

Why Join a Professional Organization?

Getting involved in a professional organization is a great way to connect with other professionals in your field and further your career through a variety of professional development opportunities. Professional organizations exist in nearly every profession or area of interest and many have options to join national, state, and/or regional chapters. While each organization is unique in its focus, they generally share a common goal of advancing their field by offering growth opportunities like the ones below:

- ❖ **Job Search** – Many organizations will provide job search assistance, communicate open positions, and provide tips for how to be successful in the field. Some may even have an internal job board for its members.
- ❖ **Mentoring** – Professional organizations often provide a unique opportunity for members to participate in mentoring opportunities, where younger professionals can spend time with more experienced professionals who have been in the field and can share knowledge and insights.
- ❖ **Networking** – Building meaningful working relationships with others in the same field is the cornerstone of many professional organizations. Opportunities may range from social gatherings to online workgroups and is almost always aimed at strengthening a particular professional community. Many networking events specifically bring together people who work in the same field or role to connect and share best practices.
- ❖ **Professional Development** – Members can broaden their knowledge through a variety of professional development opportunities such as workshops, webinars, conferences, presentations, and discussion forums – just to name a few. Many organizations also provide their members with regular publications to stay up to date on industry news and events.

How do I join a Professional Organization?

The first and most important step to joining a professional organization is to find one that fits your needs. Research your industry or area of interest to find common professional groups or organizations. Then spend some time reading over the benefits of membership for each. Smaller local chapters may offer more intimate networking opportunities with other professionals in your area, while larger national groups will likely offer the opportunity to attend conferences and network with professionals across the country. Consider the factors of cost vs. opportunities for professional growth (keep in mind that many will have a steep discount for student members). Below are some places that might help you as you search for the best fit:

- ❖ [LinkedIn](#) - LinkedIn is a great way to network with others and find professional groups. You can conduct a keyword search for groups within your area of interest and view the summary and size of the group. Most groups host great discussion forums where professionals share ideas, articles, and best practices.
- ❖ [WEDDLE's Association Directory](#) - As part of a larger career development resource website, Weddle's Association Directory lists several thousand associations from around the world by their primary focus or industry and provides direct links to their websites.
- ❖ [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) - Includes links to professional organizations related to each occupation under the tab entitled "Contacts for More Info."
- ❖ [O*NET](#) - O*NET allows you to search a variety of career titles to determine the general skills and qualifications that are usually required for specific career fields. It also lists common professional groups related to each career and provides links to the external websites.
- ❖ [Career One Stop](#) - houses a list of different professional associations in a wide variety of career fields.

If you have additional questions or would like to work with a Career Services Specialist, please email us directly at careerservices@ashford.edu or call the Appointment Line 866.711.1700, Ext. 20057 so we can set up an appointment with you.