

STRATEGIC NETWORKING IN DC

Advance Your Career Through High-Value Professional Networks

With high levels of job transition and little centralized career support, policymakers must rely on their personal networks to advance their careers.

- Challenges of Networking in DC
- Our Recommendations
 - Create a Dynamic Strategy
 - Develop a Strong Process
 - Use Your Time Efficiently
- Foundational Advice on DC Networking



CHALLENGES OF NETWORKING IN DC

Regardless of their tenure or the size of their network, policymakers in DC experience similar challenges to building and maintaining professional networks. Based on input from policymakers across the previous five years, we identified four main challenges to networking in DC.



TOO MANY
OPPORTUNITIES
TO PRIORITIZE

“DC has more networking events than anywhere in the world. Everyone gets 15 emails a day about different events and opportunities.”
-Legislative Assistant, D



SCARCITY
OF TIME

“I don’t have time for a bathroom break, let alone the coffees to find the next step.”
-Communications Director, R



LITTLE
GUIDANCE ON
CAREER
ADVANCEMENT

“Job hunting in DC is all luck and network based.”
-Press Secretary, D



NETWORKING
IS A CORE
EXPECTATION OF
THE JOB

“If you’re going to a happy hour it’s because there’s alcohol or food, or you have to go.”
-Committee Director, R

BUILDING HIGH-VALUE NETWORKS

Through our research, we uncovered common misconceptions about networking in DC. This report provides recommendations to overcome these assumptions and build high-value networks.

ASSUMPTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

THERE'S ONE CORRECT
STRATEGY TO NETWORK



EVERYONE'S NETWORKING
STRATEGY IS UNIQUE TO
THEIR STRENGTHS AND GOALS

PAGE 4

NETWORKS GROW AND
CONNECTIONS DEEPEN
ORGANICALLY OVER TIME



THE BEST NETWORKERS
DEVELOP A PROCESS TO
INTENTIONALLY EXPAND
NETWORKS AND DEEPEN
CONNECTIONS

PAGE 5

THERE'S NOT ENOUGH
TIME TO NETWORK



EFFICIENT NETWORKING
CAN ACCOMMODATE
ANY SCHEDULE

PAGE 6

CREATE A DYNAMIC STRATEGY

ONE SIZE ≠ FIT ALL

There is no one correct way to network. Successful networkers establish clear goals and set realistic parameters for themselves to mitigate wasted time.

Additionally, they build strategies that use their strengths to meet their goals.

STRATEGIES ARE NOT STATIC

Re-evaluate your goals every three months and adjust your strategy accordingly.

BUILD A STRONG NETWORKING STRATEGY



SET CAREER GOALS

- What are your short-term career goals?
e.g., To find a new job
- What are your long-term career goals?
e.g., To learn more about energy policy



ASSESS STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

- What skills are you confident in or enjoy?
e.g., I communicate well through writing
- What areas of networking do you struggle with?
e.g., I get anxious at big events



FORMULATE STRATEGY

- How can you use the strengths you identified to help you accomplish your short-term goals?
e.g., Get coffee with staff from other offices
- How can you use the strengths you identified to help you accomplish your long-term goals?
e.g., Join an issue-specific networking group



CREATE PROCESS **more on next page*

- How much time are you able to allot toward accomplishing each goal?
e.g., Five hours per week
- What skills can you deploy to help you accomplish each goal?
e.g., Set calendar reminders; log connections

DEVELOP A STRONG NETWORKING PROCESS

NETWORKING IS INTENTIONAL

The best networkers in DC actively manage their connections and intentionally prioritize relationships.

These networkers organize their connections and contact them systematically. Further, they track their interactions and integrate networking into their weekly routines, which makes it a habit rather than a chore.

Activate Your Current Network

To expand your network, ask your strongest connections to advocate for you and introduce you to their connections.



KEY ASPECTS OF STRONG NETWORKING PROCESSES

Consider introducing the following tactics into your networking process to engage your network intentionally.



PRIORITIZE BUSINESS CARDS

Prioritize and organize your business cards by potential networking value. At the end of each month, flip through the cards to identify any connections who you haven't contacted recently, and schedule a time to meet with them.



LOG YOUR CONNECTIONS

Similar to how congressional offices track their constituents, intentional networkers track their connections. Create an Excel or Google Sheet to log interactions with your connections, and include a few notes to remind you of what you discussed with them.



SET CALENDAR REMINDERS

To automate your process, create recurring reminders in your calendar to contact connections.

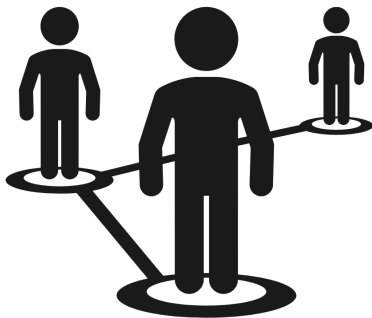
USE YOUR TIME EFFICIENTLY

EVENT PRIORITIZATION

The best networkers intentionally allot their time. They prioritize discussion-based events over presentation-based ones because of the opportunities to connect with others outside of their current network.

Successful networkers also understand that they can't meet everyone at each event. Instead, they connect with one or two people at each event they attend and focus on deepening those relationships.

Lastly, smart networkers know when to leave events because they believe they will not connect with additional people.



ONE-WAY NETWORKING

To save time, use one-way touch points to strengthen your connections. One-way touch points are one-sided, and don't necessitate a response. Follow up these one-way interactions with periodic in-person touch points.



SEND A BRIEF UPDATE BY EMAIL TO A CONNECTION



SHARE AN UPDATE ON LINKEDIN



LIKE OR COMMENT ON A CONNECTION'S LINKEDIN UPDATE



SHARE AN INTERESTING ARTICLE WITH A CONNECTION

FOUNDATIONAL ADVICE ON DC NETWORKING

Networking can feel like a chore for even the most experienced networkers. Whether you're new to DC or have been in town for a while, the following tips will help you prepare for your next networking interaction.



PREPARE TALKING POINTS FOR CONVERSATIONS

Craft talking points to help guide conversations, and commit them to memory so you will always have something to fall back on when you find yourself in unexpected (or expected) interactions.



FIND A NETWORKING BUDDY

Find a networking buddy, and learn from each other's strengths. Go to events together. Introduce each other to your current connections. Share resources that you find helpful.



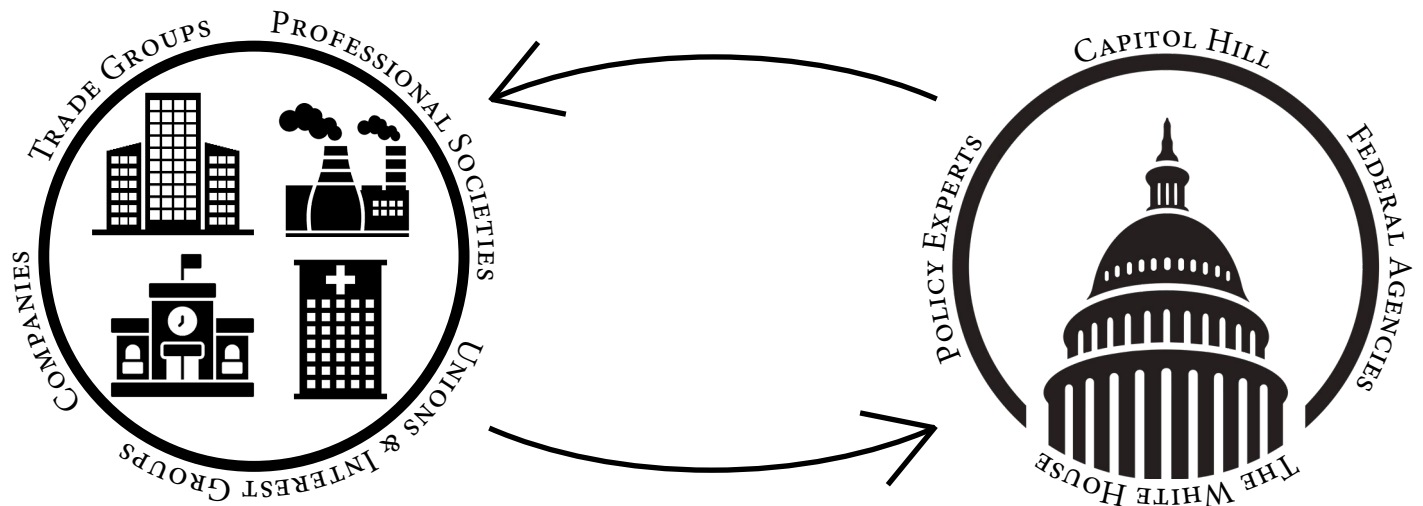
USE TRIAL AND ERROR TO DEVELOP YOUR PROCESS

Start small with one event and one touch point per month. Track what worked and what didn't, and prioritize events and interactions that you found valuable. Slowly incorporate this process into your weekly routine.

**ABOUT
BALLAST RESEARCH**

ABOUT BALLAST RESEARCH

Ballast Research provides feedback from policymakers directly to government relations professionals, helping advocates (1) make better use of policymakers' time and (2) provide resources and materials most useful to those in government.



OUR CLIENTS

Our clients are Fortune 500 companies, trade associations, and nonprofits looking to forge more productive partnerships with those in government. Each of our clients understands the value of policymakers' time and works with us to optimize every interaction. The result is more productive, mutually beneficial, and efficient engagement.

"This deep-dive, customized research is invaluable for understanding what policymakers think of us and need from us. The insights are another important tool we use to inform our thinking on how to engage, and the data illuminate where we can do better."

-Head of US Communications, Fortune 10 Company

OUR PROMISE

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All participation in our research is confidential and not for attribution.

CREDITS

Authors

Principal Author and Analyst

Allison Turnipseed

Manager of Qualitative Research

Matthew McCarthy

Head of Research

Michael Griffin

Senior Associate, External Affairs

Jessica Kirchner

President

Michael Gottlieb

A Note on Use of These Materials

This document has been prepared by, and comprises valuable proprietary information belonging to Ballast Research. It is intended for educational purposes only. Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database retrieval system without the prior written permission of Ballast Research. The use of copyrighted materials and/or images belonging to unrelated parties and reproduced herein is permitted pursuant to license and/or 17 USC § 107.

Legal Caveat

Ballast Research has worked to ensure the accuracy of the information it provides in this report. This report relies upon data obtained from many sources, however, and Ballast Research is not able to guarantee the accuracy of the information or analysis contained in these materials. Furthermore, Ballast Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or any other professional services. Ballast Research specifically disclaims liability for any damages, claims or losses that may arise from a) any errors or omissions in these materials, whether caused by Ballast Research or its sources, or b) reliance upon any recommendation made by Ballast Research.

