

Philanthropy Front and Center - New York

March 4, 2011

The Art of Networking for Nonprofits



Spring is on its way, and with the approach of that joyously awaited thaw comes the anticipation of networking opportunities for nonprofit professionals. If you're having trouble summoning the proper level of zeal for networking, perhaps we can help. On February 24, the Foundation Center celebrated the launch of [Grantspace](#) by holding a party, and seasoned networking expert Sarah Holland of the [Visibility Project](#) stopped by to teach the finer points of networking.

On March 30, we'll be holding another networking event called [Putting the "FUN" in Fundraising](#), and we hope that some of these tips might help you to get prepared! Remember to send in your responses to this question, to make the event that much better: **What is the most important lesson you have learned about fundraising?** Post your comments [here](#).

Why Do You Need to Network? Networking serves many purposes. If you're looking for a job, networking with people in your field can help you find job opportunities (especially for jobs that aren't being posted publicly!). If you're looking for volunteers, new staff, board members, or other kinds of partners for your organization, networking can help you with that as well. If you work in fundraising, networking is absolutely essential in meeting new donors and meeting people who can help you find new donors.

The more people you can meet and connections you can make, the more your "network" will grow and the more professional contacts you'll have for anything you might need over the course of your career.



How Do You Network? Networking can happen anytime, with nearly anyone. Our speaker Sarah Holland used the example of sitting on a bus to demonstrate that networking opportunities arise every day during the most mundane activities. What tends to relieve a lot of pressure and stiltedness is to remember that at its core, networking is just a conversation. You can commence a networking encounter the same way you would start any typical conversation with a new person. Ask people questions about themselves, whether professional in nature – "What sort of work do you do?" – or personal – "What city are you from?" "That looks like an interesting book; what's it about?" – and think about potential follow-up questions to keep things going and continue learning about the person.

Try not to see networking only as a way of getting something out of someone for your personal gain. This should be a two-way street, in which both of you are learning things about one another and building a meaningful connection. Obviously, not every encounter is going to end in a job or a new donor, but you never know where these conversations may lead, and at the very least you might make a friend or get some good practice for future networking opportunities. If, meanwhile, your conversation looks like it could yield a promising partnership, make note of it – "It looks like you and I have a lot of ideas in common!" – and make sure that you trade contact information before you're finished talking. One of the key points emphasized at our Grantspace networking event was this: never leave home without your business card!

What's Next? In order to maintain your network, it's very important to follow up. A day or two after first meeting, maybe send this person an email saying how nice it was to meet them. Thank them for any referrals they might have given you, or send them some information about your organization if they expressed interest, or try to schedule an appointment to meet up and talk further. Keep close track of any correspondence that you have with new contacts, so that you'll remember the information that you discussed and how long it has been since you last spoke. Again, it is important not to allow this relationship to be one-sided; in addition to considering how a new person could be helpful to you or your organization, also always consider how you might be of use to the new person or his/her organization.

What Else Do I Need to Know? For tips on networking, a quick Internet search will yield tons of information. Also,

career guides tend to include a lot of useful advice on the subject. If you stop by the **Career Corner** in the Foundation Center's New York library, you'll find a variety of books that you can browse on the subject.

Finally, if you want a chance to practice your networking skills, and you work in fundraising, then be sure to attend our networking event on March 30, Putting the "FUN" in Fundraising. You'll meet plenty of great people in the field!

-- Tracy Kaufman, Library Assistant

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