

# Job Search Groups

## For Networking and Support, Join or Start a Job Club

It's a well-known fact that the best way to find a job is through networking. An abundance of ready-made networking opportunities exists out there, but maybe none of them are right for you or accessible to you. One type of networking venue -- a job club -- could be a solution because it not only enables you to expand your network of contacts but also serves as a support group. The empathy and encouragement provided by supportive peers can be particularly uplifting in times of economic recession.

Job clubs, sometimes known as networking clubs or job-finding clubs, can take on numerous permutations and constituencies. In fact, that's one of their main attractions -- they are subject only to the rules that members want to impose and not on any sort of rigid format or structure. A job club's membership might be a homogeneous group, such as homemakers seeking to return to work after raising families, people all downsized from the same company, friends who live in the same community, unemployed new college grads -- or a heterogeneous group of disparate individuals whose only ostensible common link is the need or desire to find a new job.

What ties people in a job club together is the need for mutual support and encouragement. People who are energized by social situations and tend to procrastinate the lonely tasks of job-hunting will likely benefit from a job club. Those who are shy, insecure, or ashamed of having lost a job can get help from other job club members in overcoming these mental roadblocks. Job-club membership can stave off the depression that sometimes sets in during a protracted job search.

Not only will you feel supported in a job club, but you will probably be more successful than if you went it alone. Those who've been involved with job clubs report that their efforts that are strengthened by belonging to the group and their job searches are shorter. Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the classic *What Color is Your Parachute?* and a strong proponent of job-seeking support groups, notes an 84 percent success rate when job-search techniques are conducted in groups, compared with a 15 percent lower rate when the same techniques are followed individually.

The exchange of job leads, business cards, resumes, ideas, and information that occurs in a job or networking club can energize members and teach everyone valuable career strategies and techniques. Emily Koltnow parlayed the networking group she started into a business. She started with a lunch group of six friends who had lost their jobs around the same time Koltnow did, she relates in *Executive*

*Female*. The group soon grew to 261 and ultimately became Women in Networking.

So, where can you find a job club? Start by looking in your local newspaper's business or community calendar section. Some newspapers list job-club meetings in special sections devoted to employment and workplace issues. In some cities, you can find free employment weekly newspapers with announcements for job clubs. Look for job club or networking club listings. (Note that a networking club, while very useful in its own right, may not offer the same kind of comprehensive support that a job club can). Also try your phone book. You can also find a small listing of Networking and Support Groups in the Internet's [Riley Guide](#). In *What Color is Your Parachute?*, Bolles suggests looking for groups such as Forty Plus and Experience Unlimited, as well as local and state employment offices, the Chamber of Commerce, local colleges and universities (especially community colleges), adult-education centers, or places of worship. You might also look into organizations that cater to specific groups. Women's centers, for example, often offer job-support groups to displaced or returning homemakers. Don't forget your local library, too.

And what if you can't find a club or can't find one that meets your needs? In that case, form your own. Bolles suggests recruiting members by placing an ad near the help-wanted section of your newspaper's classifieds. Similarly, you could post notices in public gathering places.

Among the questions you'll want to consider when starting a job club:

**How many members should you have?** Experts recommend anywhere from two to 30.

**Where should you meet?** You can always gather at members' houses. Refreshments are a nice touch; you can ask members to take turns bringing goodies, or everyone can bring potluck. If your membership is too large for a private home, see if your local library, community hall, or place of worship will provide space for your club. You might also meet at a restaurant and conduct at least part of the proceedings over a meal.

**How often should the club meet?** The usual model is weekly. If it's difficult to find a place to meet or a time when all interested members can attend weekly, you could conduct the bulk of job-club activities virtually -- via phone and e-mail -- and meet less often than weekly, perhaps monthly. Members can phone each other for support. A member who had a job interview could call other members to debrief about how it went.

**Should you charge dues or fees?** Only if expenses are incurred; for example, if you end up having to rent space in a facility.

**Who should lead the group?** The group's founder can certainly lead the job club, as could any member who is deemed to have good leadership skills and experience. Leadership could also rotate among members. In some job clubs, professional facilitators are brought in for at least some of group's activities. Canada even offers a Job Club Leadership Certification.

**What rules do you need to set?** Your job club's structure can be as loose or as formal as you and your members choose. The need for rules will probably be determined as individual situations arise. A number of years ago, I joined a week-long job club at the Knoxville, TN, Women's Center. It was a great experience. I was exposed for the first time to *What Color is Your Parachute?*, as well as to the concept of informational interviewing. The one negative about the club was a very needy member who took up a lot of the club's time griping about problems that were far beyond the scope of what the club could help her with. Your club might want to set rules for how to deal with difficult members and for ensuring that discussions stay on track.

**What goes on at a job club meeting?** The possibilities are myriad. Your gatherings can be part support group, part think tank. The idea is to share each others' job-hunting and career experiences and encourage each other in the quest. What works? What doesn't? Who's hiring? Who's not?

Many job clubs follow a model developed by psychologist Nathan Azrin, widely recognized as the father of job clubs. The model, which assumes weekly meetings, looks like this:

1. Members spend a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting sharing results and accomplishments of the previous week's job hunting.
2. Members ask the group for support in specific areas. This portion of the meeting is a problem-solving and brainstorming session. Members can ask for advice, support, leads, ideas, strategies, and direct assistance. It's in this section of the meeting where a professional facilitator may be the most useful.
3. The meeting ends with members stating their job-search goals for the upcoming week. Members should set goals that can realistically be accomplished by the time of the next meeting. Here, it may be helpful to lay out some good benchmarks, such as a productive

yet realistic number of contacts that members should strive to add to their networks each week.

(Note: This model is also outlined at the Web site of Evergreen State College's Career Development Office, from which the above is adapted).

According to Azrin, job club efforts will be more successful if:

- Job-seekers have a specific goal or focus for their job search. Members should have a good idea of what kind of job they want.
- Job-seekers are well acquainted with their own skills, abilities, and interests. Azrin says members should be able to articulate verbally and in writing at least five skills and abilities that they would bring to a job.
- Job-seekers have considerable knowledge of the employers they wish to approach.
- Job-seekers follow a particular pattern in the way they conduct their research.

Here are some other ideas for job-club activities:

- Members can bring resumes, both so you can critique each others' and so you can exchange them and distribute members' resumes when opportunities present themselves.
- You could mesh the job-club and book-club models. Each member could read a book about an aspect of job-hunting and share the best ideas from the book with the group. Members can also pass out helpful articles about job hunting.
- Members can conduct mock interviews with each other. See our Interview Question Collections for ideas on what to ask. Members can also brainstorm ideas for questions to ask the interviewer.
- Members could critique and help each other pick out interview attire.
- Part of the meeting could be spent conducting employer research, especially if laptops or other computers with Internet access are available.
- Members could take free or inexpensive online or paper-and-pencil career assessments to increase self-knowledge and get an idea whether they've chosen an appropriate career path. See our table comparing and reviewing online career assessments. Caution: It's best to review assessment results with a qualified career counselor.
- Members could nominate favorite career Web sites to share with the group.
- The job club can hold special parties and events during the holidays.
- Members could test their knowledge of job-hunting techniques by taking our Tests and Quizzes for Job-Seekers.
- The club could develop a special ritual or ceremony for "graduating" members who've found a job.
- Guest speakers could be invited to job-club meetings. Career counselors, career coaches, resume writers, authors of career books, college professors, and other experts generally welcome the opportunity to speak on their area of expertise. Topics might include career assessments, resumes, cover letters, interviewing, job-search follow-up, salary negotiation, Internet job-hunting, and company research.
- Club members could take field trips to tour companies of mutual interest. Informational interviews in small groups may even be possible.

## Job Club Resources

*Job Club Counselor's Manual: A Behavioral Approach to Vocational Counseling*, by Nathan H. Azrin (Paperback - January 1981): This book by the father of the job club concept is out of print but may be available in your library.

*The Power of Having People on Your Side: How to Build a Powerful Professional Networking Club*, by Donna Fisher. Includes sample by-laws, member application, and officer job descriptions. Available through [the author's Web site](#).

From Job-Hunt.org: [Job Clubs, Networking, and Job Search Support by State](#). A huge collection of resources, organized by state.

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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