



CHAPTER BEST PRACTICES

Professional Networking Events

Our Awards Requirements Checklist indicates that chapters must hold at least one professional networking event each year to qualify for “Outstanding Chapter” status. These events provide the platform for Hokies to help fellow Hokies in an organized and professional setting.

There are three ways for chapters to participate in this program and we strongly encourage your chapter to get involved:

1) General Networking

Events are geared toward all alumni who are interested in professionally networking with members of the Hokie Nation. All professions are included and the goal is to make connections with alumni who have expertise in a wide range of areas.

2) Professional Networking

These events target specific professions and bring in those with expertise in the same or similar field (i.e. real estate, finance, hospitality, energy, etc.). The goal is to connect Hokies who work in the same profession to help one another. Whether an alumnus is looking to grow his career, identify new talent, or discuss professional trends, these events provide opportunities to learn more about each other and the field. In some cases, the Alumni Association can assist with these types of professional networking events.

3) The Hokie Nation Network

To supplement networking events, the HNN offers a suite of [electronic resources](#), including a LinkedIn group, Alumni Directory, job board, as well as a series of webinars to help develop your individual professional networking plan.

Tips for Successful Professional Networking Events:

We know that one size does not fit all when it comes to planning chapter networking events. We would like to see chapters be creative and identify the type of program that would be most effective for your local alumni. Some recommendations:

- Work with your chapter liaison to develop ideas, identify speakers, and promote event
- Identify a local “celebrity” to make remarks
- Have volunteers facilitate table discussions
- Host a before-work or after-work event
- Provide a professional panel for Q&A session
- Consider a speed networking format
- Provide an informal atmosphere to facilitate conversation and business card exchange
- Ask all participants to enter their business card for a raffle (use cards to develop list-serv and send cards to our office for data entry)
- Leverage the [Hokie Nation Network](#) to provide resources to your local alumni
- Post discussions on LinkedIn to both advertise the networking events and to discuss what worked well with other chapter volunteers
- Find a sponsor for your event who is interested in engaging Virginia Tech professional alumni
- Encourage alumni to provide success stories about their Hokie networking experiences
- Host a Young Alumni focused event to provide professional mentoring opportunities
- Have fun and encourage everyone to network!



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Suggested questions to encourage networking:

- Can you tell me more about your company?
- What do you do there?
- What do you like about your company?
- How did you get your position
- What type of education or training are needed for this type of job?
- How do you apply for a position at your company? Is there someone in particular I should talk to?
- Would you be willing to look at my resume and give me some feedback?

Networking tips:

- Use a short and appropriate email address
- Order resume cards with brief resume stats
- Write and master a 30 second "elevator speech" (record and listen to yourself)
- Build a LinkedIn profile and update it often (be sure to include recommendations)
- Become active on LinkedIn groups
- Sign up on Twitter – follow people who follow you
- Create an appropriate Facebook page
- Ask for referrals when sharing business and resume cards
- Join organizations and networks, chambers of commerce, and business networks
- Participate in online discussion forums
- Join professional organizations and attend industry conferences and job fairs
- Volunteer your time and talents to worthy causes (like your local alumni chapter!)
- Identify mentors and/or coaches
- Schedule and conduct informational interviews with peers and role models
- Utilize Alumni Associations and career offices

Networking Do's:

- Be genuine and authentic, building trust and relationships
- Develop your goals for each networking meeting ahead of time
- Visit groups that spark your interest
- Hold volunteer positions in organizations
- Ask open-ended questions
- Become known as a resource to others
- Articulate what you are looking for and what you do
- Follow through quickly on referrals
- Understand the needs of the people you are networking with and offer some value to them
- Try to contact one person per day
- Go beyond your industry!

Networking Don'ts:

- Don't fear the "big shots"
- Don't corner a "heavy hitter" with your personal life story at a social event
- Don't hand out business cards to *everyone*
- Don't only talk to people you know
- Don't waste time talking to "Me-ers"
- Don't drink too much at evening events!
- Don't expect anything from anyone
- Don't dismiss anyone as irrelevant
- Don't take "No" personally

