



# Module: Fostering Career Growth

This module covers professional development, including building a network, developing skills for career growth, and engaging in continuous learning opportunities.

# About CanWork BC

CanWork BC aims to make it easier for youth with disabilities ages to 15 to 30 years old to find and keep employment. There are a series of tools and resources for youth, employers, service providers, educators, and caregivers.

CanAssist at the University of Victoria, with the support of the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, wrote the Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities (ESYD). This strategy informed the tools and resources.

## The Youth Tool

The CanWork BC youth tool is available as an interactive online platform at [portal.canworkbc.ca](http://portal.canworkbc.ca) and through PDF workbooks such as this one. There are five dimensions of content available.

For the full PDF workbook content and accompanying facilitator guides, as well as other CanWork BC tools and resources, go to [canworkbc.ca](http://canworkbc.ca).

# Introduction

This module has three sections to help you build your understanding of employment navigation. You'll explore:

- How to build and maintain a strong professional network.
- How to prepare for and make the most of a coffee chat.
- How to keep a positive and professional online presence.

Each section will take around 15-30 minutes to complete, and you're welcome to take breaks in between.

Each section has activities that connect employment navigation to your own life to make sure this is useful for you. Be prepared to think about and record your answers in whatever way works best. That could be writing your answers in this workbook or using a different format that works for you like voice recording or typing in a notes app.

At the end of the module, you'll have the chance to put what you've learned into practice with reflection questions. Let's get started!

# Section 1: Building a Professional Network

Building a professional network takes time and effort. Whether you're just starting or already have some connections, it's important to keep working on strengthening and growing your network. This is one way to stay connected to new opportunities and build relationships that support your career.

## **In this section, we'll cover:**

- How to build and maintain a strong professional network.
- How to prepare for and make the most of a coffee chat.
- How to keep a positive and professional online presence.

By the end of this section, you'll have a better understanding of how to build strong connections in your type of work and use them to grow your career. You'll be ready to start applying these strategies to strengthen your network.

## **Engage and Explore**

### **Networking: Online and In Person**

Networking online and in person is important for building strong professional relationships. Using both methods can help you grow a diverse and supportive network. Let's explore each approach:

## Online networking

Online platforms give you access to professionals from all over the world. There are popular tools for connecting with people in your area of work, staying updated on trends, and sharing insights, including:

- LinkedIn - [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)
- X (formally known as Twitter) - [x.com](https://www.x.com)
- Facebook - [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)

Here are some tips to help you make the most of these platforms safely:

- Update your LinkedIn profile with your skills, experience, and career goals.
- Don't wait for others to connect. Reach out, comment on posts, and share your ideas. Remember to keep your comments professional.
- Follow people or companies who do similar types of work. By engaging with their content and discussions a wider audience will see your profile.
- Be mindful of what personal information you share – such as your location or financial information. If you wouldn't share a piece of information with someone you just met in person, don't share it online.

## In-person networking

In-person networking helps you build connections by joining professional groups or attending events like conferences, trade shows, or job fairs to meet experts and recruiters. Before attending,

research the speakers or companies and prepare a few questions to help start conversations.

Here are a few tips to help you find in-person networking events:

- Look online for events on websites like:
  - Eventbrite - [eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca)
  - Meetup - [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)
  - Facebook events - [facebook.com/events](https://www.facebook.com/events)
- Universities often host networking events for alumni and students.
- Industry organizations offer conferences and seminars to connect with like-minded people.
- Be safe in your interactions. If you are meeting an individual or smaller group for the first time, arrange to meet them in a public place and be sure to let someone in your life know your plans.

## **The Power of a Coffee Chat**

A coffee chat is a casual one-on-one conversation that can take place in person or online. It doesn't even have to involve actual coffee!

These informal meetings are a simple and effective way to network and build strong connections. Here's how you can prepare for and make the most of them:

What	How
<b>Prepare questions</b>	Before your coffee chat, consider what you want to learn from the conversation. This could include asking about the person's career path, advice for someone starting out in the industry, or their thoughts on the future of this area of work. For example, you might ask "How did you get started in this career?" or "What skills do you think are most important in this industry?"
<b>Start with small talk</b>	Begin the conversation with small talk to break the ice. Ask how their day is going or comment on your shared interests. This makes the chat more comfortable and helps you make connections.
<b>Be polite and respect their time</b>	Remember that the person you're speaking to is taking time out of their day to meet with you. Respect their time by being punctual and keeping the conversation on track. If you set a time limit for the chat, try to follow it, and avoid staying longer than planned.
<b>Send a thank-you</b>	After the coffee chat, send a thank-you note or email to show appreciation for their time and

**note and  
follow up**

insights. In your thank-you message, mention something specific you enjoyed or found helpful from the conversation. This personal touch shows you valued the meeting and helps strengthen the connection.

## Make it Personal

### Networking Online with LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a website where professionals connect, share ideas, and grow their careers. Networking online is an important part of growing your professional network. Whether you're just starting or already have a LinkedIn profile, this guide will help you take action and start expanding your network.

If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, you can create one by following these guides on setting up and updating your LinkedIn profile:

- [linkedin.com/learning/learning-linkedin-19899255/set-up-a-new-linkedin-account](https://www.linkedin.com/learning/learning-linkedin-19899255/set-up-a-new-linkedin-account)
- [linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a554351](https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/a554351)

Once your profile is ready, use the following steps to find and connect with the right people.

#### **Step 1: Find and connect with people**

Start by finding professionals who match your career goals.



- **Search for people:** Use LinkedIn's search bar to find people with jobs that interest you. You can filter by location, companies, or job titles. Look for people who share your interests or work at companies you admire.
- **Use keywords and hashtags:** Search with industry-specific keywords or hashtags, such as "graphic design" or #marketing to find relevant connections.

## **Step 2: Send a personal connection request**

Always **personalize** your message when sending a connection request. This shows you're genuinely interested. Here's a sample message:

*"Hi [Name], I came across your profile and noticed that we share an interest in [mention a topic or industry]. I'd love to connect and learn more about your work at [Company Name]. Looking forward to connecting!"*

A good connection request should:

- **Be personal:** Mention something specific about their work.
- **Be relevant:** Explain why you want to connect, such as shared interests or similar career goals.
- **Be professional:** Keep the tone respectful and polite.

### Step 3: Follow up after they accept

Once they accept, follow up to start a conversation, thanking them for accepting your connection and mention something specific that caught your attention about their profile or career. Here's a sample follow-up message:

*"Hi [Name], thank you for accepting my connection request! I've been following your work at [Company] and would love to ask you a few questions about [topic]. Would you be open to a quick virtual coffee chat sometime soon?"*

Keep your message clear and simple. Say why you want to talk, like learning about their work, getting career advice, or discussing a shared interest. Be polite and make your request easy to understand.

### Step 4: Keep in touch

Stay engaged after your initial conversation:

- **Engage with their posts:** Like or comment on their updates to stay on their mind.
- **Share resources:** If you find something useful for them, send a quick message to share it.
- **Check in:** Every now and then, send a brief message to see how they're doing or share something new.

## Section 2: Pursuing Career Development

Career development is all about taking steps to grow in your career. Whether you're looking for a promotion, raise, or new responsibilities, it's important to look for ways to improve. A great way to show your growth is by building a strong professional portfolio that highlights your work and achievements.

### **In this section, we'll cover:**

- How to take on new responsibilities to advance your career.
- How to ask for promotions or raises with confidence.
- How to create and maintain a professional portfolio of your work.

By the end of this section, you'll have a better understanding of tools to take charge and move forward in your career with confidence.

## Engage and Explore

### **Take On New Responsibilities**

One of the best ways to develop in your career is by volunteering to take on new tasks at work. This shows initiative and can help you build new skills that will make you more valuable to your team and employer. Here's how to get started:

- **Find where help is needed**

Pay attention to your workplace and find areas where you can offer more help or make a difference.

- **Offer to help with projects**

Volunteer to assist with tasks that aren't part of your usual job. For example, if your team is working on a big project, you could help organize tasks, do research, or assist with reports. Be sure to check in with your manager before taking on new work so you can balance new tasks with your current work responsibilities.

- **Try new things**

Don't be afraid to take on tasks that help you learn something new, like using new software, presenting in meetings, or managing a small team.

## **Aim for a Promotion**

Asking for a promotion is an important part of career growth, but it requires careful preparation. You need to demonstrate that you're ready for the next step by showcasing your skills and accomplishments. Here are some steps to take:

- **Track your accomplishments**

Document your contributions to the team and company. This could be meeting or exceeding targets, saving the company money, or solving problems that improve efficiency.

- **Talk to your manager**

Regularly communicate with your supervisor about your career goals. Ask what skills or experiences you need to develop to be considered for a promotion.

- **Prepare a case for promotion**

When the time comes to ask for a promotion, present a strong case. Highlight your achievements, how you've taken on new responsibilities, and how you've added value to the team.

## **Ask for Raises**

Discussing a raise is another key part of career development. It's important to ask for raises at the right time and with the right preparation. Here's how to approach it:

- **Research salary trends**

Find out the average salary for your role in your industry and location. This will help you understand what a fair raise would look like. You can find this kind of information online, or by asking friends, family, or mentors who work in a similar field.

- **Timing matters**

Try to ask for a raise during performance reviews or after you've successfully completed a major project. Some companies will have policies for the timing and frequency of raises so you can look into that as well.

- **Highlight your value**

When you ask for a raise, focus on the value you've brought to the company. Emphasize your achievements and any new skills or responsibilities you've taken on.

## Create a Professional Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of your work that highlights your skills, experience, and achievements. Unlike a resume, which provides a summary of your qualifications and work history, a portfolio offers a more in-depth look at specific examples of your work. It's a great tool for pursuing career development, especially when applying for new roles or asking for promotions.

### What to include in a portfolio

- **Completed projects:** Add important projects you've worked on, describing your role and the results.
- **Achievements:** Highlight things you're proud of, like awards, certifications, or major successes.
- **Skills:** List the skills you've developed, from technical abilities (like software knowledge) to soft skills (like leadership or teamwork).

### How to build your portfolio

- **Keep it updated:** Regularly add new projects and achievements to your portfolio.

- **Make it digital:** Create an online portfolio that you can easily share with employers or clients.
- **Customize it:** Adjust your portfolio to match the job or promotion you're aiming for. Focus on the skills and projects that are most relevant to the opportunity.

Career development is about improving yourself. Take on new challenges, aim for promotions, ask for raises, and keep your portfolio updated. Taking these steps will help you be ready for new opportunities!

## Make it Personal

### Create Your Professional Portfolio

#### Step 1: Choose Your Portfolio Format

Decide whether to create a physical portfolio (like a binder) or a digital one (using tools like Google Drive, a website, or a PDF). Digital portfolios are easier to share and update. You can use templates to help you organize and showcase your work professionally from sites like:

- Canva - [canva.com/search?q=portfolio%20template](https://canva.com/search?q=portfolio%20template)
- Adobe - [adobe.com/express/create/online-portfolio](https://adobe.com/express/create/online-portfolio)
- Wix - [wix.com/website/templates/html/portfolio-cv/portfolios](https://wix.com/website/templates/html/portfolio-cv/portfolios)

#### Step 2: Gather Your Work

Collect your work and achievements, including:

- **Completed projects:** Include any projects you've worked on at work, school, or in volunteer positions. Describe your role and the results of the project.
- **Achievements:** List awards, certifications, successful projects, or positive feedback.
- **Skills:** Include technical and soft skills with examples of how you've used them.

### Step 3: Organize Your Portfolio

Depending on your role, organize the content into clear sections, such as:

- **Introduction/about me:** A short description of who you are, your career goals, and what you're passionate about.
- **Work samples/projects:** Include screenshots of your work, a brief description of the project and clearly explain what your role was and what tasks you did.
- **Skills:** List your skills and how they've helped you succeed.
- **Achievements:** Highlight key accomplishments, awards, or certifications.

### Step 4: Make It Visually Appealing

If you are creating a digital portfolio, use a clean and professional layout with clear headings, easy-to-read fonts, and consistent



formatting. If you're creating a physical portfolio, use dividers and labels to keep everything organized.

### **Step 5: Update Regularly**

Your portfolio is something that you can develop over time. As you take on new projects or achieve new milestones, add them to your portfolio. Regular updates will keep it ready for any career opportunities.

## Section 3: Committing to Continuous Learning

Staying on top of your career means always learning and improving. No matter how much you already know, there's always something new to learn that can help you grow. By focusing on continuous learning, you can stay ready for new challenges and opportunities.

**In this section, we'll cover:**

- How to keep learning and stay up to date in your type of work.
- Where to find training and certifications to boost your skills.
- How having a mentor can help you grow in your career.

By the end of this section, you'll have the tools to keep learning and moving forward in your career. Let's get started!

### Engage and Explore

#### Keep Learning for Your Career

In today's fast-paced world, staying up to date with information is important for career growth. The more you learn, the more prepared you'll be for new opportunities. Here's how to keep growing in your career:

##### 1. Stay updated in your line of work

Industries change quickly, so it's important to keep up with the latest trends and skills to remain competitive and ready for new challenges. Here's how to do it:

- **Read industry news**

Follow blogs, websites, and social media that relates to the type of work you do or are interested in. For example:

- TechCrunch - [techcrunch.com](https://techcrunch.com)
- Wired - [wired.com](https://wired.com)

- **Join professional groups**

Connect with others online or in person to share knowledge and learn. Industry-specific forums and LinkedIn Groups can be great places to start.

- [linkedin.com/groups](https://linkedin.com/groups)

- **Attend webinars and conferences**

These events are a great way to hear from experts, learn new skills, get inspired, and connect with other professionals.

## **2. Find training and learning opportunities**

Training programs and courses help you build the skills to improve your career. You don't need to go back to school in the traditional sense. There are many online and community-based learning options, such as:

- **Online courses**

Different platforms offer a variety of online courses, from leadership to coding, many of which are free or low-cost. For example:

- Coursera - [coursera.org](https://coursera.org)
- Udemy - [udemy.com](https://udemy.com)
- LinkedIn Learning - [learning.linkedin.com](https://learning.linkedin.com)

- **Workshops and boot camps**

Short, intensive, hands-on experience programs can help you learn new skills quickly. **For example**, if you want to learn about project management, look for workshops in your area or online.

- **Employer resources**

If you're working, check if your company offers training programs or tuition support. Many employers invest in their employees' growth by providing these opportunities.

### **3. Get certifications to improve your skills**

Certifications show employers that you've put in the time and effort to become an expert in certain areas. It can make you stand out and increase your chances of promotion. Here's how to get one:

- **Well-known certifications**

Some jobs have popular certifications that are highly valued, like getting a FOODSAFE certification to work in a restaurant or a PMP (Project Management Professional) certification for project managers.

- **Skill-based certifications**

Certifications help show your expertise in a specific skill or tool, often related to software or technology. **For example**, certifications in Microsoft Excel, Google Analytics, or data analysis can prove your abilities.

- **Affordable certifications**

Some certifications are free, while others might cost a bit more. Check out your industry's professional association or websites like these for affordable options:

- edX - [edx.org](https://edx.org)
- Coursera - [coursera.org](https://coursera.org)

#### **4. Find a mentor**

Mentors are people who have more experience in the types of work you are interested in who can offer advice and help you grow faster by sharing their knowledge.

##### **How to find a mentor:**

- Look for someone with the skills and experiences you want, like a coworker, manager, or someone you meet at events.
- Reach out and ask for advice. Mentors usually appreciate someone eager to learn.
- Be open to their feedback. It will help you improve and progress through your career.
- Once you make a connection with a mentor, it's a good idea to talk about their availability and communication preferences (such as do they prefer email or a phone call) to make sure you both have the same expectations for how often you will connect.

Keep learning to grow in your career. Whether it's through courses, certifications, or finding a mentor, every new skill you learn helps you advance. Make learning part of your career plan and always look for ways to improve!

## Take Action for Your Career Growth

You've learned how important continuous learning is for your career. Now it's time to take action! Pick one of the ideas below and complete the action behind it. Then, write down your response and set a deadline to complete the action. Don't wait. You can start today to make steady progress toward your career goals. Every small step adds up to big growth!

### 1. Find an online course

Look for an online course to grow your career. It could be about a new skill, tool, or leadership. Write down the course name and set a deadline for when you want to complete it.

### 2. Explore a workshop or conference

Find a workshop or conference (online or in person) related to your type of work that could help you learn new things and grow your network. Write down the event name and the date you plan to attend.

### 3. Stay updated with industry trends

Stay updated in your area of work by reading an article or subscribing to your industry newsletter. Write down the article or newsletter you plan to read, and when you'll get started.

### 4. Identify a mentor

Find someone who could be a mentor and guide you in your career. It could be a colleague, boss, or industry professional. Write down their name and when you'll reach out to them.

# Make it Personal

## Take Action for Your Career Growth

You've learned how important continuous learning is for your career. Now it's time to take action! Pick one of the ideas below and complete the action behind it. Then, write down your response and set a deadline to complete the action. Don't wait. You can start today to make steady progress toward your career goals. Every small step adds up to big growth!

Step	Heading
<b>Find an online course</b>	Look for an online course to grow your career. It could be about a new skill, tool, or leadership. Write down the course name and set a deadline for when you want to complete it.
<b>Explore a workshop or conference</b>	Find a workshop or conference (online or in person) related to your type of work that could help you learn new things and grow your network. Write down the event name and the date you plan to attend.

<b>Stay updated with industry trends</b>	Stay updated in your area of work by reading an article or subscribing to your industry newsletter. Write down the article or newsletter you plan to read, and when you'll get started.
<b>Identify a mentor</b>	Find someone who could be a mentor and guide you in your career. It could be a colleague, boss, or industry professional. Write down their name and when you'll reach out to them.

## Reflect and Connect

Great work! We've covered a lot in this module including:

- Learning how to build and keep a strong professional network.
- Understanding how to find career growth opportunities like promotions or raises.
- Know how to stay up to date in your area of work and keep learning.

Take a moment to think about the questions below and how they relate to your experiences. Think of this as a reflective journal for yourself, which you can refer to later.

Happy reflecting!



**What professional groups or online platforms could you join to expand your network? Do you feel more comfortable networking in person or online?**

**What achievements would you include in a professional portfolio or conversation about a potential raise or promotion to highlight your work? How does that work show you are ready for a new challenge?**

**What learning opportunities could help you reach your goals?  
Where will you look for them?**

**Who could you approach for mentorship to help guide your  
career growth?**

# Keep Going

There is so much more to learn! Access the full CanWork BC content and learn more about the program at **[canworkbc.ca](https://canworkbc.ca)**.

Canada



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

This program is funded by the Government of Canada  
and the Province of British Columbia.