



THE NET NIGHTS GUIDE

How to Create a Career Networking Event in Your Region

Alumni Council Committee on Careers
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Here are some simple guidelines for implementing a career-networking event in your regional association. It describes a programming template called “Net Nights” that was originally developed by the Princeton Club of Washington DC (Lee Dudka *77), which has proven successful in connecting alumni in many cities including New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. We hope your region is next!

Creating a Net Nights program is relatively simple. Follow these guidelines. More ideas, information and support will soon be available online.

WHAT IS A NET NIGHT?

- A Princeton-affiliated event with two hallmark components:
 1. A structured networking exercise.
 2. A speaker or panel focused on a career-related topic.
- Net Nights fosters connections. It offers alumni opportunities to find business partners, to learn innovative ideas about careers, to establish contacts in an industry or organization, or to problem solve a critical career issue.
- Net Nights are useful to anyone navigating a career. They enable the development of an essential life skill: networking. While these events are tremendously helpful to alumni “in transition,” the most successful networking is an ongoing effort that persists long before a need is urgent. Net Nights are valuable to any alumnus who wants to strengthen their career network and foundation, to further their current career goals, or to inform a future career decision.

WHAT IS A NETWORKING EXERCISE, AND HOW DO I FACILITATE IT?

The unique feature of a Net Nights event is the organized method of facilitating connections. This is a crucial component of a successful networking event and may be a key motivating force in generating attendance. While some alumni will be looking for jobs, or seeking information about changing career paths, others may just want to build their contact files and get to know other Princetonians. These exercises address this wide range of interests.

Networking exercise options

- 1) *Offer & Ask* – this exercise focuses networking on both the “give” and the “take” with individuals letting the group know both what they have to offer and how others might help them.
- 2) *Two-Minute Networking* – in the vein of “speed networking,” individuals quickly meet each other one-on-one.
- 3) *Problems and Solutions* – this activity utilizes index cards to group-source solutions to individuals’ real-world career problems.
- 4) *Completed Thought* – a facilitator offers incomplete sentences such as, “The main reason I am here is...,” to spur group discussion.
- 5) *Find One* – standard introductions transition into specific assistance as each attendee finds an individual they can help.

Traditionally, Net Nights has used “Offer & Ask.” As an example, here are instructions for facilitating an Offer & Ask and one other exercise.

Offer & Ask

This exercise can be done at the beginning or the end of the program.

- The leader stands before the audience and demonstrates an offer and ask. He first gives a five second self-introduction, including class year and current position. He then offers something to the group that can be career oriented or otherwise, e.g. “I can review your resume if you are interested in consulting.” Or, “I can offer advice on Italian restaurants in New York City.” Then he asks for something, “I am currently researching plastics for a consulting project and seeking contacts in the state.” Or, “I am helping my daughter find an internship this summer, specifically at Channel 13.” Note he uses only 3-4 sentences and is not describing his resume or the like. Brevity keeps the focus and prevents the process from bogging down. He then asks others in the room to offer and ask in the same way.
- If you have a very large group, the room can also be broken into groups of 6-10. Offer & Ask can be conducted in these more intimate groups.

Two-Minute Networking

This exercise focuses on one-on-one interaction. Break your group into an inner and outer circle. Each inner/outer pair interacts with a general focus on careers and what they are looking for in their work. Rotate one of the circles every two minutes. The exercise ends when all pairs have met or 20 minutes have elapsed. This exercise is a less intimidating option for some attendees.

CREATE A NET NIGHT IN 5 STEPS

1. **Pick a date, time, and venue.** Give yourself a 4-6 week lead; choose early evening on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday as a best bet and plan on about 1.5-2 hours. Consider a restaurant, law firm, community center, local alumni club, or other location that will offer space free of charge or for a small per person refreshment fee.
2. **Pick a meeting topic.** Consider starting with something broad-reaching such as “How to Make a Career Transition.” Find more suggestions at the end of this guide. The topic need not limit your attendee base; with the right networking component, anyone should find value in the event.
3. **Solicit a speaker or speakers.** Utilize your regional officers’ networks or other alumni contacts to find speakers relevant to your meeting topic. Alumni speakers are desirable, but a Princeton affiliation isn’t necessary.
4. **Finalize the details.** Determine a cost to cover expenses (typically in \$10-20 range) and set an agenda. Here’s a sample:
6:30-6:45 – registration & arrival
6:45-7:45 – speaker(s)/program
7:45-8:00 – networking exercise, such as “Offer & Ask”
8:00-8:30 – cocktail or refreshments & networking.
5. **Promote the event.** Use multiple channels: print (regional association newsletter, postcard) and electronic (regional TigerNet list, regional association website). It is important to highlight the lifetime benefits of networking to generate interest among all alumni, not just those looking for work.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU KNOW?

Net Nights can be run as a single, one-off event in your yearly regional programming, or as a series of events. If you decide to tackle a series, consider quarterly events to allow alumni to continually develop their networks and practice networking techniques, and to address a variety of topics through speakers. Whatever your level of commitment, the increase in connections will benefit your alumni group.

The Careers Committee of the Alumni Council

Kate Gwon '99 and **Matt Winn** '03 are spearheading the growth of Net Nights and can field questions and offer support.

The Net Nights Forum

We will soon offer online resources, including more detailed instructions for all aspects of the Net Nights planning process, a forum for discussion among Net Nights volunteers in regions around the world, event reporting/pictures, and more.

APPENDIX

Suggested Net Nights event topics

1. How to make a career transition
2. What am I going to do when I grow up? (recent/young grads & the disgruntled)
3. Workforce re-entry strategies
4. Negotiating your way through the stages of the job hunt
5. Networking tactics and “tools”
6. Using your network to solve job-related (and job search) issues
7. The headhunters' perspective on the hiring process
8. The hiring managers' perspective
9. Late-stage career choices: avocations and retirement
10. Mistakes mid-career job seekers make
11. Tips for establishing a career in (one selected career or geographic area)
12. Obstacles at new career stages and how to brainstorm past them