, informational interviews, and job tours.

[My Network](#) is a tool to begin to build and look at your own network. Look through the tool and pick which option is best for you.

- Starting in the center, write in your name and a career you are interested in.
- Now think of someone who knows about the job or career you are interested in. Write their name in the Person 1 space.
- Fill in information about where they work, what they do, and how you can get in touch with them. This can be an email address, phone number to call or text, or another way to chat them
- Do any of these people know information about your career interest?
  - If yes, that's great! They are someone you may decide you want to connect with to learn more information from.
  - If not, do they know someone like a friend, co-worker or department at their organization related to your career interest? Many employers have a variety of departments and job positions that your network may be able to connect you with. Continue to add contacts until you are able to find someone who knows about your interest.

*[Note to Instructors: You are able to help students build a connection if they are struggling to find a connection with their interest. You can consider school staff or others the student may know or leverage your own professional network.]*



**Resource:** [My Network Tool](#)



**Review:** the [My Network](#) worksheet to help students map out their network. How students complete their network may vary based on available technology, time, and skills. Students can use notebook paper or a different worksheet, if needed. Below are some options to help students complete this activity:

- 1. Instructor Assisted:** Instructors can help students complete the worksheet based on information the student shares or known information about the student or school environment.
- 2. Guided Activity:** Instructors can guide students through the worksheet starting from their interests through to finding someone they know that would know about their interests.
- 3. Independent Activity:** Students can independently document their interest and complete the worksheet to identify someone they know who they can discuss their interest with.



### **Interactive Opportunity:**

Have students pair up to discuss the network connections they made. Do students have a connection for the peer they are working with based on their interests? If a student was not able to find a connection in their own network, does a peer have a connection? Students can use these prompts to help them do this activity:

- Practice introducing yourself.
- What is your career interest?
- What are your future goals?
- Share if you have a connection for the other student that relates to their goal.

Give students the opportunity to share what they learned from one another. Can they see how this would help in other places or other events? Instructors, if you have network connections that may help the student, feel free to share these with students to further make the example of how to network with others.



### **Extending the Conversation**

If you already have multiple careers in mind, consider completing multiple [My Network](#) worksheets. You can use one for each career interest you may have. You can start to note how you plan to reach out to some of your contacts and in what capacity you would like to connect with them, are you interested in an informational interview, a worksite tour, or a job shadowing experience. If you do not have a contact for a certain area, you can detail how you will network to find a contact or do an internet search for local business.

## Activity 4: Elevator Speech: A Pitch Party

This activity aims to explain the importance of introductions and building an elevator pitch.



**Discuss:** When meeting someone, it's important to know how to introduce yourself. A good introduction helps people remember you. While it might come naturally or easy to some, many need to practice. Introductions can happen in person, virtually, or through email, so practicing what you want people to know about you is key.

You can create a strong introduction with a well-crafted elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a short, 30 to 60-second speech that tells people who you are and what you do. Your elevator pitch should include your name, a bit about your background, and what you hope to achieve. Let's practice your introduction! Today we are going to use the resources to help us create an elevator pitch that we can practice using to help us when we need to pitch ourselves at a job fair or other event. It's ok if this doesn't feel natural. Practicing can help you feel more comfortable and confident.



**Watch:** [Networking: Elevator Pitch \(2:47\)](#) This short video explains how to create an elevator pitch for use during networking situations, such as a career fair or conference.



**Resources:** Here are some resources to help build an elevator speech. Students may use whichever resource would work best for them.



- [Elevator Speech Social Script](#) – students can write in their answer to guided prompts. Students may need help picking and choosing which prompts to answer. Feel free to complete one as an example or do together with students.
- [Graphic Organizer for your Elevator Speech](#) – provides students with a visual way to organize thoughts and write their ideas.
- [The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences: Writing Your Elevator Pitch](#) – college resource explaining an elevator pitch and examples that students can use.





**Interactive Opportunity:** Creating an elevator pitch is only half of the solution, the other half is actually using it! The best way to do this is by practicing with your mentors, classmates, friends, family, or really anyone that will listen.

Today, we are going to throw a pitch party. Each of you will get up and give our elevator speech to the small group to help practice using it and your peers will let us know if we covered the key components of the elevator pitch by using the [Pitch It! Rubric](#).

We will want to focus on whether our classmates had a clear introduction, including their name and school; if they used a professional tone of voice that was clear and energetic; if their pitch was 30-60 seconds in length; how they carried their body, was it calm and under control? Did they look towards the person they were talking to and was their intention clear and make sense?

*[Note for Instructors: You can decide the best way to complete this activity. Depending on your group of students this can be done individually with the instructor, in small groups, or in a large group. Depending on how the activity is structured, the instructor and/or peers will be completing the [Pitch It! Rubric](#).]*



**Resources:** [Pitch It! Rubric](#) this tool can help you understand what to expect from an elevator pitch and how to provide feedback.



## Extended Pathways

### Keep Building Your Network!

This activity aims to have students identify their next step in building their network.



**Watch:** [Networking Tips for College Students with Disabilities \(3:35\)](#)

Consider these tips from an Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) Career Development Specialist. How might you take that next step to building your network?

#### Opportunities Include:

- Check with your school's career connections office or staff to see if they have a mentoring or alumni network. How do you connect with this network to learn more?
- Create an account on Handshake ([Joinhandshake.com](https://joinhandshake.com)) to explore connections through your college, career fairs, and more.
- Create an account on LinkedIn ([LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com)) to build your professional profile and connect with people online to build out your network even further.



## Wrap-Up

Networking is an important skill that helps you build connections and open doors to future opportunities. Remember, it's not just about meeting people but creating meaningful relationships. The more you practice introducing yourself, asking questions, and following up, the more confident you'll become. Start small, like connecting with classmates or teachers, and work toward reaching out to professionals in careers that interest you. Building your network now can help you find support, advice, and opportunities in the future.