



## Tips and Tricks to Get the Most Out of Career Fairs

### Tips for Job-Seekers to Get the Most Out of Career Fairs

**Career Fairs and Forums** give you a chance to explore organizations and career fields through conversations with representatives that include recruiters. They are great ways to meet with employers in an informal setting and learn more about the variety of job and internship opportunities offered by companies, government agencies, and non-profit organizations where you might like to work.

- **Before the fair**, view the list of companies and representatives. Some fairs and forums are focused on recruiting specific majors, while others are interested in all majors. Develop a list of those you feel are a good match and ones you would like to speak with.
- **Research the representatives/employers.** Visit their websites, and search for any relevant articles, current events, etc. See where they are located.
- **Look for internship/job postings** on their company website and **develop questions** for the positions of interest.
- **Develop and practice your elevator pitch** to confidently introduce yourself to recruiters. Reflect on and be prepared to talk about your: academic background, career interests, past employment experience, and skills and strengths. A good pitch should answer three questions: Who are you? What do you do? What are interested in? Ask a question at the end to keep the conversation going and to highlight that you have researched the company. Examples of introductions/elevator pitches:
- Hi. I am Richard Jones and I'm a junior here at XYZ University majoring in Electrical Engineering with a minor in Computer Engineering. I've interned with ABC company for two summers where I programmed in both Python and Java. I also enjoy working with hardware, and any opportunities where I can combine the two. What types of internship opportunities are available at your organization during the summer?

- Hello, Ms. Santos, my name is Jenna Hill and I am a sophomore at XYZ University planning to major in Information Systems with a specialization in cybersecurity. I am doing research with Professor Doe and I am looking for an internship in the field of data analytics that will allow me to gain more professional skills and hands-on experience for my future career. Can you tell me about your internship program and the type of projects that students typically get involved in?
- **Prepare questions** to help you decide whether this is an ideal role or employer for you. If you spend a little time getting some background on an organization, then you can ask very focused and specific questions. This impresses representatives because it shows initiative and a genuine interest in them. Some potential questions to ask at a career or internship fair include:
  - What types of skills and experience are you are seeking for this role?
  - What type of training is available for entry-level staff?
  - What advice would you give to someone who wants to break into this field?
  - What is the hiring process like at your organization?
  - Are there immediate openings in your organization?
  - What jobs do you anticipate will open?
  - What are the typical entry-level opportunities?
  - What do you like most about your organization?
  - What skills are most important for a position in this field?
  - Considering my particular career interest, are there additional people in the organization I should contact?
  - Can you describe the typical career path in your organization?
  - Do you have rotation programs?
- **Print and bring many copies of your resume** to submit to employers. They will take notes on your resume and may scan it for distribution to hiring managers.
- **Dress appropriately.** First impressions are important. While campus attire is acceptable for students attending campus career fairs, you will probably appear more professional if you at least dress in "business casual."
- **Business Casual** is more relaxed and comfortable than formal attire but demonstrating good judgment in choices and displaying a neat appearance (e.g., polo shirt, shirt with a collar or sweater, khakis or other slacks, dress or casual leather shoes for men and women; moderate length dress or skirt for women) reflects well on your potential as an employee.
- **Allow yourself adequate time.** Come as early as possible to allow yourself enough time to get to all your companies of interest.
- **Get your bearings.** When you arrive, take a few minutes to review the map and directory for the fair. You may feel more comfortable if you quickly locate and visit employers in whom you are most interested first. This will confirm their location and alert you to any crowds or lines of other students waiting. Don't wait until the end – you may get tired or they may already have all the resumes they want!
- **Prioritize the employers you are most interested in.** If your schedule allows, you may find it easiest to start with the employers in which you're less interested. This will allow you to hone

your approach and to be most confident when you approach the employers you're especially excited about. Be sure to balance this tip with the reality that you may run out of time and that many other attendees may be interested in the same employers. Assume that you will need to wait to speak with some employers.

- **Be flexible.** The fair directory provides a brief summary of employers' opportunities and may not have been submitted by the same people who come to the fair. Some positions may no longer be available and other openings may have just emerged. No single employer representative is knowledgeable about all positions available, especially in a large organization. Some representatives attending fairs are there to share their experiences working at the organization and may not be involved in the hiring process. If the employer rep at the fair does not know specifically about jobs/internships of interest to you, ask for the name of someone who can help you.
- **Introduce yourself and be prepared to give your "career pitch."** Extend your hand, say "hello" and state your name. Have your resume ready to give to the employer. Be ready to talk about your career interests as well as academic and extracurricular experiences to show your skills and strengths.
- **Take notes** when you inquire about next steps and the possibility of talking with additional managers. The representative at the fair may not be able to answer all of your questions or know specifics about your job interests. Write down the names, telephone numbers, etc. of other staff in the organization whom you can contact later. Note specific employer information sessions, on-campus interviewing and projected hiring dates that will affect you. You will not be able to take advantage of this information if you don't record it.
- **Ask the representative for his/her card**, and then promptly send a thank-you note. Having the business card of the representative you have just spoken with serves three purposes. First, you have a direct contact with the organization, including the proper spelling of the representative's name, direct telephone line, etc. Second, a brief thank-you note acknowledges the help they gave you and the time they took to visit campus. Third, sending thank-you notes is a good professional habit. Find a sample thank-you email at the end of this document.
- **Respect employers' materials/sample items.** Some employers bring large quantities of print materials or "giveaways" clearly intended for students to take. Other employers bring a few copies of print materials, sample products, etc. as displays at their tables. Always check with employers before taking materials from their tables and don't take materials still packed in boxes. Some employers come to multiple days of fairs and plan to have enough materials for all days.

## **Tips for Employers to Get the Most Out of Career Fairs**

Career fairs are a great way to gain visibility. Whether you use career fairs as a preliminary prerecruitment activity or as your primary sourcing tool, with proper planning career fairs can provide a great format for your organization to begin building personal relationships and spread the word about your organization's needs.

The [National Association of Colleges and Universities \(NACE\) Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition](#) recommends several best practices to use in your career fair planning. These include:

1. **Making the most of your time.** Schedule other recruitment activities around the career fair. Host a cybersecurity briefing, workshop, or faculty roundtable or dinner. Visit one or more local campus career services offices to discuss student trends and preferences and provide updates about your organization and industry. Serve as a classroom speaker or speak to a student organization.
2. **Knowing your audience.** Discuss with the host organization or campus the attendee audience. Is the audience open to all? If it is being held on campus, is it open to graduate students? Alumni? And/or undergraduates? Is the career fair associated with one school or organization, and if so, which one? For example, if the event will be held on campus at a four- year university within the School of Business undergraduate program, some students will be interested in summer internships and part-time work. If held on campus and associated with the schools of engineering and computer science, and open to current junior and seniors or recent graduates, a larger crowd will be interested in full-time employment. Customizing the approach to each campus or event location could set your organization apart from your competitors.
3. **Picking the right people.** It is important to keep in mind that the behavior of career fair reps is as important as their knowledge about the company and career opportunities. Make sure that everyone who staffs the booth clearly understands that students extrapolate about your company culture from such cues as the friendliness and enthusiasm of your representatives. When selecting your team, identify those who have a passion for what they do and an interest in building relationships with students. Understand that you can't train an individual to be warm, personable, or interested. Also, be sure to have your organization's diverse range of culture, age, and gender reflected in the recruiters at your booth.
4. **Preparing for the fair.** Career fair teams should be assembled and oriented at least several weeks prior to the event. This gives team members time to prepare—not just by ingesting the information you give them about skill sets to look for, numbers, logistics, and more, but also if they want to coordinate plans to contact students ahead of time or set up additional side meeting or activities. Make sure recruiters and employees assisting at career fairs know which positions are available, which skills and qualifications the company seeks in candidates, and the company's hiring goals. Having specific positions to share creates deeper dialogue between candidates and recruiters. Make sure those helping understand the set-up and break-down process, have directions, know the start and end time, have the materials (tablecloth, pull-up banners, materials, giveaways), have the event coordinator's contact information, and understand how to ship back materials (if needed).

5. **Focusing on meeting attendees needs.** Too often, the emphasis on employer marketing and branding supersedes communicating with attendees about positions and company culture. Career fair attendees often leave the event without gathering much meaningful information. Because the primary reason that people attend career fairs is to learn about job opportunities, employers should focus their efforts on meeting those needs. Recruiters should be professional throughout the event. This means there should be no cell phone calls by your recruiters while at the booth, and no redirecting students to your organization's website for information or to submit a resume. Get students' contact information so that you can continue the dialogue. Don't just recruit them, but ask their opinions, offer relevant advice, and carry the organizational brand.
6. **Making a break from the typical.** Re-think every aspect of your approach: your booth, your message, and your participants. Make your organization memorable during the career fair. Offer a five-minute massage to students who are obviously stressed out by the job-search process or offer a \$15 gift card for any student who comes to your booth wearing your company's logo. Instead of offering giveaways, ask students to write down their favorite charity and conduct a drawing at regular intervals throughout the fair and announce the winning charity. Then send a donation to their charity in their name and, of course, send them an acknowledgement.
7. **Preparing a follow-up.** Determine the best follow-up process (who is doing what and when) before the career fair. Then, while the impression is still fresh, categorize your candidates into groups as the career fair ends: best matches, possible matches, and no matches (or some form of this grouping). Although every candidate should be viewed as a potential customer or future client, differentiate your follow up according to the groupings. During the career fair, your recruiters should schedule interviews with the candidates they see as potential matches for open positions and meet with them the same day or next, if possible. Send a "thank you" e-mail to everyone else that stopped by your booth and left their resumes. You've got a great opportunity to reinforce a first impression.

### Sample "Thank You" email message after a career fair visit

Date

Mr/Ms XXXXXXXX

Location Name Career Fair Representative

Company Name

City, State

Dear Mr. or Ms. XXXX,

Thank you for your time and consideration in speaking with me at the XXXXXXXX Career Fair on (date). I learned a great deal about (company and the applicable program/position), and I am very interested in applying for this opportunity with your company.

We had discussed my background in \_\_\_\_\_ and my \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ skills obtained in my \_\_\_\_\_ internship, that are relevant to this position. I was especially impressed during our conversation by the fact that (add something that you learned in the conversation). I strongly believe that being a part of the (program, or team or department) would allow me to begin a very successful career in (field) for (company name).

I submitted my resume for your consideration at the Career Fair, and I also attach another copy for your reference. I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you or another member of your team again about this position in the near future. Please feel free to contact me by phone at XXX XXX XXXX or email me at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Sincerely,

Name