



**Washington University School of Law**  
CAREER CENTER

*Networking  
Receptions*





The goal of networking is to create long term, mutually beneficial, professional relationships with attorneys and other professionals. As a law student, networking is an effective way to learn about a legal market, practice areas and employers and to identify potential employment opportunities. The law school offers many networking opportunities, including:

- 1L Diversity Expo
- 1L Employer Showcase
- Summer Connects
- Speaker series
- Dedications
- Big Table Discussions

But do not limit yourself to just those opportunities at the law school! Attend winter receptions hosted by law firms and legal organizations. Join the local bar association of your target cities as a student member and attend the receptions, speakers and/or continuing legal education courses. Join industry and trade groups for your target practice and attend their programming. The Career Center is happy to help you identify organizations with networking opportunities. Capitalize on informal networking opportunities as well. Talk to the person next to you on the train or airplane. Make connections with members of your place of worship. Talk to your fellow students.

Networking receptions are a great place to meet new people and to make career connections. Not everyone is a natural networker, but effective networking is a skill that can be learned and developed over time and with practice. The rest of this guide will break down the art and science of making new connections at networking receptions and similar events.

Before arriving at the event, make sure you have taken the steps necessary to start off on the right foot.

*RSVP:* If the event requests an RSVP, it is important that you let the organization know if you will be attending. If your plans change after you RSVP, reach out to the organizer to let her/him know that you can no longer attend. There will often be name tags, and the organizer may make note of those who RSVP'd but did not attend.

*Attire:* Dress appropriately. The invitation may include a dress code. If there is no stated dress code, wear business attire - a suit, dress and jacket, or professional separates. Always err on the side of formality.

*Research and Prepare:* Learn about the organization and its attorneys prior to the event. Be familiar with the organization's core values, major areas of practice, office locations, and how it distinguishes itself from other similar organizations. Research recent news articles about the organization or cases it has handled. Learn about specific programs or initiatives that are unique to the organization. If more than one organization will be represented at the event, try to learn at least one thing about each organization with which you will connect. Scan the local newspaper before the event to familiarize yourself with current national and local events that may come up in conversation. Memorize 5-6 questions that you can ask to drive conversation. Have a few general questions ready so that you can confidently strike up conversation with anyone. Sample questions are provided at the end of this guide.

*Know your Goal:* Your goal in attending a networking reception is to introduce yourself to lawyers at the event and to build a positive connection that allows you to follow up afterwards. Rather than trying to meet every attorney in the room, establish a goal of making a firm connection with two or three lawyers who will remember you after the reception.





Walking into a room filled with people that you have never met (and who all seem to know each other!) can be intimidating. Remember, everyone is there for the same reason – to meet new people and make new connections. Breaking the reception down into manageable steps can make the experience seem less overwhelming.

*Step 1: Greet the Host:* If there is a welcome table, pick up your nametag (if applicable), and greet the host. Nametags are worn on your right shoulder or jacket lapel. Express your gratitude for being invited to the event.

*Step 2: Quickly Read the Room:* As you enter, quickly scan the reception room and read the body language of the groups. Look for open couples and trios. Open couples and trios will be facing outward, indicating they are open to new people joining the conversation. If you see someone standing alone, approach that person.

*Step 3: Make your Introduction:* Once you choose a person or group to approach, walk over and wait for a break in the conversation. At that point, you can introduce yourself. “Hi – my name is Elizabeth Kim, and I’m a first year student at Washington University.” Listen to the names of the other people, repeat them once. “Kelly, it’s so nice to meet you.”

*Step 4: Make Conversation:* If there is not already a conversation in progress when you join, it may be appropriate to drive the conversation by asking a question or two. Ask open ended questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, but avoid personal and potentially controversial topics, such as politics, religion, etc.

Your questions do not always have to be business related, but they should be professional. Small talk is great for establishing shared interests that can lead to a more meaningful connection. Let the attorney set the tone – if s/he is excited to discuss the organization or her/his work, then run with it. If the attorney seems bored or unengaged, ask a non-legal question and try to find common ground.

Stay positive during the event. Do not make negative comments, including negative comments about the event, attorneys, other students, other firms or organizations, the school, cities, etc. Avoid talking too much about yourself.

*Step 5: Actively Listen and Take Mental Notes:* Active listening is a great way to compliment the other person; it shows her/him that you are interested in what s/he is saying. Avoid listing off your questions, one after another. Try to link your next question to something the person said.

“You mentioned that you initially worked as a prosecutor before moving to the white collar criminal defense unit at your firm. What are your thoughts on the recent reforms instituted at the prosecutor’s office?”

Mentally make note of the people you speak with so that you can send a quick follow-up/thank you note after the event. Ask the people you meet for their business cards. As soon as you leave the event, jot down your notes on the back of each card.

*Step 7: Make a Graceful Exit:* Do not just wander off. If you are ready to move on, your new acquaintance likely is too. Look for non-verbal cues that your contact is ready to move on or is bored. Do not hold them hostage. State how wonderful it was to meet them. If possible, make a final note about the conversation.

“It was so lovely to meet you. I’ll be sure to check out the Venture Café next week. Thank you again for the tip.”

“I don’t want to monopolize your time. I enjoyed meeting you and hearing about your practice.”

“I know you have many people to speak with. I hope you have a great trip to Spain. I look forward to talking with you in the future.”



*Be Confident:* If you are nervous, remember that you have much to offer! Walk into the room with confidence, and do not be afraid to proactively introduce yourself. Most people will be polite and courteous, but if you run into someone rude, move on quickly and do not give it another thought.

*Mingle:* Avoid spending too much time with a group of other candidates or students. Make an effort to meet attorneys with the host organization. You do not need to meet everyone, but aim to make a solid connection with at least 2-3 attorneys.

*Be Professional:* First impressions are important. Make a conscious effort to appear professional and welcoming. Be mindful of your body language. Crossed arms indicate you are not receptive to conversation. Look people in the eyes. Use a firm handshake. If you make eye contact with someone, smile. While this is not an interview, remember that you are always being observed. Always act professionally.

*Limit Alcohol:* Alcoholic drinks are often offered at networking receptions. You are not required to eat or drink at the reception. If you do drink, limit yourself to one or two alcoholic beverages. When possible, drink out of a glass.

*Be Strategic with Food:* There will often be finger foods. Do not treat the event as your dinner or as a party. This is for professional networking. Consider eating before you arrive. This allows you to focus on meeting new people without worrying about greasy fingers, being caught with your mouth full, or spilling food on your clothing.

*Be Inclusive:* Introduce other students when possible. Use first and last names and make a connection, if possible. If there is a large age difference, consider using Mr./Ms.

“I’d like to introduce...,”

“May I introduce...,”

“I’d like you to meet...”

“Ms. Samson, I’d like you to meet Mr. Jacobs.”

“Judy, this is Tom Jacobs. Tom, this is Judy Samson. Tom, Judy also grew up in Boise, Idaho.”

Follow up is important. Within 24 hours after the event, send a short written note or email to the organizer and to each of the attorneys you met, thanking them for their time. If appropriate, ask if you can follow up with them in the future if you have questions.

Dear Ms. Zhang,

Thank you for speaking with me at your organization's winter reception. I enjoyed hearing about Legal Aid of Huntsville's plan to create a dedicated elder law unit and the opportunities available for summer interns. I plan to submit my application very soon.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Anne Walsh

Dear Mr. Cramer,

It was a pleasure to speak with you at the WashULaw Chicago Summer Connect happy hour. I enjoyed meeting you and learning about your regulatory practice. On your advice, I plan to enroll in administrative law next year and will look for internship opportunities at the FCC for my 2L summer. I look forward to speaking again soon.

Sincerely,

Ryan Smith

What do you like best about working at the organization?

What do you like best about what you do?

Is your day to day practice as you expected it would be when you first started?

What type of practice do you have?

What made you select this area of law?

Do you see any challenges or changes on the horizon for your field of law?

What are the most rewarding aspects of a career in this practice area?

Which aspects of your background have been most helpful?

If you could do things all over, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why?

How long have you been with the organization and what causes you to stay?

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing new attorneys?

What personal and professional skills do you find to be important for success at your organization or in your practice area?

Do you hire summer interns?

How long is your summer program?

Do summer interns work in one area, or do they rotate through various practices?

What makes a summer intern successful at your organization?

Did you have an opportunity to take a vacation this summer?

I just finished a really interesting biography of Lyndon Johnson and am looking for a new book. Do you have any recommendations?

I'm hoping to take a short vacation after the bar exam. Do you have any favorite destinations in the U.S.?