

Why students should join their professional associations

We could start with the more self-serving reasons for joining your provincial HR professional association.

1. **It could very well get you your first job in HR.** As a fledgling HR professional you know that many positions are never posted; those looking to fill positions will first go to their networks to find candidates. You want to be part of those networks. Professional associations provide access to the most useful networks there are as a professional.
2. **You could learn all sorts of stuff about careers in HR that could be of use to you in making career decisions.** There are many different paths in HR. Some of those paths are more right for you than others. You want to know what it is like to work for a small company? You want to know what it is like to be more of a specialist in a particular area? There is someone who is a member of the association that would be glad to tell you.
3. **You can get some real help in achieving the designation.** You want to connect with others who might be writing the exam? You want to start or join a study group? The best way to get that kind of support is to join your HR professional association.

Then again, there are those other, less tangible reasons for joining your provincial HR association.

Becoming a member of a professional association is not like subscribing to a magazine, it is a career choice. It is part of what being a professional is all about. It may sound old-school to some, but being a professional is important to most who have chosen to become professionals. This professional identity begins with joining your professional association.

There is much about being an HR professional that one simply cannot learn in school. As a student, becoming a member of, and participating in, your professional association is one way to accelerate your learning of the ropes.

As a member of your provincial HR association, one becomes a member of a special community. The HR community is quite diverse, but there is something that all members have in common and that is a passion for HR. Becoming a member of your professional association is the best way of connecting with others that share this same passion.

Becoming a member of a professional association is also more than just belonging—it is not only about what one can get from your association but also what one can give back to the profession.

Professional HR associations are more than 'clubs' based on common interests, they are self-governing bodies. As a member of a professional association one becomes part of the governance of the association.

Professional associations play an important role in society. In Canada, the model for professional regulation is *self-regulation*. This means that all important decisions concerning members of the profession or those who would become members of the profession are made by members of the profession. The whole system of professional regulation depends on professionals getting involved and

contributing to the regulation of their profession. Without this participation, self-regulation simply could not work. There is also a certain amount of self-interest in participation in professional regulation. As HR professionals we all share a brand—the HR professional brand. Whenever HR professionals fail to live up to professional standards, the reputation of all HR professionals is diminished somewhat. By joining your professional association, one begins to assume your responsibilities as a professional.

Participation in your provincial association provides one with the opportunity to shape the future of the profession. It provides opportunities for leadership and opportunities to collaborate with others in making the profession better. There really aren't any limits here. Many members have developed new skills and increased self-confidence through participation in their professional association; skills and self-confidence that they have brought back into their own organizations and businesses.

Student members play an important role in provincial HR association that no one else can play. Student members represent an important source of energy and ideas. They represent the voice of the future of HR. It is absolutely essential for the vitality of the professional associations that the voice of students be heard. Student members have the biggest stake in ensuring that the profession is vibrant and progressive.

Yes, as a student, there are the more obvious reasons for joining your professional association, and it is more than worthwhile to join your professional association just for those reasons; but there are also other reasons that may be just as important. There are great benefits in joining earlier rather than later. By joining as a student, one gets a head start on all of the above. It is a great start to a career in HR.