

FAIRS AND EMPLOYER EVENTS

Regardless of program, major, year of study or future goals, attending fairs and other employer events where you connect directly with employer representatives is important. They offer the opportunity to build connections with influential people in the world of work and gather insider information about industries and organizations, even if you are not currently looking or already have a summer, volunteer or post-graduation position.

While some representatives may be in a different field, the more business people you build genuine relationships with the more comfortable and connected you will be.

Career-building events can take place on campus and in the community. Motivated employers from companies, agencies, governments, emerging sectors, well and lesser known organizations attend on- and off-campus fairs and events. They share information about (often unadvertised) student and new-graduate opportunities, identify high potential individuals and get a better sense of candidates than they could by simply reading resumes.

What is the Difference Between a Fair and Other Employer Events?

Career, Volunteer and Recruitment Fairs allow job seekers to speak directly with many recruiters in a 'trade show' like setting where talking about job opportunities and interests is the point. There are often 50 - 100+ booths with wide ranging part-time, summer and full time opportunities. Some employers take applications on the spot so bring copies of your resume. Others won't, but will provide job details and how best and when to apply.

Other Employer Events include: information sessions, receptions, facility tours, meet and greets, industry panels and conferences. These events allow for a more personal, less high volume interaction, where representatives or industry leaders are on hand to talk about their organization and industry. They are interested in individuals who are professional, articulate and engaged. Offering a resume at these events is usually premature.

In both types of settings, representatives can tell who is prepared and stands out in a positive way.

Preparing for Fairs and Employer Events

Anxiety over introducing oneself and starting a conversation at a business event is what often prevents people from attending. But to get opportunities you must be an active participant. A little planning can help you be memorable and reduce your nervousness.

Start with your goals. What are you interested in or want to learn? Is it about typical career paths? Strategic volunteering opportunities? Meeting contacts in five companies? Identifying additional industry employers? Clarifying tasks/positions considered 'entrance level' for University graduates?

Introducing yourself can be simple:

- Begin by shaking hands and give them your name, major / concentrations / specialized program, expected graduation and types of work you are interested in.
- Prepare for the 'tell me about yourself' question. This includes positioning yourself and your interest in their company or an example of something you have done that illustrates skills you would like to grow.
- Use a bit of research done before the event to ask them a meaningful question to continue the conversation.

Check the Career Services or other host's website to see who is attending. Identify organizations of interest. Go through the list again, this time visiting websites of organizations you do not know to see what they do. Add some of these to your list. Industry contacts and jobs are everywhere. Don't miss opportunities due to lack of name awareness.

BONUS ACTIVITY: Ask people in your network if they know anyone who works at these organizations who you might speak to for more insights.

Most representatives are happy to answer specific questions about positions and hiring processes, but few seriously consider a candidate who asks, "What do you do?"

Make a cheat sheet on each organization: name, what they do, what caught your interest, key points you want to make and a few questions about their company you would like answered. Use this to start, supplement or close the conversation naturally. What are you curious about?

Prepare thoughtful answers to common questions such as "What are you interested in?" Answering "I don't know" or "anything" leaves a poor impression. A specific job title is not necessary. Focus on what you can bring to the organization, not what the organization can do for you. What do you think might be of interest to the employer about you? Explain what you can do and why you are interested in this organization. If you don't know, they won't know why you should join them either!

Sample questions that may serve as conversation starters include:

- I read that your organization recently... How will that impact future summer/entry-level hiring?
- What kind of post-secondary, entrance-level positions exist within your organization/department? What are the main duties of those positions?
- What non-academic skills and experiences do you look for in new hires (summer or for future graduate positions)? What abilities are critical for early success in this area?
- When are peak hiring periods? What is the application procedure? How do you use LinkedIn or other social media in your recruiting process? How long is the hiring process? What percentage of applicants are eventually hired?
- How long have you been with the company? What changes and trends do you see? What advice would you suggest for getting started given the changes and trends you are seeing?
- What kind of summer/co-op/internship opportunities are there in this field? How have employees/Co-op/Interns/new grads been used in the past?
- What advice do you have for a university student/grad keen on entering the ___ field?

Finding Success at Fairs and Employer Events

Arrive early. All representatives may not be able to stay to the very end. Act professionally, use good manners, turn off phones and electronics, smile and make eye contact.

Look independent and take initiative. Approach representatives by yourself rather than with friends. Be patient while representatives are speaking with another student. Stay long enough to have your questions answered and your interest recognized, but never monopolize an employer's time.

Speak clearly and confidently, and listen carefully to answers. Ask questions about the company before you talk about yourself. This allows you to present yourself in the context of what they are looking for.

Explore all your options! The purpose of fairs and employer events is to build employer contacts. Have an open mind about organizations that you might have overlooked earlier. Good careers are often found in unexpected places. Organizations you may not have heard about, many with fewer than 500 employees, generate the most jobs.



A smaller employer event with 10 organizations bringing an average of 3 representatives means the opportunity to have a memorable conversation with up to 30 industry contacts. A fair with 70+ tables means an enterprising student could choose from among 200+ industry people to consider building a relationship with. Treated professionally, these people could be helpful in identifying jobs, learning about industry cycles and tipping you off to interesting future projects.

Fill in event feedback forms. Your comments are important in planning events that will continue to be valuable for you and future students.

After The Fair or Event

The secret to building a professional network is following up and staying in touch, whether or not there is currently a position for you. This is a good way to grow your network and plan ahead. It also demonstrates an understanding of business etiquette.

- **Evaluate.** Reflect on your conversations. Did information collected meet your goals? Are there more questions or additional information you now know you need?
- **Begin a contact log.** Include contact(s) made, organization, information learned, referrals received, promises made, if a resume was provided, questions still outstanding, follow-up date and space for further notes. Your contact database can be as simple as 3" x 5" cards or looseleaf or as high tech as a cloud-based contact manager. All work well.
- **Send an email.** Within one week send a short email to any representative you feel you connected with or would like to be remembered by. Remind them who you are, mentioning something you discussed and thank them for their time.
- **Create calendar entries.** Follow-up and complete all promises and thank you notes immediately.
- **Finally, know where to go for help.** Use Career Services to help you prepare for the next step. Whether that is interview preparation, mapping out a follow-up plan, finding additional information, coaching for follow-up calls, information interviewing or using high impact job search techniques, Career Services can help.

Fairs

Instead of only stopping at booths obviously connected to your major or which have interesting giveaways, savvy students know fairs present a huge opportunity. Find the event's table to get a map of where each employer can be found. Map out those prioritized from pre-event preparation to make the most of your time. Practice communicating with many professionals about opportunities and wait to be offered promo items.

Most recruiters won't collect resumes at fairs, but have copies for those that do. Customize a resume for your top organizations. Poorly or well written, a resume is a first and lasting impression on your standard of work.

Show interest in the company. Take a notebook or cards where you have recorded points from your research, and can record new information and follow-up commitments. Clothes should be more business-casual than everyday school clothes.

Recruiters spend one to five minutes with each person providing summer, part-time and graduate job and application process information and may be pre-screening for positions.

- The fair will be noisy, speak up. If recruiters can't hear you, they won't remember you.
- Fairs are busiest between classes so, if possible, avoid these times. Don't interrupt. Make eye contact, then wait for your turn. Questions and answers by other students offer valuable information and real-life career search 'do's and don'ts.'



TIP:

If you are in accounting, marketing, communications, computer science, human resources, etc., be aware that virtually every organization employs people in your field.

- Ask each employer for a business card, their name, next steps and the best way to follow up. Procedures, requirements and timing are different company to company. Knowing each allows you to know the best time to follow up and for what reason.
- Before moving on, thank the recruiter for their time. Note on your 'cheat sheet' if an organization seems promising and next steps you will take, such as:
 - Email the representative to reaffirm your interest. This sets you apart from those who won't bother.
 - Look at the positions posted on their website. Calendar to return to the most promising organizations weekly or bi-weekly.

If you receive names for other company contacts, write them on the recruiter's card so you can say who referred you. Recruiters are excellent resources about their industry and company. You will get more information than you can remember! Take notes.

If you learn about a job but didn't provide a resume, modify your resume to highlight specific assignments, experiences and competencies that directly relate to the job. If you were unable to speak to a recruiter of interest, send a note and your resume indicating their booth was so busy you didn't get a chance to meet, but are very interested and will call to arrange a convenient time to talk. Then call!

Other Employer Events

Attending a range of employer events is a great way for you to meet representatives and leaders, get insights into companies and their culture, learn position requirements, and make a great first impression. Talk with everyone! Even if you initially don't see yourself with a company, you might change your mind. Get a good feel for each company by talking to more than one representative.

Approaching someone to start a conversation can take as little as "Hi, my name is ..." . Establish basic rapport with the person with small talk or asking a simple question to break the ice. Move on to a two-way conversation which can be like a mini information interview using your pre-event research. If you built a rapport with them, consider connecting with them on LinkedIn.

Most information sessions, panel discussions, etc. are followed by an opportunity to speak with representatives and other attendees. Use this opportunity to introduce yourself to a few people. Take the time to also network with fellow students and job seekers you don't already know.

Don't just come for the food or walk out early. Dress in business or business casual attire. Employers are watching how you interact with them and with others. They pay attention to who shows up prepared to have intelligent conversations with representatives and who brings their best-selves often over multiple events.

Bonus Activity: Have your resume critiqued to ensure it attracts the type of work you prefer. For more information, go to mtroyal.ca/careerservices and Students >> Resources and Services >> Critiques for Resumes, Cover Letters, Portfolios.

CAREER SERVICES

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