
Getting involved with a networking group or professional association is an excellent way to build connections with individuals who are already working in your career field. Many associations offer student memberships for a reduced fee or provide regular networking events. The list below includes a sampling of groups in the West Michigan region, but note that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

General Business Groups

Grand Rapids Young Professionals (www.gryp.org)

- Dedicated to providing young professionals between the ages of 21-40 with the opportunity to interact professionally and socially with each other.
- Membership is free, although there may be a fee to attend some events.

LinkedIn Grand Rapids (www.linkedupgr.com)

- Provides online discussions in addition to face-to-face networking opportunities for members of LinkedIn group.
- No membership fee, but there may be a fee to attend some events.

Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (www.grandrapids.org)

- Connects businesses in West Michigan and advocates for policies that support economic growth and vitality.

Grand Rapids Area Professionals for Excellence (www.grapegr.org)

- Hosts monthly networking events with a respected business speaker.
- Membership is currently free and open to anyone who joins GRAPE on LinkedIn.

Inforum (www.inforummichigan.org)

- Focused on creating strategic connections and accelerating careers for women in Michigan and the Midwest.
- \$20 annual student membership fee.

BL²END: Business Leaders Linked to Encourage New Directions (www.grblend.org)

- Offers an outlet for young professionals of color to learn, network, grow and become engaged in the Grand Rapids community. Events held monthly.
- Membership is free, although there may be a fee to attend some events.

Accounting and Finance Groups

Institute of Management Accountants, Grand Rapids Chapter (www.imamichigan.org/grandrapids/)

- Hosts chapter meetings, a February college student event, and a May charity event. Local chapter of the worldwide association for accountants and financial professionals working in business.
- Student membership fee (<http://www.imanet.org/students>).

West Michigan Association of Financial Professionals (www.wmafp.org/)

- Provides a local forum for improving the techniques of contemporary treasury and financial management, as well as the opportunity to network with other finance professionals. Regional affiliate of the national Association for Financial Professionals (AFP).
- Students can attend meetings at a reduced fee.

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (www.aicpa.org)

- Represents the accounting profession, sets ethical standards, and develops and grades the CPA examination.
- Free student affiliate membership available.

Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants (www.michcpa.org)

- Dedicated to promoting and enhancing the value of the CPA profession; provides continuing education opportunities for professionals.
- \$25 annual student dues (dues can be waived by taking an online survey on the MICPA website).

Healthcare Financial Management Association, Western Michigan Chapter (www.wmihfma.org/)

- Helps healthcare finance professionals meet the challenges of the modern healthcare environment by providing education and building and supporting connections.
- Free membership in HFMA national organization for full-time college students, which includes free membership in Western Michigan chapter (www.hfma.org).

Human Resources Groups

Association for Human Resource Management (www.ahrm.net)

- Focused on networking and professional development for human resources professionals.
- Annual student membership is free; \$10 monthly fee to attend breakfast or lunch meetings; additional membership fees apply if individuals choose to join the national Society for Human Resource Management.

Human Resources Group (HRG) of West Michigan (http://hrgwmi.shrm.org/)

- Serves as a local resource for networking, information, professional development and continued support of excellence in human resources.
- \$25 annual dues for HRG membership; additional membership fees apply if individuals choose to join the national Society for Human Resource Management.

Marketing and Communications Groups

American Marketing Association of West Michigan (www.amawestmichigan.org)

- Provides marketing-oriented programs, unique and fun networking events, and introductions to key marketing professionals at some of the premier regional companies.
- \$47 annual student membership fee for AMA plus \$5 annual dues for West Michigan chapter.

American Advertising Federation of West Michigan (www.aafwmi.org)

- Connects members across all disciplines in the advertising and marketing industries, educates members on trends in creativity and marketing, and recognizes excellence in advertising through the annual ADDY Awards.
- \$49 annual Young Professional membership fee, plus fees for luncheons or special events.

West Michigan Public Relations Society of America (www.wmprsa.org)

- Helps professionals develop and sustain essential knowledge and skills for the public relations profession.
- \$65 annual student affiliate membership available through the national Public Relations Student Society of America (www.prssa.org/about/Join/#Affiliate); discounted student fees for monthly West Michigan chapter events.

Grand Rapids Toastmasters Club (<http://grandrapids.toastmastersclubs.org/>)

- Focuses on helping individuals develop and improve communication/public speaking and leadership skills. Meetings held weekly.
- Can attend a meeting without paying any membership fees.

Non-Profit Sector Groups

Young Nonprofit Professionals Network of Greater Grand Rapids (www.ynpngr.org/)

- Provides emerging non-profit leaders with opportunities for professional development, education, and networking, while promoting a dialogue among nonprofits in the Greater Grand Rapids region.
- \$35 annual membership dues or \$60 for two years.

Volunteer Management Association of West Michigan (<http://vmawm.wordpress.com/author/vmawm/>)

- Exists to encourage and equip persons who manage volunteers/volunteer programs. Educational programs offered three times per year, in addition to three networking events at local restaurants, a holiday social event and an annual meeting in May.
- \$55 annual membership; non-members can attend educational programs for a \$25 fee.

Association of Fundraising Professionals, West Michigan Chapter (www.afpwm.org/)

- Fosters development and growth of fundraising professionals and promotes high ethical standards in the fundraising profession.
- \$35 collegiate membership for national Association of Fundraising Professionals plus \$50 for membership in West Michigan chapter.

If you are looking for networking opportunities outside of West Michigan, many of the groups listed above are local chapters of larger national organizations. Therefore, it can be helpful to visit

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the national organization's website, and then search for the chapter in your local area. The Chamber of Commerce in your area can also be a helpful resource for finding information about networking groups.