
Why Join a Professional Association?

by Stephanie Legatos

Professional associations exist for just about every industry and profession. For some professions, there are several related professional associations. Many are international or national in scope, with regional or statewide chapters – some with student-chapters.

Professional associations offer a variety of benefits when you are job searching or exploring careers:

Networking

Opportunities abound to meet people who are working in the field in which you are interested. By attending meetings and serving in a volunteer capacity or leadership position, you will create visibility for yourself and have the opportunity to build relationships with other members. Just by attending regularly, you'll will meet people and expand your networking skills and contacts. There is always time before and after the formal part of the meeting to talk informally. Use this time to find out about current needs in the field, where your skills might fit best and to schedule networking or informational meetings. Don't forget to consider and ask how you can help whoever you're talking with. Networking is based on mutuality.

You can maximize the value of your membership by volunteering to help out on a committee or with registration. A friend of mine was seeking a new job in a highly-competitive field after holding his first job post-graduation for a year. He joined the local chapter of the key professional association for his industry – and at a time when they were seeking new leadership. He volunteered to be the events coordinator. As the person who introduced both himself and the guest speaker at every meeting, he became quite well known and visible within the association and the industry (geographically) as a whole. By capitalizing on the networking opportunities available to expand his contacts, he found out about a highly coveted position, was one of two finalists out of hundreds of applicants – and got the job! He was told by the hiring manager that his exposure made the critical difference.

Continuing Education

Associations provide a variety of ways to help you keep up-to-date with trends in the field. These include training workshops and seminars, telesessions, webinars, conferences, newsletters, books and other publications. Some offer discounts to members.

Information

Additional information including changes in business strategies, the marketplace, new products, new/emerging needs and services, and key leaders is also available through membership in a professional association. The more you know about what's happening in the industry and profession in which you want to be

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employed, the more knowledgeable and credible you will appear when networking, writing cover letters, and interviewing. You can gain this information in a variety of ways:

- Newsletters
- Industry publications (magazines and journals)
- Articles posted on web site
- Research reports

Scholarships

Some associations offer scholarships or awards to student members. This is an often over-looked source of funding for tuition or continuing education support.

Remember...

People most often want to hire people they know and people who are recommended by people they know. Professional associations offer consistent and ongoing opportunities for you to become known in your field. Joining is also a way to demonstrate your commitment to the field. The more people you know, and the more you know, the more effective your job search or career transition will be.

Internet Resource:

lpl.org/ref/AON
rileyguide.com

Library Resource:

The Encyclopedia of Associations

