



# YALI Network

Guide to Hosting a  
Networking Event

Networking is an important part of building your personal brand, your business or organization, and finding common purpose with your community. Hosting a networking event is a great way to make connections with other like-minded professionals. This guide will help you understand what every networking event needs, and what considerations you should make for an in-person event compared to an online event. Use the following checklists throughout your event process to help your networking event be as effective as possible.

## The four stages of every networking event:

### Stage 1: Planning

- **Decide on the purpose of your event**  
What is the main goal you are trying to achieve?
- **Consider your budget**  
How much can you afford to spend hosting the event? If the cost is too high, consider partnering with other professionals to co-host the event. Having no budget is also okay, networking events can be very small and still be successful.
- **Pick a venue (in-person or online)**  
If you choose an in-person event, free or low cost event locations, like your place of business or community center may be a good choice.
- **Select a date and time for your event**
- **Give yourself at least 8 weeks to plan and invite guests**  
Aim for a diverse group of people from various communities and professions. Try and use it as an opportunity to introduce people who may not know each other but have much to offer.

### Stage 3: Event

- **Break the ice**  
Meeting new people can be challenging and some people may be nervous to talk, try asking simple questions about who they are and what they do.
- **Event Structure**  
Try to limit the number of presentations or speeches you have, as they can distract from the networking. Give attendees a chance to mingle with each other informally as part of the event. Try to keep the event structured with an agenda, but be flexible to allow guests to network.

### Stage 2: Invitations & Preparation

- **Determine which ways you will choose to invite people, and how many people you will invite**  
(Email, social media, by phone/text, in-person)
- **Tell people why they should come**  
Be sure to explain how and why the event will be beneficial for guests when inviting them, try to do this in three sentences or less.
- **Be courteous to invitees**  
Like you, other professionals tend to be busy. Sending people too many invites or reminders could make your event seem less desirable to attend.
- **Come up with a personal pitch**  
When meeting new people, it's especially important to be clear and concise, so practice a short pitch that will tell people who you are, what you're passionate about, and what you do professionally.

### Stage 4: Follow-up

- **Email guests within 24 hours to thank them for attending.**  
Try to personalize your messages as much as possible to each attendee you met.
- **Keep the group in touch**  
Consider creating a LinkedIn or Facebook group to keep attendees in touch after the event.

Once you've chosen if your event will be in-person or online, take a look at the sections on the back to see more tips on how to make your networking event a success.

Now that you've chosen the type of event you want to host, take some time to review the checklist below that corresponds to your event:

## In-Person Events

- **Make sure you have professional business cards**  
When you meet new professionals at the event, trading business cards is a good way to help them remember who you are and how to contact you. Have a sign-in sheet at the entrance and ask attendees if you can share their contact information.
- **Try to include only a few chairs, to make sure guests mingle**  
Limiting the seating options will help make sure most guests are up and moving, and will help to increase the number of people each guest can meet.

## Online Events

- **Plan a theme**  
Planning a theme can help keep conversations flowing online. Consider preparing a few topics of discussion and sharing them with attendees ahead of time.
- **Use the event as a starting point**  
After the event, try to set up future conversations with attendees to help your network continue to grow.



### 2018 Mandela Washington Fellow Jackline Ochola from Kenya on the importance of networking:

"We do a lot of things but we don't know how to talk about them. We believe and wait and hope that somebody is going to come and get to know what we're doing. If being a Fellow has taught me one thing it's that if I am doing a good thing, I need to talk about it and need someone to listen. I need to connect with people."

For more information about networking and professional development, check out the [YALI Professionals](http://yali.state.gov/professionals) site ([yali.state.gov/professionals](http://yali.state.gov/professionals)) to access a collection of online courses, blogs, toolkits, and other resources to aid you as you grow your career, your business, and your community.

- **[Strategies for Personal Growth and Development](#)** Online Course
- **[Articulating Your Best Skills](#)**: An online professional development resource
- **[Professional Networking 101](#)** An online professional development resource