



ENGAGING WITH PROFESSIONAL GROUPS



Professional associations and industry groups are often excellent venues for learning about career pathways, expanding your network, enhancing your credentials and staying on top of industry trends.

What are professional organizations?

Professional associations, organizations and other groups generally are formed along industry lines to facilitate networking, share information and advance industry interests.

How to find the right one:

There are professional groups for almost every industry, ranging from the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention to the American Association of Candy Technologists. Even a basic online search that includes industry keywords and “professional association” will help you begin to map the landscape of relevant groups.

In general, you’ll want to curate a list of active professional organizations that you either join (many have discounted rates for student memberships) or visit regularly online. Once this list is part of your toolkit, you can use these associations to network, evaluate graduate programs or certifications, and prepare for job interviews.

Why engage with them?

Whether you’re an exploring student, recent graduate or are well along your career path, getting involved can offer significant benefits:

- **Networking** - Meetings and events, from local speaker presentations to national conferences, can represent an excellent opportunity to meet and connect with leaders, senior practitioners and peers.
- **Career Resources and Job Boards** - Many professional associations offer career resources for students, emerging professionals, and executive members. These often include industry-specific job boards.
- **Education** - Professional organizations often are a rich source of information on industry issues, trends, research and more.
- **Professional Visibility** - Becoming actively involved in an industry group or association is a great way to enhance your professional visibility, build credentials and form new professional relationships.

Which organization to join?

If you don't know already (some fields have highly visible professional associations), speaking to your peers and other contacts (and if you're a student, your professors) is a good first step to determine which organization or organizations to consider.

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Once you have identified the organization or organizations that make the most sense, visit their websites and evaluate them.

- ✓ Review the members list, if it's available—do member individuals and companies seem in line with your career goals?
- ✓ Look at their programs and events—do the formats lend themselves to networking? Do the event themes and subject matter seem interesting and relevant?
- ✓ Does the organization have a strong presence in your area? Does it have mechanisms for members to connect or interact with other members?
- ✓ Do they have a robust job board? Is it regional or national? Is it for emerging or mid-career professionals?
- ✓ What are the membership fees and event costs? Based on benefit, do they seem reasonable? Are there discounts for student or early-career membership? If you're employed, does your employer cover membership fees and costs to attend events?

CURATE A LIST

In general, you'll want to curate a list of relevant and active professional organizations that you either join or visit regularly online. Once this list is part of your toolkit, you can use these associations to network, evaluate graduate programs or certifications, and prepare for job interviews.