



Six Steps for Hosting a Successful

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NETWORKING EVENT

Why is networking important for young professionals?

Networking is crucial for young professionals in any field, especially in out-of-school time (OST), where career pathways can be unclear. Many young people joining the OST profession do not realize the strong, fulfilling, and viable career paths available to them, often due to a lack of access to a network of professional connections.

As career advancement and leadership pathways often depend on access to social networks, the [National AfterSchool Association's 2020 "Landscape of AfterSchool Leadership" Report](#) notes the significant value of emerging leaders having strong networks with established community leaders, funders, consultants, and veteran nonprofit executives.

Strong social networks connect emerging leaders to current leaders, which can give young professionals a clearer idea of potential opportunities and connections to those who can offer guidance and support.

One effective way to help young professionals build social capital is by hosting network events tailored to the unique needs of young professionals. If you are part of an organization or committee tasked with organizing such an event, this guide will walk you through the six essential steps to host a successful young professionals networking event.

Step 1: Outline Your Budget

Before diving into event planning, it's essential to establish a clear budget. Determine how much you can allocate for venue rental, catering, marketing materials, and other expenses. Consider potential sources of funding, such as sponsorships or ticket sales. A well-planned budget will ensure you can cover all necessary costs and make informed decisions throughout the planning process.

2: Decide on a Format

Choose a format that aligns with your goals for the event, ranging from a casual introductory event or one focused on elevating current issues or concerns for the profession. Selecting the right format for your networking event is crucial to its success. Different formats cater to varying objectives and preferences. Here are a few options to consider:

Mixer: A casual event where attendees mingle freely, allowing for organic conversations.

Panel Discussion: A structured event with a panel of experts discussing relevant topics on OST and leadership, followed by Q&A sessions.

Speed Networking: Participants engage in short, timed conversations with various attendees, providing opportunities to meet a broad range of professionals in the OST field.

Workshop or Seminar: A more educational approach where attendees learn from experts in the OST field.

Step 3: Determine When and Where

Selecting the right date and venue is crucial for attracting attendees. Consider the following when making these decisions:

Date: Avoid scheduling your event during major holidays or other significant local events that could compete for attendees' attention. Mid-week evenings or weekends are often preferable.

Venue: Look for a location that comfortably accommodates your expected number of attendees. Ensure it is easily accessible and provides the necessary facilities (e.g., audiovisual equipment, seating, parking).

Step 4: Create an Agenda

A well-structured agenda keeps your event on track and provides attendees with a clear understanding of what to expect. A full sample agenda can be found at the end of this document. Here are some suggested items for an OST Young Professionals Networking Event:

- **Welcome and Registration:** Greet attendees, distribute name badges, and provide an overview of the event.
- **Keynote Speaker/Panel Discussion:** Feature an influential speaker or panel to kickstart the event with valuable insights.
- **Networking Session:** Depending on your format, allocate time for networking activities. For example, if you're hosting a mixer, designate a specific time for open networking.
- **Workshops or Breakout Sessions:** If applicable, offer educational sessions or workshops to enhance attendees' skills and knowledge.
- **Closing Remarks and Thank You:** Express gratitude to attendees, sponsors, and speakers. Share information about upcoming events or opportunities.

Step 5: Promote, Promote, Promote

To ensure a successful turnout, effective promotion is essential. Utilize a multi-channel marketing strategy, including social media, email marketing, and your organization's website. Consider reaching out to local universities, afterschool programs in your community and network, and OST Leaders to help spread the word. Create promotional materials, such as posters, flyers, and event pages on platforms like Eventbrite or Meetup. Engage with your target audience by highlighting the event's benefits.

Step 6: Follow Up

Your event doesn't end when attendees walk out the door. To maximize its impact, follow up with participants. Send a thank-you email to attendees, sponsors, and speakers, expressing appreciation for their support. Share event highlights, photos, and any additional resources or content discussed during the event. Encourage attendees to connect with each other on LinkedIn or other professional networks and provide

opportunities for ongoing engagement, such as webinars, trainings, or future networking events.

Hosting an OST Young Professionals Networking Event benefits both your organization and attendees. By carefully planning and executing these six essential steps, you can create a valuable networking experience that creates meaningful connections and helps young professionals advance in their careers. Remember that successful networking events require careful preparation, and attention to detail will ensure your event stands out in the minds of your attendees.

Examples of Successful Meetups:

Here are a few examples:

NAA Convention YP Meet-Up

At the NAA annual convention, we offer an evening Young Professionals meet-up to encourage our participants under 40 to connect with other young professionals. During this meet-up, they learn about the NAA Next Generation of AfterSchool Leaders Award, NAA YP resources, and participate in engaging networking activities.

OSTI-CON Young Professionals Panel

NAA's Next Generation of AfterSchool Leaders were invited to be panelists for Empowering the Next Generation: Developing and Supporting Young Professionals in OST, hosted by OSTI-CON in Texas. Topics included NAA's Thriving Workforce Initiative and its efforts to cultivate young professionals in out-of-school time. Additionally, participants heard from a panel of Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders about their experiences working in the field and the importance of developing young professionals.

Afterschool State Conferences

NAA State Affiliates are convening young professionals as part of their annual state conferences. These are taking place as lunches with a speaker or dedicated sessions in the conference schedule.

Sample Agenda & Materials:

NAA23 YOUNG PROFESSIONALS MEET-UP (45 mins)

10 mins	<p>Welcome (5 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As you're coming in, find a seat and please fill out sign-in sheet that is going to be passed around (people can also leave their business cards at the table and I will collect them) - Goal of meet-up → to build community, meet new people, make connections, get inspired <p>Who is in the room? Ask people to raise their hand if...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First time at this conference - Familiar with NAA - Presenter <p>Info about NAA Next Gens (please look for more info on the app)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAA's Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders identifies young leaders and recognizes and cultivates the talent of afterschool champions who have the potential to influence the field of afterschool for years to come. The selected emerging leader honorees will have demonstrated contributions that have started to influence beyond individual programs to organizations and communities, a proven passion for developing themselves and others, active engagement in efforts to elevate the afterschool field, and demonstrated persistence in their work to grow as leaders. <p>Format of meet-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intros, and a couple of icebreakers + activities to encourage conversation & find connections - Action items: Connect with 1 person on their preferred platform (LinkedIn vs Email vs Twitter) → don't let those business cards die in the back of a drawer, connect with people tonight & throughout the conference <p>Introductions at the table (5 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share name, org, location - Icebreaker: What is a food that reminds you of your childhood and why?
30 mins	<p>Activity 1: Mindsets (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give yourself a mindset sticker & explain why you gave yourself that mindset sticker - add it to your badge, waterbottle, cellphone, notebook, wherever <p>Activity 2: Fun Icebreakers (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you were a potato, how would you be prepared? - If you were a vending machine, what would you dispense? - Describe something that's made you smile today. <p>Activity 3: Conference Wants & Takeaways (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As young professionals, what can MAA do to support you? What would you like to know? - What is one takeaway or something you learned today?
5 mins	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanks for showing up - Why YP matter - Action items: Connect with 1 person you met on their preferred platform (LinkedIn vs Email vs Twitter) → don't let those business cards die in the back of a drawer, connect with people tonight & throughout the conference