



HeadStart
a future in AI for girls

Your guide to
Networking



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Guide to Networking

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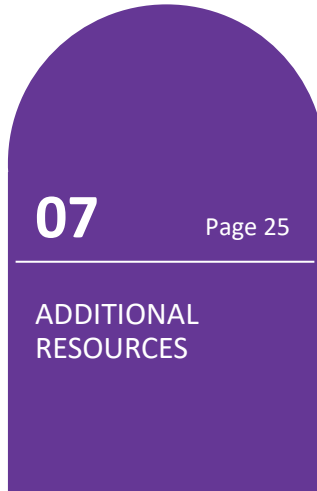
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01

INTRODUCTION



What is this Guide?

*This guide is designed to help you – as a youth educator or teacher – create **simple and meaningful networking experiences** for girls and young women who are curious about tech, AI and digital careers.*



It's not about formal mentoring programmes. It's about **connection**: short, inspiring moments where girls meet real women working in AI and feel like *they belong there too*.

With this guide, you'll be able to:

- Organise networking sessions in your school, youth center or online;
- Find and invite female professionals in AI;
- Support girls in asking questions building confidence and imagining their future.

Why networking matters for girls in tech?

Girls often don't choose tech or AI because they don't see **themselves** in those spaces. They may:

- Think tech is “not for them”;
- Feel isolated or unsure about their abilities;
- experience a lack of role models who reflect their identity and interests.

Networking helps change that.

Even a **30-minute conversation** with a woman in tech can spark new ideas, boost confidence, and shift a young person's mindset. It's not just about career guidance – it's about **belonging, visibility and possibility**.

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THE POWER OF NETWORKING





The Power of Networking

Networking definition:

The process of **building and maintaining professional relationships** that can **provide mutual support, collaboration, and growth.**

Why is it relevant in AI:

- Staying updated on **AI trends and opportunities.**
- Access to **collaborations and job opportunities.**
- **Visibility** in a male-dominated field.



The Power of Networking

Empowering Girls in AI: Girls are often underrepresented in tech, not because they lack talent - but because they lack visibility and opportunities.

Networking can change that.

Even a short conversation with a woman working in tech can:

- Boost confidence;
- Spark curiosity;
- Normalise asking questions;
- Create a sense of belonging;
- Inspire new ideas about the future.

These connections are not just about professional advice. They are about possibility and identity. They tell girls,

“There is a place for you here.”

Visibility:

Connect girls with women leaders in AI to inspire and demonstrate possibilities.

Opportunities:

Share information about AI competitors, scholarships, and educational programmes.

Empowerment:

Show how networking can create a support system in the tech world.

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WAYS OF NETWORKING & MENTORING



Ways of Networking



There's no one right way to connect. The key is **accessibility and authenticity**. Here are a few formats that work:



Speed Networking

Quick rounds of short conversations (e.g. 5 minutes each) between girls and women professionals.



Online Meet & Greet

Invite a guest speaker to a video call and let girls ask questions. Works well across geographies and time zones.



Small Group Coffee Chats

More informal sessions in small groups, ideal for schools or youth centers. Encourages honest, open conversations.



Story Circles

Invite women in tech to share short personal stories: how they started, what they love, challenges they've faced. Allow girls to respond and reflect.



Shadow & Share

Arrange for a student or small group to "shadow" a professional virtually or in person for an hour, then reflect on what they learned.

Ways of Mentoring



*There's no one right way to mentor. The key is **guidance, support, and encouragement.** Here are a few formats that work:*



One-on-One Mentoring

Regular meetings between a mentor and mentee, either in person or online, focusing on personal growth, skills, and career advice.



Group Mentoring

One mentor works with a small group of mentees. Encourages peer learning, collaboration, and discussion of shared challenges.



Near-Peer Mentoring

Slightly older students or early-career professionals guide younger mentees, sharing recent experiences and practical advice.



Reverse Mentoring

Younger mentees share insights, skills, or perspectives with a more experienced mentor, fostering learning both ways.



Shadow & Reflect

Mentees “shadow” a mentor during a work task or project (virtually or in person) and then reflect on what they learned, ask questions, and discuss next steps.

Tools

For Networking and Mentoring



Online Tools

- Video conference tools;
- Collaboration tools ([Google Docs](#); [One Note](#); [Notes](#); [Trello](#));
- Communication apps ([WhatsApp](#); [Slack](#));
- Feedback/evaluation tools ([SurveyMonkey](#); [Google Forms](#));
- Or... just make a quick phone call or a virtual coffee

In Person Tools

- Development plans: roadmap for the mentoring journey;
- Goal-setting exercises;
- Role-playing activities: Networking events; Shadowing opportunities; Reflection/journaling

Tools

Roles & Responsibilities



Mentors are guides, not teachers or parents; they listen, support, and share experiences, but do not solve everything or replace professional help.

Setting Expectations

- **Confidentiality:** trust is key; what's shared stays private.
- **Respect:** listen without judgment; value different perspectives.
- **Goals:** agree together on focus areas (confidence, skills, career paths).

Encouraging Self-Reflection

- Ask open questions: *“What are your strengths?”* or *“Where would you like to grow?”*
- Help mentees set **small, achievable steps** toward their goals.
- Celebrate **progress and effort**, not just results.



Tips for Networking

(for mentees)

Before the Event

- Research the event and attendees.
- Prepare an "elevator pitch" about yourself.
- Create your own professional profile (e.g., LinkedIn) or update an existing one.
- Have your profile accessible (LinkedIn QR code, digital business card).

During Networking

- Start with open-ended questions (e.g., "What excites you about AI right now?").
- Be genuinely curious about others' work.
- Listen actively and take notes when possible.

Post-Networking

- Send follow-up messages to the people you met (e.g., mentors, speakers, or professionals).
- Mention specific details from your conversation.
- Stay connected by engaging with their updates or social media

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HOW TO SET UP A SESSION



Organising a networking event can be simple and fun. Here is a step-by-step guide:



1. Set a Goal & Plan the Session

What do you want the girls to take away? Inspiration? Career insights? Confidence?

Define your audience: peers, students, teachers, ...

Choose a date and time.



2. Choose the Format

See section 3 — pick what fits your time, space, and audience. Is it online or you need to book a space? If it is online: test your Zoom/Teams link. If it is in person bring tea/coffee/snacks – it breaks the ice!



3. Prepare the Girls

- Share who's coming and what they do;
- Help them brainstorm questions (see Tips section)
- Normalise nerves – this is new for everyone!



4. Invite the Guest(s)

Use your network, or the directory on our website (see section 5).



5. Create a Welcoming Space

Whether it's a classroom, Zoom room or community center — make it friendly and safe.



6. Host and Guide

- Start with a warm welcome;
- Introduce the guest(s);
- Encourage girls to ask questions;
- Keep things relaxed – not too formal.



7. Reflect Together

After the session, invite girls to share:

- What stood out?
- What surprised them?
- What would they like to explore next?



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HOW TO RECRUIT MENTORS



Recruitment

You don't have to do this alone. We're building a **directory of women professionals in AI and tech** who are open to being contacted for short networking sessions.

Here are other ways to find potential guests:

- Ask local universities or tech hubs.
- Reach out on LinkedIn or social media (a short, kind message goes a long way).
- Tap into parents, family or friends of your school community.
- Partner with organisations supporting women in tech.

Tip... Let the guest know:

- It's short and informal;
- They don't need to prepare a presentation;
- The goal is simply to share their story and answer questions.



Who are the mentors?

Mentors, in this context are:

Women working in Artificial Intelligence, digital innovation, or tech-related fields.

- Volunteers from organisations like **Inspiring Girls, Women in AI**, and others.
- People who are willing to **share their stories**, challenges and advice.
- Not perfect or famous – **just real, relatable and open**.

They don't need to have mentoring experience. What matters most is that they are willing to connect, listen and inspire – even if only for one session.

Qualities of a good mentor

- **Empathy and Patience:** Understanding the mentees' challenges and pace.
- **Active Listening:** Providing a safe space for mentees to share their thoughts.
- **Willingness to Share:** Openly discussing career paths, failures, and successes.
- **Encouragement and Feedback:** Balancing constructive criticism with positive reinforcement.



“

The key to artificial intelligence has always been the representation

06

TIPS & MOTIVATORS





Mentees and Mentors

Tips to encourage success

MENTEES



- Be curious and proactive.
- Be willing to gain new knowledge/experience from those who have already been in the position.
- Accept advice and feedback.
- Be realistic regarding time and availability expectations.
- See the mentor as a reference from whom you can learn and grow.
- Explore different opportunities you haven't thought of.

MENTORS



- Share knowledge and advice.
- Create an open environment.
- Motivate the mentee in their professional development.
- Commit.
- Empower and support.
- Consider Diversity & Inclusion.



Motivators for Young Women

For young women (especially those early in their career or studies), the main motivators to attend a mentoring session, workshop, or networking event in AI would typically be:

1. Career Advancement & Opportunities

- **Clear benefit:** Meet women leaders in AI who can open doors, offer advice, or even help you land an internship or job.
- **Real stories:** Hearing first-hand from women who have “made it” can be hugely inspiring, motivating, and practical.

2. Building Confidence in a Male-Dominated Field

- **Safe, support environment:** Young women often worry about being “the only women” in tech spaces. Events where they are surrounded by supportive peers & mentors help build courage and a sense of belonging.

3. Access to Insider Knowledge & Skills

- **Exclusive tips:** How to break into AI careers, what skills matter most, what recruiters look for — things you can't easily Google.
- **Hands-on learning:** Opportunities where they can *do* something (like practice an AI-related skill) are much more motivating than just lectures.



Motivators for Young Women

4. Networking & Personal Connections

- **Meeting future collaborators:** Knowing people in your industry early on is beneficial. Making friends, allies, & mentors now can pay off for years.

5. Visible Role Models & Realistic Pathways

- **Relatable mentors:** Not just famous CEOs, but women they can see themselves becoming - women who had setbacks, switched careers, balanced different priorities, etc.

6. Personal Empowerment & Inspiration

- **Feeling part of something bigger:** A community that is changing what AI looks like - and that they belong to.

7. Practical Takeaways

- **Concrete outcomes:** Maybe a professional headshot for LinkedIn, a certificate of participation, templates for portfolios, or a list of "next steps" for growing their career.



Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks

Marketing Mentorships



If you are promoting a networking, mentoring session or workshop, you want to frame it around things like:

- “Build your career, skills, and confidence in AI.”
- “Learn directly from inspiring women who’ve walked the path you’re starting on.”
- “Make real connections that could change your future.”
- “Get insider tips you won’t hear anywhere else.”

What You Gain as a Mentor



- Strengthen your leadership and communication skills.
- Gain fresh insights and inspiration from the next generation.
- Expand your professional network with other mentors.
- Make a tangible impact on a young woman’s confidence and career path.
- Enjoy giving back and shaping future talent.

Your Journey Starts Here



- ✓ Organising a networking session is easier than it seems - all it takes is one conversation to spark confidence, curiosity, and a sense of belonging in a girl’s journey.
- ✓ It’s a small action with a big impact and incredibly rewarding for everyone involved.
- ✓ On the Headstart website, you’ll find all the tools, guidance, and inspiration you need to make it happen - you’re not alone in this!

07

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



01

Checklist

This is just an example.
Feel free to make your
own checklist!

Before the Session

- Objectives for the session.
- Who is the audience?
- Time and date for the session.
- Format for the session: in person; online...
- Search for an appropriate guest.
- Invite the guest.
- Share details about the guest with the audience.
- Help the audience brainstorm questions.
- Test Zoom link OR prepare tea/snacks/coffee...
- Prepare a warm welcome (icebreaker, game, question...)
- Prepare an introduction of the guest.

After the Session

- Reflect about the session with the audience
- Gather audience's feedback from the session
- Gather guest's feedback from the session

...

02

How to create SMART Objectives

To set clear & achievable targets, objectives should follow the SMART framework, ensuring they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant & Time-bound.



Examples:

- During the session, 80% of the girls (audience) will ask questions to the guest.
- At the end of the session, 100% of the girls (audience) will be able to identify one thing that they learned from the session.

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Workplan Template



1. Objectives

2. Guests/Mentors

3. Audience/Mentees

4. Materials/Resources

5. Total Duration of the Session

03

Workplan Template



6. Opening

How much time do I need?

Introduce the guest. Introduce the audience. Create an icebreaker?

7. Session

How much time is the guest presenting?

How much time for questions and dynamics between the guest and the audience?

Do I need to prepare questions for the audience?

03

Workplan Template



8. Closing

How much time do I need?

How will I gather feedback?

9. Notes/Comments/Reflections

04

Icebreaker Ideas



2 Truths & 1 Lie

- Each person takes a turn sharing 3 statements about themselves: 2 truths and 1 lie.
- The rest of the group tries to guess the lie.

Breaks the initial tension in a personal way. Doesn't require materials or prep. Encourages listening and engagement between the audience and the guest.

Variation:

- The guest shares 3 statements about working in AI: 2 truths and 1 lie.
- The audience tries to guess the lie.

The Emoji Introduction

- Each person takes a turn introducing themselves with their **name** and **3 emojis that describe her personality or mood**.
- The emojis used can be more specific. Example: one emoji that describes your dream job, one that describes your personality and one that describes your mood.

It's a light and modern icebreaker. It can often be very funny.

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Icebreaker Ideas



Compliment Chain

- Each person, at a time, gives the person to their right a genuine compliment (it can be as simple as “I love your energy!”).
- The chain keeps going until everyone has given and received a compliment.

It’s a good way to create a comfortable, inviting, light and relaxed.

Introduction Chain

- Each person takes a turn introducing themselves following this method:
 - I am (name)
 - I like (thing or action that starts with the first letter of their name)
 - Do a gesture, movement that symbolises the thing or action said.
- The rest of the group repeats the name, thing/action and gesture/movement.

It’s an excellent way to help everyone remember the names of the participants in a fun and relaxed way.

05

Data Protection / Consent Form (Template)

HeadStart Mentoring Session – Consent Form

We are committed to protecting your privacy and personal data. Please read and complete this form.

Participant Name: _____

Date: _____

Consent:

I understand that during this mentoring/networking session, my name, photo, or contributions may be recorded or used for session purposes. I give my consent for:

- My participation and feedback to be recorded.
- My anonymised feedback or reflections to be used for reporting or sharing session outcomes.

I understand my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw consent at any time by contacting [Insert Contact].

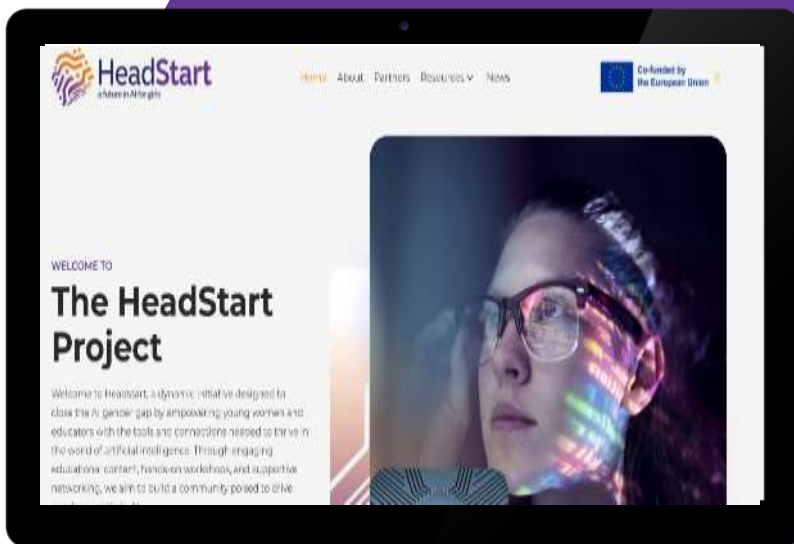
Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18): _____



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