



Making the most of a Career Fair

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REASONS TO ATTEND CAREER FAIRS

- Explore careers and learn about possible job and internship opportunities.
- Network with professionals in the career fields and companies in which you have an interest.
- Meet face-to-face with company recruiters and increase your chances of getting noticed.
- Gain experience with talking with employers, practice selling your skills, experience and education, and thus build your comfort level with interviewing.
- Get answers to your questions about particular positions or companies straight from a company representative.
- Gather contact information and additional information from companies in which you have serious interest.
- Get more copies of your resume out to employers in a quick and efficient way, allowing you to build your network and have specific individuals to follow up with later.

PREPARATION BEFORE ATTENDING A CAREER FAIR

Expectations

• **Your Expectations**

You are responsible for making the most of a job fair. This means that you should begin with clearly defined and realistic expectations. You will not receive a job offer at the fair, but it is realistic to assume you will make a significant number of employer contacts. For most candidates, success will depend on effective follow-up after the fair.

• **Employer Expectations**

Some employers are only collecting resumes; some are not accepting any resumes and may expect you to submit application materials online. Some are building/assessing an applicant pool; some are ready to fill specific vacancies. Some will expect you to express your interest by already knowing about their organization; some will view this day as a career fair/information gathering process. Most employers will expect that if you are interested, you will follow up. All employers expect you to be professional, willing to initiate conversation and able to highlight your strengths.

Things To Do

• **Set Goals**

Set goals for yourself. What do you want? To research companies, internships, jobs?

• **Address Assumption/Have an Open Mind**

Avoid making assumptions about who might and might not have positions for you. You will be surprised at the broad array of positions many companies have. Even if they are not advertising for someone with your focus, if you impress people, they will likely keep your resume and contact you at a later date.

- **Make Your Commercial**

Be able to introduce yourself and express your job interests and qualifications. Prepare a 1-minute commercial which includes your academics, activities, work experience, skills, and/or career goals. Highlight those things that you feel would be most relevant and important to the employers with whom you wish to speak. Practice with a friend, in front of a mirror, or with a career center staff member.

- **Identify Examples of Your Work and Skills**

Identify specific experiences where you have demonstrated your strengths and abilities, and be able to describe them quickly. Backing up all your skills with specific examples will make you a stronger candidate.

- **Prepare Explanation of Interests**

Prepare explanations of why you are interested in a particular industry or company.

- **Conduct Company Research**

Research the employers that are of interest to you. Go to the career fair web site to get a list of companies attending (<http://www.wipccc.org/workforce.html>). Choose a dozen or so you are really interested in and thoroughly research them on the web. Complete online applications for companies in which you have an interest in working.

- **Investigate Alumni Connections**

Find out if your college career services or alumni office offers alumni networking services. If so, check to see if there are any alumni working for companies in which you are seriously interested and take their names with you to the fair. Ask faculty for contacts, as well.

- **Prepare Questions**

Be prepared to ask questions of the representatives. Develop a list of questions to ask—some generic and some company-specific. Avoid saying, "Tell me about your company." Two to four questions should be enough. Practice out loud; it helps. (See "Questions To Ask" on page 6 of this guide.)

- **Practice**

Practice giving your handshake (firm but not a vice-grip) and your 1-minute commercial, asking your questions, and responding to questions.

- **Develop a Professional Image**

Purchase or borrow a nice soft- or hardcover briefcase and hardcover notebook portfolio to take to the event. Use it to store company information, business cards, resumes and personals items, and to record notes during the career fair. Also consider having personal business cards printed professionally, which you may distribute to recruiters at WorkForce as well.

- **Coordinate Clothing and Accessories**

Select an outfit and accessories that meet professional standards. Make sure they are pressed and polished. You should pick out something that you would wear if you were going to an interview. If you do not have professional attire in your closet, go borrow or buy it! Wear comfortable dress shoes, as you may be waiting in lines and moving through crowds.

Things To Bring

- Copies of your resume (25-50 depending on size of event and number of employers you'd like to approach).
- A smile, strong handshake and positive attitude.
- A 1-minute sales pitch to introduce yourself and highlight your qualifications.
- Information about the organizations that you will be approaching.
- Personal business cards.
- A professional briefcase and/or hardcover notepad portfolio for resumes, company information, business cards and notes.
- Energy! Be your best, as refreshed as possible.

Attention to Your Resume

- **Representation of You**

Develop a strong resume that represents your knowledge, skills, and abilities effectively. Seek advisement from the career center, faculty and professionals in the field to assist in the resume writing process.

- **Focused Objective(s)**

If you are looking at several career options, you may want to have two or more targeted resumes with different career objectives.

- **Quality**

Your resume needs to look professional—easy to read format on plain, light/neutral-colored resume paper (i.e. white, light gray, ivory, etc.)—and free of typos. Get several copies of your resume for distribution—25 to 50 depending on the size of the event. Print the copies directly from your computer on high-quality resume paper, or have a professional printer make copies on a high-quality copier. Make sure you have others review your resume to check for errors or typos before you make copies. Seek assistance with resume writing from your campus career services office.

WHILE AT THE FAIR

What Not To Do

- Don't cruise the booths with a group of friends. Approaching booths independently on your own often allows you to have more meaningful exchanges with recruiters, they are more likely to remember you, and you are more likely to be seen as a professional and sincere candidate.
- Don't carry your coat, backpack, a large purse, etc. with you. These look unprofessional and can become cumbersome and heavy as you move through crowds and wait in lines at the fair. A briefcase is more appropriate if you need additional storage, other than the notepad portfolio for your resumes, etc. A coat check will be available for you to store your coat and bag at WorkForce.
- Don't "wing it" with employers. Do your homework and research the companies just as you would for an interview.
- Don't come dressed for gym class. Dress professionally just you would for an interview.
- Don't collect a lot of free give-away items. You may get more than you can carry and they may distract you from your original goals.
- Don't display negative body language: i.e. slouching, chewing gum, fidgeting, playing with your hair, rocking from side to side, looking around when talking or being spoken to.
- Don't come during the last half-hour of the event. Some employers leave early if they have lengthy travel ahead of them.

What To Do

- **Give a Positive First Impressions**

Make a good first impression: be prepared, dress for success, and greet employers with a smile, firm handshake, and good eye contact.

- **Make Eye Contact**

Make eye contact immediately when introducing yourself and maintain eye contact through introductions—long enough to determine the person's eye color.

- **Be Ready for Introductions**

Have a strong opening introduction of yourself (give your 1-minute commercial), along with reasons why you are interested in the particular organization. Ask recruiters right away if they're accepting resumes at the fair, or how you can apply for positions. If you've completed an online application already, let the recruiter know. If the recruiter is taking resumes at WorkForce, hand her/him your resume and be prepared to expand on it quickly.

- **Remember Names and Share Yours**

Remember the representative's name when they introduce themselves and repeat it in your response to them. If they do not give their name, casually refer to their name from their nametag. Wear your nametag, placing it on your upper right chest/shoulder area for better visibility. After talking with the recruiter, write his/her name down in your notes, and also write down the name's phonetic sound if it is difficult to judge from the spelling.

- **Smile**

Smile and be polite. People who are smiled at tend to smile back. This puts the employer and you at ease.

- **Display Appropriate Body Language**

Stand up straight; keep your body, arms and shoulders open to the person with whom you're speaking; give good eye contact; nod your head and give appropriate gestures to indicate you are listening. Do your best to remain comfortable and control nervous movements.

- **Communicate Effectively with Company Representatives**

- Study the floor layout before you go in and find the companies you are interested in.
- Wait your turn—write notes from previous contacts and/or read company literature while you are waiting to speak with a representative.
- Be sure to listen to the questions other job seekers are asking and the responses they get. It could help you plan your questions.
- Reveal information in a give-and-take fashion. Don't monopolize the conversation or the recruiter's time; your goal should be to establish a rapport.
- Communicate your abilities and interests.
- Ask questions and listen carefully to what the representative has to say!
- Ask the recruiter if it is okay for you to write/email to follow up to the fair. You can ask what role the career fair plays in their recruiting strategy or next steps in their hiring process.
- Avoid using euphemisms—filler words such as, "um," "like," "ya know."
- Before leaving, be sure to close the conversation and thank them. Their time is valuable and you never know who they know!

Positive Attitude And Energy

- **Confidence**

Be confident in the abilities and skills you have attained. Project confidence in your demeanor and voice in sharing the information to help assure you are heard and believed. The room will be noisy, and if they can't hear you, they won't remember you. If you show doubt in your abilities, then so will the recruiter.

- **Enthusiasm**

Be enthusiastic and articulate in selling yourself. This is an important quality!

- **Initiative**

Take the initiative and engage in meaningful conversations with representatives. Speak with representatives from companies that you had not considered before. Explore all your options! Ask for a business card or write down the representative's name. If the recruiter is from Human Resources, get the name of the department manager for the area in which you would like to work.

- Offer a resume or offer to send it.

Questions To Ask

First and foremost, questions should be natural. Be yourself. Don't rifle your questions; maintain a natural flow.

Questions You May Want to Ask Company/Organization Representatives:

1. How many employees does your company have?
2. What goals does your company have for the next ten years and beyond?
3. What kind of entry-level positions exist within your company?
4. Do you offer internships? If so, what percent of interns are offered positions after graduation?
5. How many employees are in my area of interest (which is...)?
6. Does your company hire on a continual basis or just at certain times of the year?
7. How long is the hiring process for an individual hire?
8. What does your company consider the 5 most important qualities in an employee?
9. Are graduate degrees important? If so, in what areas?
10. What courses do you suggest in order to be a successful candidate?
11. Is there a G.P.A. cut-off in the recruiting process?
12. What personality traits are important for success in your company?
13. As an entry-level employee, what can I expect to be doing 2, 5, 10 years from now?
14. What made you choose this company?
15. How long have you been with the company?
16. What things has your company accomplished of which you are especially proud?
17. For how many years does the entry-level employee typically stay with the company?
18. What percent of applicants are eventually hired?
19. What is the retention rate in the company?
20. Do you expect your employees to relocate?

* Do not read directly from this list of questions at the career fair.

What To Take Away From The Fair

- **Business Cards**

Get business cards from recruiters you meet. Use the cards to write follow-up notes to those organizations in which you are most interested.

- **Notes About Contacts Made**

Write down important details about particular organizations, including names of people who may not have had business cards

- **Company/Organization Information**

Most recruiters will have information for you to pick up, including company brochures, CD's, position descriptions, etc.

- **Better Sense of Career Options**

If you have used the event correctly, you will have made contact with several organizations that hire people with your skills and interests. Evaluate whether each company might be a match for you.

- **Self-Confidence**

A career fair gives you the opportunity to practice your interview skills in a less formal environment. Use this experience to practice talking about what you have done, what you know, and what your interests are.

Follow-Up

- **Thank You**

Look over your notes and make a list of companies you talked with in descending order of importance. Write and mail a thank you letter (typed) within 48 hours of the fair to the recruiters from companies with which you made connections and are most interested. It is not only appropriate, it reminds them of your name and gives you an opportunity to stand out among other candidates. Use the notes you took, literature you collected, and research you did to compose the letter. Include your resume—it may have been lost at the fair or somewhere while the recruiter is on the road at other events. You may also edit the resume and send a more targeted version to that particular company.

- **Phone Calls**

Call/email those recruiters who indicated that it was okay to do so. When calling, be prepared and know/practice what you are going to say beforehand. Check with the recruiter to be sure that your application is complete.

- **Other After-Thoughts**

Be prepared for the company to contact you to follow up. Keep your research/literature organized and within easy reach of the phone. Make an appointment with a counselor in your campus career services office for more information on interviewing—while you're at it, ask about signing up for a mock interview!

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