ARIZONA DECA NETWORKING GUIDE

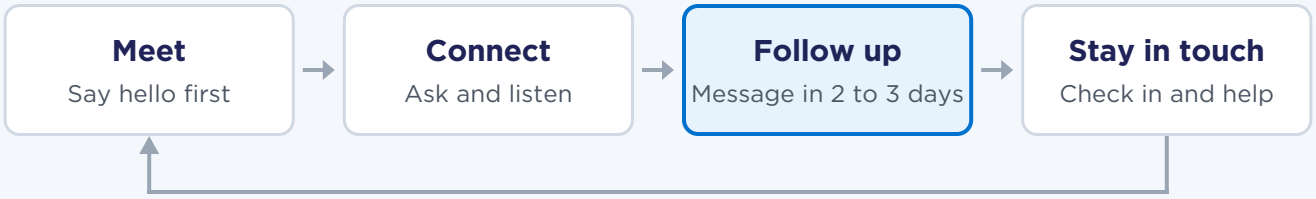
Turn every conference into a stepping stone for you and your chapter.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is the process of building genuine, mutually helpful relationships with people over time. It is not collecting contacts, handing out business cards, or asking strangers for favors. At its core, networking is simply getting to know people, showing interest in who they are and what they do, and finding ways to support each other.

A good way to think about it: your network is the group of people who know you, trust you, and would think of you when an opportunity comes up. You are also part of their network.

Following up is what turns a chat into a connection



Then meet the next person. It works best when help goes both ways.

networking cycle · 4 steps

Every good connection follows the same loop, and the follow-up step is the one most people skip.

WHAT IS NETWORKING FOR?

People network for different reasons, and in DECA you will probably do all of these at some point:

Learning.	Hearing how other chapters run fundraisers, recruit members, prepare for competition, or structure their officer teams.
Career exploration.	Meeting professionals in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management who can tell you what their work is really like.
Opportunities.	Internships, job shadows, scholarships, mentors, references, and leadership roles often come through people, not applications alone.
Support.	Having people to ask for advice, encouragement, or feedback when you hit a challenge.
Chapter growth.	Finding judges, guest speakers, business partners, and sponsors for your chapter, and partnering with other chapters.

HOW NETWORKING HELPS YOU

For you as an individual

- Builds communication and confidence, skills you are also practicing in role plays and presentations.
- Opens doors to mentors, recommendation letters, and career opportunities.
- Helps you discover paths you did not know existed.
- Makes you more visible as a leader.

For your chapter

- Brings in fresh ideas you can adapt for your own chapter.
- Creates relationships with local businesses and community partners.
- Strengthens your chapter's reputation across the state.
- Gives your officers a support system of peers who are doing the same job.

THE DO'S OF NETWORKING

1. BE GENUINELY CURIOUS.
Ask real questions and listen to the answers. People remember how you made them feel.

2. PREPARE A SHORT INTRODUCTION.
Have a 15 to 20 second answer to "Tell me about yourself": your name, your chapter, what you are involved in, and something you are interested in.

3. START CONVERSATIONS WITH SIMPLE OPENERS.
"What events are you competing in?" or "What has been your favorite session so far?" work well.

4. MAKE EYE CONTACT, SMILE, AND GIVE A CONFIDENT HANDSHAKE.
Strong first impressions matter.

5. REMEMBER NAMES, AND USE THEM.
If you struggle, repeat the name back right after hearing it.

6. LOOK FOR WAYS TO HELP OTHERS.
Offer a resource, share an idea, or make an introduction. Networking works best when it goes both ways.

7. TAKE NOTES AFTER CONVERSATIONS.
Jot down names, schools, and what you talked about so you can follow up meaningfully.

8. FOLLOW UP WITHIN A FEW DAYS.
Send a short message that references your conversation. This step is what turns a chat into a connection.

9. DRESS AND ACT PROFESSIONALLY.
Follow the conference dress code and represent your chapter well. Everyone you meet is a potential reference.

10. THANK PEOPLE.
Thank judges, speakers, exhibitors, advisors, and volunteers for their time.

11. STAY IN TOUCH.
A quick check-in, congratulations on an achievement, or share of an article keeps the relationship alive.

THE DON'TS OF NETWORKING

1. DON'T ONLY TALK ABOUT YOURSELF.

A conversation is not a monologue or a sales pitch.

2. DON'T ONLY STICK WITH YOUR OWN CHAPTER.

You can sit with your friends at home. Conferences are your chance to meet new people.

3. DON'T STAY GLUED TO YOUR PHONE.

It signals you are not interested in the people around you.

4. DON'T ASK FOR SOMETHING RIGHT AWAY.

Build the relationship first, then ask for advice or help.

5. DON'T INTERRUPT OR DOMINATE CONVERSATIONS.

6. DON'T TREAT PEOPLE DIFFERENTLY BASED ON THEIR TITLE OR AGE.

Be equally respectful to a fellow member, an advisor, and a CEO.

7. DON'T GOSSIP OR SPEAK NEGATIVELY

about other people, chapters, or schools. Reputations travel quickly.

8. DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW UP.

Great conversations fade fast if you never reach out again.

9. DON'T OVERPROMISE.

If you say you will send something, send it.

10. DON'T WAIT FOR OTHERS TO APPROACH YOU.

Most people are a little nervous. Be the one who says hello first.

11. DON'T IGNORE ONLINE CONDUCT.

Anything you post or send after a conference is part of your professional image.

NETWORKING AT ARIZONA DECA CONFERENCES

Arizona DECA conferences are one of the best places to build your network because you are surrounded by students, advisors, alumni, judges, and business professionals who care about the same things you do. Conferences change from year to year, so check azdeca.org for current dates, locations, and schedules.

Each event widens your network one step further

Camp DECA Arizona DECA	**Meet chapters from across AZ**
FLC Fall Leadership Conference	**Meet new faces, swap ideas**
Districts District Career Development Conferences	**Build your regional circle**
SCDC State Career Development Conference	**Expo, judges, and employers**
ICDC International Career Dev. Conference	**Meet members worldwide**

ICDC is for members who qualify.
networking path · 5 events

Start with Camp DECA and FLC, build your regional circle at districts, then use state and ICDC to widen it even further.

BEFORE ANY CONFERENCE

- Set a goal. For example: meet five new people from other chapters, talk to two professionals, and learn one new idea for your chapter.
- Prepare your introduction and practice it out loud.
- Create or update your LinkedIn profile (with a parent or advisor's guidance if needed) so you can connect with people afterward.
- Bring a way to share your contact info, such as a business card, a QR code to your LinkedIn, or your phone ready to exchange details.
- Look at the schedule. Pick the sessions, workshops, and events where you are most likely to meet people.
- Pack something to take notes in.

FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE (FLC)

FLC is often the first big event of the year and a great low-pressure place to start building connections.

- Meet people early. Everyone is fresh and looking for new connections.
- Join workshops and activities and introduce yourself to the people next to you.
- Talk to officers from other chapters. Ask what is working for them and share what is working for you.
- Collect ideas. Bring back at least one idea for fundraising, recruiting, or chapter events.
- Meet your state officers and learn how you can get more involved.
- Connect with new members and first-time attendees. Be welcoming. These connections often grow for years.

DISTRICT CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCES

District conferences are often smaller and closer to home, which makes them ideal for building your regional network.

- Get to know chapters near you. These are the people you will see again at state.
- Talk to competitors before and after events. Ask what they prepared and how it went.
- Introduce yourself to judges. Thank them, ask for feedback, and ask about their careers and how they got started.
- Support other chapters. Cheer for others at the awards session and congratulate people you meet.
- Make a plan for state. Exchange contact info with the people you want to see at SCDC.

STATE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (SCDC)

SCDC is Arizona DECA's largest gathering, and it brings together students, advisors, judges, volunteers, and business and college partners.

- Visit the College and Career Expo when it is offered. Talk to representatives from colleges, employers, and organizations. Ask about programs, scholarships, internships, and what they look for in applicants.
- Attend workshops and speak with presenters afterward. A thoughtful follow-up question is a great way to be remembered.
- Network with judges and business professionals. Many are DECA alumni or industry leaders who enjoy mentoring students.
- Connect with state officers and candidates if you are interested in leadership.
- Meet people between events. Lines, hallways, meals, and waiting areas are some of the best places to start conversations.
- Celebrate everyone. Cheer at the awards session, congratulate winners from other chapters, and be gracious regardless of your own results.
- Exchange contact info with other competitors. You may be teammates, classmates, or colleagues in the future.

INTERNATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (ICDC)

If you qualify for ICDC, you have the chance to connect with thousands of DECA members from around the world.

- Stay connected with your Arizona delegation. These are the people you will go through the experience with, so build those bonds.
- Meet members from other states and countries. Ask about their chapters and communities.
- Visit the exhibit hall and career and college fairs to talk with companies and universities.
- Take part in the general sessions, workshops, and social events.
- Connect with national officers and DECA staff, and thank speakers and volunteers.
- Keep in touch after you return. Follow up with people you met and share what you learned with your chapter.

ADVISORS: ADVISOR LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE (ALC)

Advisors can network too. ALC is a chance to meet fellow advisors, share chapter ideas, and learn about state and national programs. Stronger advisor networks lead to stronger chapters.

NETWORKING CONVERSATION STARTERS

- "What events are you competing in this year?"
- "How does your chapter run its fundraisers?"
- "What has been your favorite part of the conference so far?"
- "What got you interested in DECA?"
- "What do you do for work, and how did you get started?" (for professionals)
- "What advice would you give someone interested in your field?" (for professionals)

HOW TO FOLLOW UP

Within 2 to 3 days of meeting someone, send a short, personal message. Here is a simple template:

> Hi [Name], it was great meeting you at [conference/event]. I really enjoyed our conversation about [topic]. [Optional: I'd love to hear more about / I'll send you that idea we talked about.] Hope to see you again soon!

Then:

1. Connect on LinkedIn with a short note reminding them who you are.
2. Keep track of your contacts in a simple spreadsheet or notes app, including where you met and what you talked about.
3. Check in every few months. Congratulate them on an accomplishment or share something useful.
4. Share what you learn with your chapter. Your network benefits everyone, not just you.

QUICK CHECKLIST

Before:	Set a goal. Practice your introduction. Update your LinkedIn. Review the schedule.
During:	Say hello first. Ask questions. Listen. Meet people outside your chapter. Take notes.
After:	Follow up within 2 to 3 days. Connect online. Share what you learned. Stay in touch.

IF YOU FEEL NERVOUS

Most people feel awkward walking up to someone new, and that is normal. These tips make it easier:

Set a small goal.	Aim to have three real conversations, not to meet everyone.
Go early.	Rooms are quieter and conversations are easier to start before sessions fill up.
Find someone standing alone.	They will almost always be glad you said hello.
Bring a buddy, then split up.	Use a friend for confidence, but make sure you each meet new people.
Ask questions.	You do not have to carry the conversation when you are curious about the other person.
Leave gracefully.	Say, "It was great meeting you. I'm going to grab a seat for the next session," and move on.

NETWORKING BEYOND CONFERENCES

Your network does not have to stop when the conference ends. You can keep building it year-round:

At your school.	Talk with alumni, teachers, counselors, and your advisor about people they can introduce you to.
In your community.	Attend chamber of commerce events, local business meetups, and volunteer opportunities.
Through your chapter.	Invite local professionals to speak, judge practice role plays, or host a business tour.
Online.	Keep your LinkedIn profile current, and engage with posts from people in your network.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Networking is a skill, and like every DECA skill, it improves with practice. You do not have to be the loudest person in the room. You just have to be curious, kind, and willing to start a conversation. Use every Arizona DECA conference as an opportunity to grow your circle, and your chapter and your future will be better for it.