

Adding Value and Solving Problems: Virtual Networking for Scientists

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Job hunting for early-career psychological scientists can be difficult in the best of economies. A pandemic like COVID-19, which has shelved hiring plans and cancelled in-person conferences and events where so much networking would have occurred, has only magnified the challenge. Paradoxically, these constraints may also represent windows of opportunity that resourceful scientists are uniquely qualified to open.

“Networking is all about community—it’s about how I might help you, be a resource for you, inject value into your organization,” according to Alaina G. Levine, a STEM career consultant who writes and speaks for scientific audiences. In the [APS webinar Virtual Networking: How to Network and Find Collaborators From Afar](#), she laid out techniques and strategies for making connections remotely, identifying pain points, and building collaborations with people who might become (or introduce you to) your future colleagues. “If we’re going to advance our science, we need new collaborators, new perspectives,” she said. The trick is getting the right people to see that potential in you.

First step: Send a targeted email that quickly establishes the parallels between your respective areas of expertise and requests a 15-minute Zoom/Skype/Whatsapp call to explore how you might be able to help them. Better yet, send several of these emails.

Consider the example of one young scientist Levine knows. Seeking a postdoc in a specialized field

where he had limited experience, he conducted a literature search for professors working in that field who were using techniques he had some knowledge of. One of the professors who took a meeting with this young scientist went on to create a postdoc specifically for him, after a series of conversations that helped the young scientist identify his future colleague's pain points and elucidate the ways in which he would be able to help.

Here are a few more tips on how to identify those prospects, and what to say when contacting them:

- **Form your list using informed sources.** Ask colleagues, advisors, friends for recommendations. Review conference agendas and programs, including [virtual presentations](#). Look through [membership directories](#). Read [journals](#) and papers. Scour your social networks. Volunteer on committees and task forces.
- In your actual message, **begin by demonstrating empathy and genuine interest** in the recipient's health and well-being, especially in light of the current realities. "I hope this email finds you and your colleagues healthy and safe."
- **Pinpoint the mutual interest.** "I read about your work on X and see parallels to some work I'm doing in X + 1."
- **Clarify that you're putting their needs (and the community's needs) first.** "I'm wondering if I might serve as a resource or be of assistance."
- **Be patient and respectful**—don't expect a response right away, or at all—and be prepared to circle back in a few weeks or months with a second effort.

Above all, listen intently when you do get those meetings. Levine, who has [written widely about networking for scientists](#), underscores the importance of being alert to others' pain points—to the "walls impeding innovation" they may be facing. That prospective boss or colleague may not even realize they need a new colleague or set of perspectives, let alone have an actual position opening or job description to refer to. You know what expertise you bring. You know about new techniques and tools that more established scientists may not be familiar with. Leverage your training, Levine said, and customize your problem-solving expertise as you go.

[View a recording of Levine's June 25 webinar and view the full list of APS webinars:](#)

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