

How to Get the Most from a Job Fair

Job Fairs can be a great way to find jobs. If employers attend job fairs, it is an indication that they are actively hiring. Some job fairs are set up as “hiring events,” where you can interview on the spot. But often it is more a time to gather information, introduce yourself to employers, learn how to apply, network, and set up times to interview later.

Job fairs are usually mass events, and can sometimes feel intimidating and overwhelming. You can get more out of job fairs by preparing in advance and having a strategy when you come. Being ready and focused can help minimize jitters and uncertainty. Here are points to help you work a job fair to your advantage:

1. Study up.

- Find out where and when the job fair will be held, and what its emphasis will be.
- Learn as much as you can about the employers that will be there: who they are, what they do, organizational health and performance (financial results, employment trends, etc.) where they are located, what kinds of jobs they typically hire for.

2. Allow enough time

- Make sure you know how to get there: transportation to take, where parking is, etc.
- Come at the beginning of the job fair if you can. Avoid the last hour, unless there is no other time you can come. Employers who have been at an event all day tend to start “packing up” their booth in the last half hour and may be more distracted.

3. Show you mean business

- Dress professionally: even if you know the workplace is jeans or “business casual,” dressing up a bit more shows you are serious and respect the process
- Be neat and clean: If you are a man, shave or trim your beard/mustache; if you are a woman, be careful with make-up and perfume.
- Bring a briefcase or portfolio, but don’t carry excess “stuff.” There is *sometimes* a coat-check area where you can leave what you don’t need, but don’t count on it.
- Don’t bring children. It worries employers that you might not be able to find childcare after you have a job.

4. Bring several resumes

- Have enough copies to give to all the employers you may be interested in.
- Print it on good “resume paper” if you can.

5. Have a strategy

- When you arrive at the job fair, pick up information about the fair: a map of the room, what employers are there, what jobs they are hiring for. Study descriptions provided.
- Prioritize and make sure you go to the employers you are most interested in first. If they are popular, you may need to wait in line, but often you can read information they provide while you are waiting.

- You may want to approach one “practice employer” before you go to your top employer, but save strolling for after you have met with the ones that seem best for you. Then go on to find out about other employers and what they have to offer.

6. Engage employers and introduce yourself

- Introduce yourself, tell them why you are interested in their company, and tell them briefly about your background and qualifications.
- Ask questions that show you know something about them already, but want to find out more about what they do, and what opportunities they have to offer.

7. Collect information

- Often employers have brochures describing their business and job postings of current openings that you can take. They may also have “trinkets” and giveaways to promote themselves.

8. Ask for an interview

- If you find a job that seems like a fit with an employer you are interested in, ask them if you can interview for the job. They may be holding interviews that day, but mostly likely will be scheduling them for a later time. Bring your calendar and see if you can get something set up.

9. Find out about next steps

- If they are not interviewing that day, find out what next steps are, timing, and when they expect to fill the job.
- You may need to go to their career website and apply online to be considered; if so, find out how to do that.

10. Get business cards or contact information from employer representatives

- Take note of who you are speaking with and get their business card if possible.
- Find out who the hiring manager is, or who the best contact is regarding employment.

11. Follow up

- Send a Thank-You note to employers you are interested in. Thank them for their time and reinforce why you would be a good fit for their position. Enclose a copy of your resume.
- If you have their phone number, follow up a few days later with a phone call, telling them again of your interest in being interviewed. The idea is to be persistent without being a pest.

Even the best job fair will probably not be as fun as the State Fair – or even the County Fair. But if you have the right approach and attitude, it can be a positive experience.