



An Economist's approach to building your professional network and why it matters

Elizabeth Schuster, Environmental Economist

Sustainable Economies Consulting, LLC

Networking Empowers Women (NEW), 12/10/2020

Photo credit: John C. Lorson

Different networking goals & styles

1. Do you want to scale up your networking?
2. Do you want to be able to collect data while networking?



Before restoration (2005)

How I got started as an Environmental Economist



A group of people, including men, women, and children, are walking along a dirt path that has been restored. The path is bordered by a wooden fence on both sides. The surrounding area is a mix of sand, grass, and water, indicating a wetland environment. In the background, there are houses and trees, suggesting a residential area nearby. The sky is clear and blue.

After restoration (2007)

Cape May Meadows & Cape May Point State Park




The research process



The surprisingly controversial results

- \$313 million impact on tourism
- \$9.6 million from avoided costs from flooding to homes





Raritan Watershed

- How can we build meaningful relationships with new partners across a 7-County region in just 1 year?



Networking strategy

Set criteria for who you interview





Carefully design “semi-structured” interview questions

Question example

OK

What are the top barriers for success you face in your job every day?

BETTER

What are the top challenges facing the communities with which you work?



Photo credit: John C. Lorson

RESULTS, Raritan Watershed

Top challenges

- Insufficient economic growth, lack of job creation
- Lack of reasonably priced housing
- Damage to homes and infrastructure from flooding in flood prone areas

Other metrics

- 50 interviews across 7 counties
- 4 funded projects
- Invited to give a presentation to 300 people

Letting people's voices be heard

Example from my friend Barbara
Jones

Scoping for a Healthier Raritan Watershed for Nature and People



Photo: D&R Canal, © Jim Lukach

Report prepared for Johnson & Johnson

By Elizabeth Schuster, Ellen Creveling,
Nina Chen and Leander Lacy of
The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey

February 2017





Sustainable
Economies
Consulting

Starting over again in Ohio





Land Use Actions Seminar Series on balanced land use



Small business response to the pandemic





Bolstering local food systems



Here's the catch: the results are anecdotal

Example from local food systems:

- We know small-scale food producers have trouble accessing new markets
- But we don't know who needs more support, start-ups or existing businesses looking to expand
- We don't know how needs vary across meat and cheese producers, or across small versus medium sized businesses



Lessons learned

1. Listen to understand, *especially in the first conversation.*



Lessons learned

2. Take the time to develop a strategy and have a goal for your networking.



Lessons learned

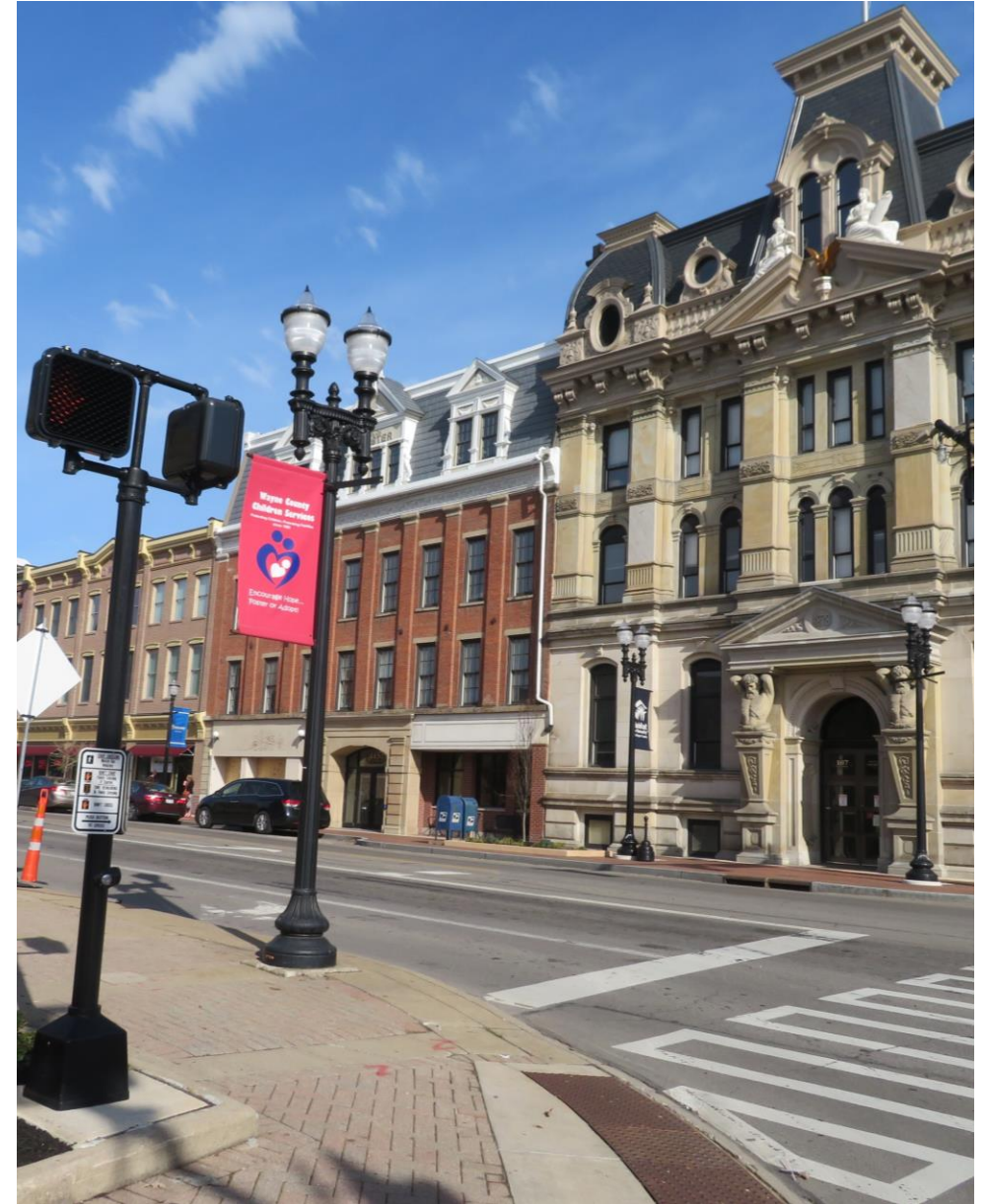
3. If it's an important question you need answered, test it first. And then ask everyone you talk to.





Lessons learned

4. It's the same framework whether you are in the private sector selling a product or the public sector offering a service.





What goals do you have for networking?

Contact Elizabeth Schuster,
efschuster@gmail.com

With any questions