Career Connections

Program Handbook

WESTERN FAIRS ASSOCIATION
BUILDING BETTER FAIRS

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Check out our online Toolbox for program resources at: www.westernfairs.org

Mission

Mission

The Career Connection Program's mission is to inspire, grow, and establish connections between fair industry members in a supportive environment while providing opportunities for learning experiences, networking, professional growth, and skill development in the WFA and the fair community. These skills will improve the quality of the membership and enable the association to enhance and innovate fair, event, and venue management.

Purpose & Objectives

Purpose

A career connection relationship is designed to enable experienced professionals, known as Advisors, to share their knowledge, skills, and insights with others through a one-on-one relationship. Program Participants benefit from gaining knowledge and support in achieving their professional development goals, while Advisors make a personal impact on the professional development of others and the strength of the industry association and its members. The Career Connections Program, by ensuring the success and integrity of the individual connection relationships, contribute to the success of the program and the development of both Advisors and Participants.

Objectives

• To create connections in order to facilitate the sharing of mutual knowledge.

• To facilitate networking among WFA professionals through the creation of in-depth business relationships.

• To assess and recognize the success of each connection.

Career Connections Committee

The Career Connections Committee is responsible for facilitating the Career Connections Program. This is a sub-committee of the WFA Leadership Committee. The Leadership Committee Chair will appoint the sub-committee members from the Leadership Committee and recruit on an annual basis.

Current Committee Member include:

- Kaitlyn Findley-Thorn, Del Mar Fairgrounds
- Allison Keaney, Cow Palace Arena & Event Center
- Jennifer Murad, AV Fair & Event Center
- Leah Perkins-Hagele, Washington County Fair
- Chris Pickering, Pickering Events LLC
- Kady Porterfield, Kittitas Valley Event Center
- Pam Schultz, Wild Science Imagination Gallery, Inc.

Overview

The Career Connections Program's charge is to promote WFA's goal of becoming more inclusive and diverse through professional development opportunities, educational offerings, and increasing awareness.

WFA's Career Connections was conceived and developed by young professional members
and is managed by the Career Connections Program Team with the purpose of providing members with the opportunity to:
- Experience meaningful and ongoing interaction with a diverse group of top professionals in the industry.
- Gain real world insight from experienced and successful professionals.
- Receive an insider's view of the association.
- Expand perspectives on a range of career opportunities.
- Establish a network of professional business contacts.
- Develop confidence through leadership and personal initiative.

WFA's Career Connections Program was developed to foster learning and engagement specifically aimed at achieving professional development and improving the quality of the
fair and event manager workforce throughout the membership. By building a stronger network of talented professionals skilled in solving the issues facing our industry, our association and members will become more valuable assets to their communities, their venues, performers and guests.

By connecting fair and event management professionals who have identified a professional
development need with a member that has demonstrated competency in that area, tailored
solutions can be designed to improve the skill set of the Advisor and Participant and enhance their contribution to the industry.

Advisors and Participants will be selected from applications submitted to the program.

Program Schedule

Annual Timeline

January 31	Applications Due
February	Connection Announcements
February-December	Monthly/Bi-Monthly Progress Calls or Meetings
December	Conclusion of Career Connections Program

Roles & Responsibilities

Advisor

Qualifications:

- Must be a current or retired employee of a WFA Member with documented experience/achievement in industry
- Must be willing to actively work toward achieving Connection relationship goals
- Complete Career Connections online application & submit a resume
- Meet requirements listed in responsibilities section

Responsibilities:

- Drive the connection process by identifying advisory needs of the Participant
- Share experience and resources with your connection
- Listen carefully and objectively; encourage exploration and growth
- Provide appropriate information to help your connection achieve professional goals
- Share feedback on progress with your Participant
- Document progress
- When appropriate, conclude the Connection relationship
- Evaluate the impact of participation on personal and professional development

Participant

Qualifications:

- Must be a current employee of a WFA Member
- Must be willing to actively work toward achieving Connection relationship goals
- Complete Career Connections online Participant Application & submit resume
- Meet requirements listed in responsibilities section

Responsibilities:

- Be ready, willing, and able to devote your time and energy
- Seek new learning and commit to take action
- Meet with your Advisor at regular/agreed intervals
- Initiate meeting arrangements
- Plan and present each meeting’s agenda
- Reply to emails and phone calls within two days
- Invest time to utilize resources suggested by Advisor and implement strategies
- Share experiences and progress with your Advisor

- Document progress
- Apply learning to improve growth
- Evaluate the impact of participation on personal and professional development
- Fulfill your commitment to your Advisor and the Connection process
- When appropriate, conclude the Connection relationship
- Evaluate the program and your Advisor at the conclusion of your Connection

Program Progress

Planning

The Career Connections Program is Participant-centered, which means simply that Participants are advised to take a leadership role in the Connection process. Once a Career Connections relationship is established, the Participant will initiate meeting arrangements.

Initial Connection

Each pair will conduct an initial Connection meeting. It may be beneficial in making the initial Connection to discuss a communication plan, goal development and assessment measurements for the Advisor-Participant relationship.

There are tools to assist with this planning that can be found on the Western Fairs Association website. The toolbox includes:

- **Effective Communication Plan**
- **SMART Goal Development**
- **Goal Development Worksheet**
- **Partnership Goal Statement**
- **Participant Action Plan**

Meetings

It is the Participant's responsibility to plan each meeting's agenda. Tools in the online toolbox (on WFA's website) to assist in meeting preparation and follow-up include:

- **Call Prep Sheet**
- **Meeting Record**

Connection Assistance

Recognizing that many barriers to success can be raised during a Connection process due to
other demands of work and personal life, each pair will have access to a contact on the Career Connections Program Team to assist in the progress. Progress toward achieving the Connection relationship goals may be monitored throughout the year by the Career Connections Program Team, if needed.

Concluding the Connection

The final meeting between Advisor and Participant should focus on bringing issues to a close. It is a good time to reflect on the Connection and talk about the positive changes that occurred for each person. In no way does this mean that the professional relationship must end. Many Connection relationships will continue on an informal basis for years to come.

In the final month, each Advisor and Participant may be asked to complete a program survey and submit it to the Career Connections Program Team.

Being a Great Industry Advisor

Benefits

This is a strategic moment to invest in the future of a Participant. With the ever-increasing competition in the fair and event industry, WFA is poised to play a major role in shaping the character of our association and the fair management industry for decades to come.

As an Advisor, you can:

• Positively influence another individual by making productive use of your knowledge, skills, values, and experiences.

• Gain tremendous satisfaction from contributing to the development of capable individuals
and enjoy the satisfaction of seeing them succeed.

• Increase communication, leadership, and development/training skills for the association.

• Expand professional contacts through interaction with other Advisors.

• Revitalize interest in your own work through connection to your Participant and their energy.

• Boost self-esteem through recognition from your Participant, peers and the association community.

• Invest in the future by giving back to the association.

Advisors are influential people who significantly affect the lives of new and existing WFA members through the people and things that they know. Successful Advisors are those who embrace the art of give and take as John F. Kennedy said: “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” This means that Advisors plan to learn from others in the industry and show leadership by sharing examples of lifelong applied and hands on experience.

As an Advisor you are expected to:

• Invest time in yourself and your Participant.

• Discuss with the Participant, any expectations you have regarding levels of contact or content of exchanges.

• Communicate respectfully and responsibly with your Participant, fostering a relationship based on mutual trust and support.

• Value the member's time as if it were your own.

• Be available, meeting with your Participant within respectful time intervals.

• Reply to email messages and phone calls from your student within 2 business days.

• Fulfill your commitment to your Participant and the Connection process.

• Evaluate the relationship and the program at the conclusion of the Connection.

• Contact your partnership coach with any concerns regarding your Connection relationship or the overall program.

Guidelines for an Effective Connection

One of the most difficult tasks an Advisor must prepare for is to let the Participant take the
initiative and practice leading. That role reversal may feel somewhat awkward at first. Two ways to feel more comfortable about this role reversal are to:

• Acknowledge that you are spending time helping to shape the future, of the association
and

• Reflect on a past Advisor of your own, remembering what worked best when you spent time together.

These thoughts may set the tone for a potentially dynamic outcome. Discuss topics on business and career. Participants are responsible for being prepared to cover these areas:

• Career changes

• Educational path

• Continuing education

• Leadership Role in WFA

• Challenging events, pivotal or peak experiences

• Future plans, role models

Respond directly to questions. When someone asks a question that seems too personal or out of context with the professional conversation, simply say, "I would rather not discuss it." Some people prefer to take a passive approach or adopt an avoidance method. In general, however, everyone benefits from genuine, direct and honest answers, especially when practicing how to say "no."

Probe to find common interests. Some Participants may be shy and uncertain about themselves while talking with seasoned leaders in the industry. If a conversation, particularly in the first or second meeting, feels stilted and uncomfortable, then it is most appropriate to veer away from the prepared agenda and probe for more common interests. Sometimes, just finding out that both people share a mutual delight in golf or reading eases tension. Once that sense of shared interest exists, a real exchange of ideas can result.

Components of an Effective Connection

Guidance:
Advisors are guides through the learning process, helping Participants understand and integrate into their own life knowledge, skills, character and relational abilities – qualities that are essential for success in the meetings industry and within WFA.

Vulnerability:
Advisors are selected because of their expertise and character. Therefore, sharing your own development and experiences are essential, as is fostering a relationship based on mutual trust and support. Be willing to have your Participant observe your life and career and allow the Participant to benefit from the fruit of your failures as well as successes.

Discussion:
Stories, dialogue, questions and even role play can be vital components in the learning process. Listen to and learn from Participants and discern ways to provoke and encourage their growth. Learning to ask the right questions is as basic to growth as discovering answers. Pose questions and challenge Participants to help them make their own decisions. Act as a sounding board or coach.

Affirmation:
We learn best in contexts of support and encouragement. As an Advisor, seek to enable the professional development by encouraging the progress of the Participant.

Application:
The best Connection enables specific application in small steps. Participants need to be given the opportunity to put immediately into practice what they are learning from an Advisor.

Participants: Getting the Most Out of Your Industry Connection

In today's marketplace, the value, if not the necessity, of being proactive in securing knowledge and advice from industry professionals has never been greater. Every Connection experience is beneficial.

Benefits

• Gain from the Advisor's knowledge, skills, values and expertise.

• Grow through greater awareness of challenges and opportunities.

• Receive critical feedback in key areas, such as communications, interpersonal relationships, technical abilities and leadership skills.

• Develop a sharper focus on what is needed to grow personally and professionally.

• Learn specific skills and knowledge that are relevant to professional and personal goals.

• Gain knowledge about the WFA culture and unspoken rules that can be critical for success in the industry.

As a participant in the Career Connections Program, you are a representative of your respective company, therefore, held to a very high standard of conduct. As a participant, you are expected to:

• Initiate contact to schedule meeting(s).

• Research the business, organization and individual.

• Plan and present each meeting's agenda.

• Open and close each Connection meeting.

• Meet with your Advisor at regular intervals.

• Reply to email messages and phone calls within two days.

• Fulfill your commitment to your Advisor and the Connection process.

• Evaluate the program and your Advisor at the conclusion of your Connection.

Learn & Share

As in most endeavors, the more you put into the program, the more you get out of it. Find out about your Advisor: In addition to the personal profile you receive, do research the Advisor prior to the visit. Look for boards on which they serve, awards received, or recent newspaper articles about their company.

Research the Advisor's company, function and industry. Advisors represent a wide group of companies, functions and industries. Prepare yourself by researching the intricacies of each of these areas. The better prepped you are, the more you will understand during Advisor meetings.

Communicate respectfully and responsibly. Clarify your expectations. Discuss with your Advisor any personal expectations you have regarding levels of contact or content exchanges. The better you communicate your interests before the relationship begins, the more you and your Advisor will get out of it.

Ask the right questions. Give thought to questions you will ask before you meet with your Advisor. You can start with the list provided and/or come up with your own. Make them strategic for your own growth and adjust as the Connection progresses.

Be flexible. Advisors are busy, so be flexible regarding places and times to meet with them. When geographically feasible, you may want to offer to meet for coffee or talk on the phone.

Be considerate of and show appreciation for your Advisor's time. Advisors are volunteers!

Accept a subordinate learning position. Don't let ego get in the way of learning. Trying to impress the Advisor with your knowledge or ability will set up a mental barrier between you both. It will prevent you from receiving what your Advisor is giving.

Bring in current news or propose discussing a hot topic in the industry. Discussing a real-life business situation will increase the impact of the visit. Creating active dialogue around a hot issue is an interesting way to learn about the way your Advisor approaches business decisions.

Leave time for Q&A. Make sure you build in enough time for a Q&A session at the end of each meeting.

Creating a Successful Connection Relationship

These tips can help you and your Connection start out on the right foot as well as continue to keep the relationship running smoothly. You can use these in preparation for, as well as during your first meeting together. You also should revisit them regularly to ensure that you are fully benefiting from your Connection relationship throughout the program.

ADVISORS: Ask your Participant to outline personal and professional goals for the year-long period of the program. Work together with your Participant to create program goals and how you plan to achieve these together.

PARTICIPANTS: Identify the issues/goals you want to address during the program. Come to meetings prepared with questions. Share your successes and freely discuss any less than satisfactory results. Ask your Advisor, "What do you know now that you wish you'd know "then"?"

TOGETHER: Discuss how the Connection program has helped (or not) you achieve your goals. Use the Career Connections Program Team to identify other resources, if needed.

Don't cancel or put off a meeting just because there is no urgent to-do list. Use the time to address bigger questions about professional development/career paths rather than focusing on the day-to-day issues. Take advantage of each other's backgrounds and experiences.

General Tips

1. By making yourself available and sticking to your scheduled meetings you demonstrate that you value each other's time and commitment to each other and to the Connection program.
2. Take the time and energy to establish trust. Recognize that this doesn't happen overnight and takes effort on both parts. Remember that you are sharing vulnerabilities at times.
3. Share work samples with each other as appropriate while maintaining necessary confidentiality.
4. If feasible, make an effort to visit each other's work site and/or attend an event at each other's venue.
5. Maintain your curiosity. Ask questions of each other.
6. Remember that this is a two-way street – you both have the opportunity to learn from each other.
7. Don't lose sight of the big picture – it's all about developing a quality workforce for the venue management industry, staffed by the best professionals.
8. Don't lose sight of individual achievements as you work towards your goals.
9. CELEBRATE EACH SUCCESS NO MATTER THE SIZE!

Check out these tools in the online toolbox for more!
- **More Tips for Participants**
- **More Tips for Advisors**

Checklist for Getting Started

For Participants:

- Send your resume and a few brief paragraphs that describe your work and personal history to your Advisor, along with a word of thanks for volunteering to be your Advisor.
- Request your Advisor's contact information, including the contact information for his or her assistant. Enter it into your cell phone and other contact databases for easy access later on.
- Read up on your Advisor. Google your Advisor to read any news, published work, or announcements that are publicly available.
- Review WFA's Career Connections Program Handbook.
- Get a journal or notebook which can be used exclusively for taking notes during your Connection sessions and containing any related materials and bring it with you to the first session.
- Be ready at least 5-10 minutes early for the session and remember to plan adequate time to prepare for the session.
- Pay attention to time and bring the conversation to a close when you reach the time limit indicated by the Advisor.
- Follow up immediately after the first session with a note of thanks.
- Follow up immediately after the Connection session with any actions to which you have agreed. Don't delay, as it is more likely to slip your mind as days pass.
- Confirm the date and time of your next Connection session.
- Send an email one to two days prior to confirm that the Advisor is still "on" for the next session.
- Give advance notice to the Advisor if you are running late or must cancel or postpone a session.

For Advisors:

- Review your Participant's bio and resume prior to the first meeting.
- Consider your own experiences and background in light of your Participant's career and life and reflect on areas of common interest and experience.

• After reading your Participant’s communications, jot down a few curious questions that you can use as conversation starters in the first session.

• Review WFA’s Career Connections Program Handbook.

• Identify options in your calendar for regular Advisor meetings so you can offer dates and times for future sessions at your first meeting.

• Suggest a time for the first meeting, specifying both the starting and ending time for the conversation.

• Start and end your first session on time to establish a good boundary with your Participant.

• Convey your enthusiasm and make a personal connection via the tone of your email or phone communication. This will help relieve the Participant’s fears of inconveniencing you.

• Follow up after the first session with a warm note of encouragement.

• Follow up immediately after the Connection session with any actions to which you have agreed. Don’t delay, as it is more likely to slip your mind as days pass.

• Confirm the date and time of next Connection conversation.