



# CENTRAL OKANAGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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## Connector Guide



# CONNECTOR



The [Connector Program](#) is a formalized community integration initiative designed to broaden a job seeker's network through one-on-one meetings with established business leaders in the community. It is a simple but effective referral process that puts newcomers in touch with highly networked individuals so they can connect to our workforce and settle successfully in our community.

## Interested in Participating?

We are currently building our network of Connectors. If giving back by helping newcomers and recent graduates integrate into the community interests you or you are new to the region, a post-secondary student or recent post-secondary graduate, email [connector@investkelowna.com](mailto:connector@investkelowna.com) for more information.

### Become a Connector

**Connectors** are successful professionals with well-established professional networks in Central Okanagan, who:

- Enjoy making introductions and connecting people
- Are effective communicators and can give supportive and constructive feedback
- Have a desire to support newcomers and young professionals with building their network

#### Connectors Role

- Meet with a 2 - 3 Connectees per year for a 45-60 minute informational meeting
- Listen, ask questions, and share knowledge of current market demands in their industry
- After the meeting, provide the Connectee with a warm introduction to 3 additional contacts. Each of your contacts will be asked for another 3 referrals

#### Benefits of being a Connector

- Access to local talent
- Increased awareness about your organization and industry
- Knowing you are opening doors and helping people succeed in the Central Okanagan
- Contributing to a welcoming and diverse community

### Become a Connectee

#### Why Participate?

The COEDC Connector Program accelerates your integration into the professional community in the Central Okanagan. By building a professional network you will gain new contacts and be better informed of opportunities in the region, helping you to create a successful career in the Central Okanagan.

#### Who Can Participate?

- Newcomers or returnees to the Central Okanagan
- Post Secondary Graduates or Students

#### Benefits For Connectees

- Access to successful professionals with well-established networks in the Central Okanagan to expand and diversify your professional network
- Better understanding of your sector, field of interest, and the local job market
- Opportunity to share details about your experience and expertise
- Valuable feedback about your job search strategy and career path



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## Working in the Central Okanagan

In 2022, a national Connector Program webinar featured highlights from a study by RBC about future employment. The study says Canada is in the early stages of a job revolution, predicting 2.4 million new jobs, or jobs that will be revitalized over the next 4 years. It also said that 50% of today's jobs will be significantly disrupted.

Given that, it says the most highly desirable skills for all employees moving forward are **CONTINUOUS LEARNING** and **FLEXIBILITY**. These transferable skills will be as important as having a specific skill, like accounting, for example.

Additionally, the webinar listed, communication, creativity, complex problem solving, and cultural awareness as the top attributes. Each word has many definitions in the workplace. As a perspective employee, it is useful to understand what the terms mean for a specific role and employer, and to prepare some examples so you can share your capabilities in these areas. You may wish to prepare an answer for questions like: When was a time that you used your complex problem-solving skills and what was the result? OR When have you demonstrated cultural awareness and what was the result?

Cultural awareness is about your values and how you treat others, people like you and those mildly or very different from you. This can include how they speak, think, act, behave, etc. Respect is everything.

All workplaces, like families, have a culture. This isn't about ancestry. It's about what is accepted and what isn't. That can be everything from open-minded and welcoming, to more insular. There are many words to describe the culture of an organization, stuffy or fresh, vibrant or dull, energetic or sluggish, driven or just willing to do enough to get by, rigid or flexible and so on.

More and more employers are looking for someone who fits within the culture of the organization, not simply someone with the necessary skills. It is up to you to fit in if you really want to work someplace. Ideally you find a job with a culture that aligns with your values, but you may not and that's ok. You may decide to change it, which is really challenging, or you accept it seeing this job as a step to a longer-term career path.

## The Central Okanagan work landscape:

- ✓ Canada's fastest growing and most entrepreneurial region
- ✓ There are many independent business owners and sole-proprietorships and support required to help those businesses get started, 19% of all those employed here are self-employed, which is higher than in all of BC and in all of Canada.
- ✓ There are only a few Cooperatives
- ✓ There is a high concentration of non-profit organizations
- ✓ Limited Government-based roles
- ✓ Interior Health employs the most people
- ✓ 27% of occupations are in sales and service. This chart shows the labour force by occupation - <https://data.investkelowna.com/labour-force-profile>

### Main industries

Labour force by industries expressed as a percentage of the total labour force

Industry	Count	Rate (%)
Health care and social assistance	16,690	14.00
Retail trade	15,125	12.70
Construction	13,695	11.50
Professional, scientific and technical services	9,570	8.00
Accommodation and food services	8,820	7.40

Data source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

- ✓ There are many small to medium sized businesses and relatively few with over 500 employees
- ✓ Most businesses don't have unions, however some that do include Interior Health, most government offices, and education
- ✓ More and more businesspeople recognize the importance of cooperation and collaboration
- ✓ There is a group of people working toward a more circular economy, developing ways to make use of waste products or biproducts, for example
- ✓ In 2021, the median household income was \$85,000
- ✓ Until more recently, many businesses didn't have trouble filling rolls, except agriculture which counts on temporary foreign labour.
- ✓ This is one of a very few warmer winter regions in Canada so many people want to call this region home
- ✓ Work hours may be more flexible in some jobs enabling enjoyment of outdoor activities sometime during the day
- ✓ Meetings start on time, so being punctual is important. You can arrive 5-10 minutes early which allows you time to network
- ✓ There is less sense of urgency to return calls so if people don't get back to you, it's not about you. They are busy and get lots of calls. Reach out to them again in 3-4 business days as a follow-up friendly reminder
- ✓ A great work ethic tends to stand out





## Finding work in the Central Okanagan

### *Suggestions from Connector Program lead*

Operating the Central Okanagan Connector Program, I've had the pleasure of meeting hundreds of connectees. I also get to work with great Connector volunteers who make the program possible. Here are some general thoughts about the Central Okanagan job market and job searching that may be helpful. Please email [connector@investkelowna.com](mailto:connector@investkelowna.com) if you have comments, questions or more tips you think could be added to this list.

- ✓ If you are new to the area, or even returning after some years away, the importance of growing your network can't be stressed enough. Word of mouth travels fast in this region and there can be jobs here if the right person comes along or employers find out about someone through a referral.
- ✓ As within any community, some people are more active and plugged into what is happening throughout the region. Try and get to know these people. LinkedIn is a useful and used channel.
- ✓ Consider applying even if you don't meet 100% of the desired qualifications. You may just get the role, but even if you don't, you have someone in the community who knows of you and your search for work. If you are applying for jobs with Interior Health, be sure to meet all the qualifications.
- ✓ Apply, apply, apply. Some suggest spending 30-120 minutes a day applying for jobs, typically two applications per day.
- ✓ Volunteering in your desired field can lead to paid work.
- ✓ Follow up with people. Send thank you notes/emails/cards when people give you their time for a meeting or interview.
- ✓ Reach out proactively and ask for informational meetings/coffee to learn more about a prospective employer and then come prepared as though it might be a pre-interview. Offer to leave your paper resume with them and then email it to them or HR to have on hand.
- ✓ Be proactive and drop in at places where you think you'd like to work. See if there is anyone you can leave your resume with, or talk with, or get a contact for so you can set up an informational meeting and keep in touch.

- ✓ You may usually bring your notes into an interview which contain reminders of answers to questions you think you may be asked. Just check in at the beginning of the interview if it's OK to have notes.
- ✓ Try to connect with at least two people a day. (coworkers, bosses, family, friends,) Sometimes, even the grocery store clerk. Practice breaking the ice to see if you can get them to talk with you more than just How is your day? Or How are you? It's a way to get more comfortable speaking with people you don't know, without being introduced. The great majority of people will talk with you, but you are likely to be the one who must speak first.
- ✓ When you meet someone, think about or ask them if there is anything you can do to help them. This might be sharing information with them, making an introduction to someone you know, or sharing a tip about a great experience you just had that they may want to try. People tend to remember people who help or offer to help them.
- ✓ There are two approaches for finding work – seeking the ideal job or starting to work knowing that one position will lead to another (not necessarily within the same organization). My best advice is to just land a job, particularly for those who haven't worked in Canada. Canadian work experience is highly valued because it can provide you with a local reference.
- ✓ If your resume includes jobs with companies in other countries, include a short description of the business. This saves perspective employers time in looking up the company, which they may or may not do.
- ✓ Get involved in the community. Attend events or go places and just talk with people. Network. These don't have to be paid events. There are several places to visit without cost. How about the dog park, even if you don't own a dog.
- ✓ Have a brief description of who you are, how you arrived in the Central Okanagan and why, your skillset and what type of work you are looking for (Specific to one location? Full-time, part-time or contract, an entry-level role or a more senior one, etc.) Share this description with as many people as you can. It's called your elevator pitch, because you should be able to share all this information, concisely in about the time it takes to ride an elevator.
- ✓ Employers are as interested, if not more interested in your skills and transferable knowledge, versus your education credentials so highlight them on your resume.
- ✓ Even with a master's degree or PhD, without work experience, it is likely going to be harder to find a job.
- ✓ If you leave a job, leave with relationships at that workplace intact, if you can. Your reputation typically stays with you and proceeds how others think of you, even before your work accomplishments.
- ✓ Investigate the place of business you want to work at before you attend an interview.
- ✓ Read more about Okanagan Work Culture and Professionalism.





## Professionalism in the Central Okanagan

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines professionalism as "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person" So what does professionalism look like in the Central Okanagan?

First, it's about your personal brand. It's not about how you think you behave or what you think your personality and characteristics are, it's about how others perceive you.

You may disagree with them, but when it comes to professionalism, "their perception is everything".

Humans form perceptions of other people quickly by how they look and behave. It seems judgemental, and it is but we constantly size up others. Are they respectful, kind, considerate, honest, trustworthy, open, confident, bossy, stubborn, persistent, resilient, and the list goes on. How do they speak. What do they value? How do they treat others? How are they dressed?

Exercise: Think about how you would like to be described as an employee. Make a list. For example, dedicated, friendly, supportive of others, willing to pitch in, a happy personality, well-groomed, always on time, someone who participates, someone who leads even if not in a leadership role, and so on. Then, ask two or three people who know you from work to describe you. If your list and theirs don't match, it might be an opportunity to think about how you need to change your behaviour, so they describe you using the words you'd like them to describe you with.

One thing a potential employee may overlook is their social media channel content and the impression an employer may get about them if the search posts open to the public. Think about what your various posts might say about the person you are.

The Canadian work culture has changed in the past 20 years, less top-down, hierarchical management, less "do what I say" and more collaborative. "Here's how we do it, but if you have a better way, please speak up." While speaking up is not possible in every role, generally, there are opportunities and flexibility for great ideas to come from any part, or level, of the organization.

Professionalism is still an expectation in most workplaces.

In the corporate environment, professionalism is largely driven by:

- your/the business strategy or dream
- passion and commitment to achieve
- drive and determination
- teamwork and recognition of others
- resilience and resourcefulness when times get tough
- gratitude and thankfulness for people and achievements

Some professionalism tips (no special order):

- Be 5 -10 minutes early – for interviews and your job. Some people won't give you a second chance if you're late.
- Always present yourself dressed professionally, which usually means one step up from what you think your potential boss will be wearing, especially for an interview, either in person or online. If you think they will wear a dress shirt, then wear a dress shirt with a tie, for example. Rarely, will people fault anyone for being nicely dressed. Typically, sweatpants are never appropriate for an interview – even online.
- Be honest and have integrity, which means doing what you say you are going to do by when you say you are going to do it.
- Be humble - You don't need to have all the answers just the ability to listen and confidence to ask questions.
- Professionalism is putting aside your personal bias to get the job done, for the sake of the team or company.
- Check your ego. While your personal values help determine where you work (Ideally, you need a fit), once you have a role, uphold the ethics/values of your organization, your association and your profession. If you exceed that, great. If your personal values are different, find a way to uphold the corporate values. If they're at odds, and you can't reconcile them, it's not the best job for you. You can try to change the corporate values if they are truly unethical. Speak out if people aren't upholding the corporate values. But if you really don't fit, the professional decision is to resign.
- Be kind, considerate and generally a nice person – buy donut holes for the team or send your boss a thank you card, bring dollar store candies.
- Acknowledge and accept your co-workers for what they bring to the table good and bad and compliment them or let them know how they are doing good or bad! You are all part of a team that plays a role in success or failure and should be accountable for that.
- Have empathy for others – walk a mile in their shoes.
- Have professional social channels (LinkedIn)
- Follow up with people, this includes people in your network. See if you can keep a connection alive by reconnecting every 3-6 months.

- You don't have to say everything you think.
- Whatever you write down stays forever. Don't push the send button in anger. Take time to review your answers.
- Watch your facial expressions and be aware of body language. It's the most powerful form of communication. Don't slouch, but instead lean forward when speaking, match the tone of the person you are speaking with and look people in the eye when speaking.
- Learn how to have critical or hard conversations. There is a pattern and skill to doing this well and the better you do it, the more likely you will get the results you desire.
- If you have a problem with a fellow employee, speak to them first to better understand and then resolve the matter – one of those tough conversations - , rather than going to their boss or yours with the issue, unless they have done something illegal or criminal like harassment or assault.
- Trust your instincts and skills. Find the balance between taking initiative and asking, “can I do this?”
- Seek and accept coaching and constructive criticism/feedback.
- Own your mistakes, recognize them, acknowledge them, admit and apologize for them and learn from them. When you own a mistake and need to inform coworkers or your boss, try to come with a solution. “I made this mistake, but it can be resolved if \_\_\_\_\_.” OR “I made this mistake, but I've already apologized and resolved it.”
- If you bring forward a problem or issue, if possible, offer at least one potential solution. It shows you've tried to problem-solve pro-actively.
- Take pride in your work and do your best every day but if there is a day where you feel off, don't try to hide it, acknowledge it with your team, if the work culture allows. It may be OK once in a while to admit that you are at work but didn't have a good rest because your child was sick in the night, for example. However, be cautious that this doesn't become a pattern or excuse for poor performance.
- Be a lifelong learner.
- Manage expectations of what you can deliver and when, then over deliver whenever possible be early and do it better than promised. If you must, ask for feedback part way through your work to ensure what you are doing is on the right track. For example, promise you'll have something done by end of day Wednesday but complete it in on Tuesday.
- Imitate or emulate employers and people you like and avoid emulating those you don't.
- Make your boss shine. Help them reach their goals. It will help you.
- Leave all jobs on a positive with your former boss/colleagues, if you can.



## Networking 101

### Making networking work for you

The Connector Program is designed to help educated job seekers build their professional network. We can't promise a job but given the population, many people in the Central Okanagan are connected to others through work, sports, leisure activities, their children, school, and so on.

For a few people, networking is easy, but most people get better only by doing it. While you can do mock networking with friends, the best places to practise are events. It's important to get comfortable approaching someone you don't know to introduce yourself and start a conversation. Networking can be particularly uncomfortable or culturally strange depending on the culture in which you are most comfortable.

### Will people introduce themselves to me if they see that I'm new?

Some people might, but it is more likely you will need to approach a stranger to introduce yourself or interrupt a group of people who are already speaking together to join their circle to chat.

In Canadian culture, it is common to reach out your hand for a handshake, as you say, "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_." OR "I noticed you all speaking together, I'd like to introduce myself since I'm (new to networking OR new to the region OR moved here recently) and I am trying to meet more people." Most people will say "Hello" and then you can share a bit about yourself like:

*"I've relocated here from \_\_(where)\_\_(alone or with whom). I have experience in \_\_(list top three skills)\_\_\_and am exploring how these skills (or my education and previous work experience) could be a fit for employment locally. I'm very interested in growing my network in the region, to see how my skills could help others, as well to learn more about work life here. Ideally, I hope to make connections in the \_\_\_\_\_ sector, or with people who are connected to people in that sector, but I am open to meeting all new people."*

The paragraph above is sometimes referred to as your quick or elevator pitch and should be crafted so you can speak it with ease to let people know right away some of your skills that could be helpful to others/or a business.

NOTE: In Canada, it is perfectly OK for a woman to approach a man she does not know or a group of men talking at a networking event to introduce herself and offer a handshake. There is no requirement that a third person make the introduction.

## Some conversation starter questions those new to networking can try to keep conversation going:

- What brings you out to this event? Have you attended before?
- Do you know many people here?
- How long have you lived in the Okanagan? Did you grow up here?
- What do you do for work?
- Can you tell me more about working in the region in general?
- What's the best career advice you've ever received?
- What attracted you to your job? Your industry? This region?
- What's the best part of your job and also the biggest challenge?
- What skills do you think are most important in your work or for me to know in my work search?
- Are there others at this event you think I should introduce myself to, or speak with? If you know them, could you please introduce us?

It is also Ok to ask some personal questions such as:

- Do you have a family? If so, where do your children go to school? What does your partner do? Partner is used on purpose as it is the most inclusive word and gender neutral. Many people have partners who also are connected in their own line of work.
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- Are there things here I should see or do? Can you make recommendations?

NOTE: Most people at networking events do not talk about politics or religion. They do talk about the weather.

## Ending a conversation tactfully

You've talked with one person for a few minutes. They can't introduce you to anyone else in the room so you want to move on to speak with someone else. Here are a couple of examples of things you can say.

*"It's been good to meet and talk with you. Thank you for your time. I'm going to go and try and meet a few other new people here since I attended to try to meet as many people as I can."*

If that is too difficult, you can always excuse yourself by saying, *"I hope you'll excuse me, but I need to use the washroom."* Then go to the washroom. This isn't recommended but it can be a way to leave a conversation.

## Other networking tips:

- Give yourself a goal to meet a certain number of people at one event.
- If you can offer to help someone with something simple that comes up in conversation, do it. People will remember those who helped them, even if it is a small thing.
- Ask people you meet if they have a business card. (It's always good to have their information so you can send them a quick email after the event to say how much you enjoyed meeting them.)
- Consider having a personal business card made. Many online programs do this, and stationary stores offer templates and printing at a reasonable cost. Even if you don't have a hard printed copy, save a photo of your business card on your phone as a photo. That way someone can easily take a picture of it.
- If possible, take a friend or a spouse to the event with you so you can help each other.
- Interactions don't have to be long to be valuable.
- If you meet someone and you don't feel their information is valuable to you, move on to meet someone else.
- Ask if you can connect with people on LinkedIn – this is also a good reason to get their business card so you can look them up after the meeting and ask to connect.



## The importance of LinkedIn

People here use this tool for networking and to connect to others for business. Most often, it is good to share a message when trying to connect with someone, even someone you've already met in person.

Sample connection messages on LinkedIn borrowed from Richard Gawles, entrepreneur, speaker, marketer at his company called Landing.

*Hi \_ (insert their name) \_\_\_\_*

*I enjoyed your (post, webinar, meeting you at \_\_\_\_\_).*

*We are both (\_\_\_\_\_).*

*I'd love to connect you to \_\_\_\_\_ OR share this (article, story, name, etc.) with you as a potential resource.*

*OR*

*I'm interested in (\_\_\_\_x company) and was wondering if you could give me some advice on what they look for in an ideal candidate.*

*OR*

*Would you be open to a short 15-20 min networking meeting so I could ask a few questions? No worries if this isn't a good time.*

*OR*

*I see you are friends with (\_\_\_\_\_), and I wonder if you'd be willing to make a soft introduction. No worries if this isn't something you feel comfortable with.*

*Best,  
(Your name)*

## Other tips on LinkedIn

- Follow up again in six months with new contacts, if you can, just to say hello and keep the relationship alive.
- Offer dates when you are free for a meeting, your phone number and email or send a meeting request so it can be in a calendar.
- Think about how you can help those you connect to and, if possible, do it.
- When you receive a request for connection from someone you don't know, accept the request, and ask them why they wanted to connect with you. Hi x Thanks for reaching out. I love making a new connection. What about my profile brought you to me? How can I help you?
- Then you can decide if you want to keep the connection or block it.

Remember, NO one is great at this stuff. The only way to get better is practice! Don't be afraid to ask people for help. Ask people how they'd approach a perspective employer? Ask others to describe their skills and what they are good at so you can mimic parts you like in your own introduction. You want to sound humble and impressive at the same time - smart but not cocky.



## Preparing for an Informational Interview

### Informational interviews demystified

Part of the process of making new business connections, to hopefully lead to work within the Central Okanagan or beyond, may involve seeking informational interviews with companies or people. This type of interview is not a job interview but instead a meeting/conversation to gain industry insights that can't easily be found elsewhere.

These interviews may be helpful to:

- enable you to meet face-to-face and share your resume
- give employers a face to go with your name
- inspire you to make more-informed decisions about your career or job search
- help gather information that may lead to meeting other perspective information sources or potential employers. Sometimes, they can even lead to a job, either with that company or with someone who knows someone else who is looking for an employee. Jobs can come from direct referrals, rather than through an application process.

The best way to pursue an informational meeting is to stop in to drop off a resume in person at the business' local office, if they have one. Phone calls are OK, but really the best approach is to visit in person.

Always explain how you found out about the company/person and, if you are part of the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission's Connector Program, mention that as well. Tell them how much you would appreciate a 15–20-minute informational interview with either a specific person, (if you know that) or with someone at the business, because you are working toward building your professional network.

The goal is to keep the meeting request time short, making it more likely for them to share their time. Offering to book the meeting another time, rather than when you have stopped in, may increase the possibility of obtaining a meeting.

These meetings will not likely result in a job offer immediately. However, you can ask them about their companies, if and how they would see your experience fitting in at their business or elsewhere and any tips/ thoughts they'd have to share that would be helpful to you. The goal is to get more information that would help you find work.

Sample questions include:

- What type of jobs should I be looking for, or would be qualified for, given my skills, experience and work status?
- Where would these types of jobs be located within the Okanagan?
- How often are they advertised publicly and where?
- Do you have any suggestions where to seek work or about how to improve my resume?
- Are there other companies or people you could refer me to, or that I should be reaching out to?
- What is the work culture like in your company and in the Okanagan?
- Is there any further advice you can provide that can help me in my search for employment?

Finally, don't be afraid to reach out several times to the same person to stay connected, if you do it in a nice way, persistence can pay off.

# CONNECTOR







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