

Making the Most of Your Professional Association Membership

There is probably at least one professional association related to your industry or career field. Joining one or more professional associations is a smart career move. But what do you do after you send in your membership fee? How can you leverage your membership in a professional association to boost your career? Professional associations provide opportunities to learn about trends and opportunities in the field and to connect with other professionals. Here are some steps you can take to make the most of your professional association membership:

- ✓ **Use the right resources to find organizations.** To find a professional organization, browse the list on the [Professional & Trade Associations](#) page on the Career Resources page of the SPHHS website, the [Weddle's Association Directory](#), or the [ASAE Gateway to Associations Directory](#). Many associations have discount membership and conference registration rates for students, and some have discounted rates for new professionals. A place to start may be the APHA (American Public Health Association) or ACHE (American College of Healthcare Executives).
- ✓ **Read association publications.** Your professional membership fee often includes a subscription to a professional journal, newsletter and/or listserv, and access to the association's web resources. Reading these publications will help you to stay aware of current issues and trends in your field.
- ✓ **Attend association events.** Most professional associations host annual conferences where members have an opportunity to present their research, network, and learn from experts in the field. There are often sessions or events for students or new members. Some associations also have regional conferences or monthly chapter meetings; attending these smaller events can be a less intimidating way to begin your involvement in a professional association. Volunteers often are needed to staff registration tables and to perform other tasks. Volunteering gives you a purpose, which can help you to feel more comfortable when you attend such events. Volunteering also puts you into contact with other association members, making it a great way to network. Contact the membership officer or coordinator to find out more about volunteering at association events; he or she will certainly be happy to hear from you!
- ✓ **Volunteer to work on committees and task forces.** Professional associations often have student forums or student seats on committees. By working on a committee or task force, you'll have the opportunity to develop close working relationships with other members of the association. You may have an opportunity to help plan events, produce materials, or draft association policy, all of which look great on a resume. In addition, you'll also get an up-close look at the inner workings and resources of the association. For alumni who have been working for a few years, volunteering on such committees provides a great way both to expand your network and build your resume – two benefits that are likely to come in handy when trying to take your next career step!
- ✓ **Contribute to an association publication.** In addition to peer-reviewed journals, some associations publish more informal magazines, newsletters, and web articles. Consider writing a book review, a case study, or interviewing a leader or innovator in the field. You can find submission guidelines on the publication's website or by contacting the editor of the publication.

- ✓ **Continue your education.** Professional associations often offer seminars, webinars, or other opportunities for continuing education. Once you are finished with your formal education, it's up to you to stay up to date in your field. Utilizing the continuing education resources of a professional organization is a great way to do this.
- ✓ **Talk to people.** One of the primary purposes of a professional organization is to bring together people with similar interests. If you're not networking, you're missing out on one of the greatest benefits of association membership. Demonstrate an interest in the people you meet at association meetings and conferences. Take advantage of association mixers, job fairs, and mentoring programs. And then stay in touch with your new contacts through LinkedIn, email, and in-person get togethers.
- ✓ **Put your association membership and activity on your resume and LinkedIn profile.** Employers are impressed with professional association memberships because it demonstrates interest in and commitment to the field. If you can also list committee positions or publications, even better!

Remember, you will get out as much as you put in to a professional association membership. Taking an active role within a professional association will help you increase your knowledge of your field, expand your professional network, and advance your career.