NETWORKING TOOLKIT

1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome!
Welcome to the networking event toolkit, we'll walk you through every step of running an incredible event! From planning, to ensuring your guests generate meaningful connections and nurture their new relationships; we've got it all. Relax and trust in the toolkit.

Questions, comments, or concerns? We're just an email away at letstalk@nemontario.ca

What's in the toolkit?
Leading a networking event should be fun, to help things run smoothly, we developed resources and tools to help you along the way, including:

1. Introduction
- Start with why

2. Event prep
- Creating your dream event
- Guest prep list
- Do's & don'ts of networking

3. Event day
- Event day must-knows
- Video & Photo Release
- Slide template
- Ice breaker activities

4. After your event
- How to follow-up
- Thank-you Notes

What's a networking event?
Networking events promote meaningful connections among students and/or professionals to encourage the development of valuable relationships.

Start with why
The key to organizing a great networking event is to start with an objective, or your "why." Check out leadership expert Simon Sinek's TED Talk: How great leaders inspire action to learn more about his "Find your Why" model.

Before any planning begins, think through why you're organizing a networking event. What do you want to accomplish? What do you want guests to get out of the experience?

Get clear on your 'Why' first, and use that clarity of purpose to help you make decisions throughout the planning process. *How To Plan Your Event With Purpose & Passion*

2. EVENT PREP

Creating your dream event
What does success look like for you? Link your definition of success to your original "why" statement for leading the event in the first place, and set reachable goals. While it's valuable to plan for reaching these goals and achieving success, it's also a good idea to stay flexible and leave room for things you hadn't anticipated.

There are different ways to measure success, for example the number of participants and event publicity are straightforward and simple to capture. If you want to understand the deeper impact of your event on participants, key stakeholders and your team, you could consider having quick interviews with people or ask for their reflections.

Check out Eventbrite's ABC's of organizing a networking event.

The basics
1. Defining your purpose
Did ya start with figuring out your why? The best networking events have a clearly defined purpose and bring together people with connected interests. Do you want to connect students and professionals in a specific industry? Or bring together engineers and technologists interested in being part of a network that promotes community and connectedness?

national ENGINEERING MONTH

2. EVENT PREP

Maybe you really want to stir the pot and invite an interdisciplinary audience to discuss prompts while meeting new people like, "how do I consider macro ethics in my work?"

2. Defining your audience
Who is the event perfect for? What do they get out of it? This step is much easier once you've defined the purpose. This is how you'll brand your event and draw interest from a target audience. For example, if your networking event is for media professionals, you might say it's, "a chance for journalists, editors, and publicists to expand their industry contacts, collaborate on stories and discover professional opportunities."

3. Deciding on a format
Your event format should align with the purpose and audience you've identified. They create the guidelines from this point forward -- for example, if you have an audience of 100 construction workers an intimate event in a coffee shop wouldn't be ideal.
- Intimate (coffee shop, restaurant sit-down)
- Free form (office, bar, sporting event)
- Formal (conference centre, community centre, university lecture)

4. Formalizing the budget
Don't put the cart before the horse... your planning needs to fit within your budget. Don't plan your event at the Shangri-La

hotel if your budget is a couple hundred dollars. Having an estimated budget before you start planning will help ensure your event is feasible, it can also help you get ahead of sneaky fees like tablecloth rentals - trust us it's a thing and it's costly.

In-kind donations can go a long way! Check-out our **sponsorship guide** for securing in-kind donations for your event.

Don't be afraid to charge a reasonable cost for attendance; Eventbrite says putting a value on your event leads others to regard it more highly. Selling tickets, even if they're free, gives you a handle on numbers and reduces no-shows.

5. Book your date & venue
These might not seem like the most exciting steps but they're launching your event from idea to reality. You're almost there!

Picking a time and place that suits everyone is impossible but thinking about your target audience and what might work best for them can help increase attendance.

If you're inviting professionals who are extremely busy, a breakfast event could help avoid meeting conflicts later in the day. Students might appreciate sleeping in and grabbing a drink in the evening. Don't forget childcare commitments, be mindful of PD days and consider being a child-friendly event.

Eventbrite says midweek events work best – before people start thinking about the weekend. Be mindful of your start and end times by considering where people could be commuting from and to.

Preparing Guests
Successful networkers take risks because each risk is an opportunity to make a meaningful connection. A successful networking event prepares and supports guests to take risks while also recognizing that not everyone in the room is a daredevil. Feel free to share our do's & don'ts of networking so everyone is on the same page.

It can feel like a daunting responsibility to make sure everyone has a good time. Don't worry, we've put together a pretty cool and thorough checklist to help ease the most worrisome guest. Send it to your guests and bring a pair of earplugs because the conversations will be non-stop!

Tips
- *Look at other events online, is anyone doing something similar? Is someone doing something that inspires you?*
- *Think about events you've been to, what did you like? What could have been better?*
- **Lean on your team for decision making. Think about EDI best practices, ask: "how might we ensure diverse perspectives and experiences are present at our event?"**
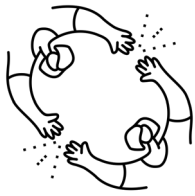
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3. EVENT DAY!

4. AFTER

Event Day Must-Know's!!

If you've been to a networking event, there is a good chance you've experienced that sudden "oh no!" feeling. Whether you're shy, or not sure how to start a conversation you find yourself hovering around the snack table with a bunch of people feeling the exact same way.

The most important part of your networking event is that people actually network. Make it your priority as the organizer to support every guest in feeling comfortable and prepared to make meaningful connections.

Breaking The Ice

Even with your guests fully prepared to make connections, a great networking event will facilitate these connections further, through predesigned activities that generate energy and break down communication barriers.

1. Humanize your guests

Begin your event with an activity that emphasizes the importance of relationships. This reminds your guests that you are seeking human connection and not just another email address to add to an address book. This helps to break down any hierarchy in the room by grounding the event in shared interests.

2. Kick-off your event

Grounding your event in a real world issue, gives every guest an easy way to open conversation. You might show a video, invite a guest speaker, deliver a personal greeting or invite an elder. The issue you present should align with the purpose of your event; EDI, lifelong learning, or ethics.

Struggling to come up with effective event activities? No problem, we've put together a sample activities list!

3. Invite a diverse audience

A diverse audience is key to generating inspiring conversations!

For example; mining engineering networking event comprised solely of mining engineers will limit the perspectives in the room, possibly limiting opportunities for dynamic discussions. But the same event that includes key stakeholders from government, NGOs, and Indigenous communities will lead to more powerful conversations, encouraging meaningful connections and change for the better.

Relationships

Ahh, the hard work is done! Your guests were awesome, they initialized conversations with strangers and planted seeds that have the potential of flourishing into beneficial relationships. Encourage your guests to nurture the connections they made. Support and encourage the follow up quest.

Participant Surveys

It's a best practice to follow up with your guests and ask them to reflect on the experience and give you feedback. This gives them the opportunity to digest why the event was valuable or how it could have been better. This will help you gauge what could be done differently next time and what worked really well.

As part of National Engineering Month Ontario, we have created a standard survey used in 300+ events happening across the province. Sending this survey to your participants will help us collect consistent information across the events and identify patterns and insights.

Following up with guests is also a great opportunity for you to build relationships and to share how to follow-up with your networking connections, helping them build on the connections they made at the event. A win-win!

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