

CAREER FAIR PREPARATION GUIDE

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WHAT IS A CAREER FAIR?

Career fairs are composed of a group of organizations that are currently looking to hire new employees, interns, or volunteers. In public health, you will find that the types of organizations that take part in a career fair may be quite diverse, ranging from large consulting companies to small international non-profits.

A career fair is an excellent opportunity for employers to meet many potential applicants in a short period of time. They may have a list of currently open positions that they are hoping to fill, or they may just be present to raise awareness about their company for the future. At a fair, each participating organization will have human resources and/or program representatives available to explain what the organization does and what types of positions may be available.

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND?

Everyone, no matter their career goals, year in school, or progress in the job search process, can benefit from attending a career fair. A career fair is an excellent opportunity to explore many different types of organizations and positions in a short period of time. This may be helpful during not only an active job search, but also in determining which types of positions or organizations might be of most interest to you in the future.

Often at a career fair, you will submit your resume and business card to company representatives for future contact. Other times, organizations at a career fair may have more information about how you can go about officially applying for a position online. Either way, your interaction with the representative from the company may provide you with some insight for use during potential interviews down the road.

If you are not actively looking for a job, this does not mean it is a waste of time to attend a career fair. Attendance will allow you to get a feel for what types of organizations exist and what types of positions exist. Additionally, it may be useful to see what skills are desired by employers in your field of interest. If you notice that a lot of employers are looking for the same skill, you may still have time to acquire that skill (for example, use of a specific software program or experience making presentations) before you start your active job search.

A career fair is one of the best times to get advice from professionals and company recruiters. Just because you might not be interested in getting a job right now, that does not mean organization representatives do not want to talk to you. They realize that you will eventually be looking for a job, and they want to help you better understand what you are looking for and how to get it. Their goal is for you to have a positive experience during your first interaction with their organization so that someday you may apply for a position. Overall, it is beneficial for them to have as many qualified candidates apply for each position as possible. With a large applicant pool, they can select the applicants who have the right sets of skills for the position for which they are hiring. With more applicants, they are more likely to find the person who meets all of their needs.

A career fair is also a great way to expand your network of contacts. You never know who you may run into down the road, whether it is once you are in the workplace or while you applying for jobs in the future. As big as the public health workforce may seem, you may find yourself running into familiar friendly faces more frequently than you would think.

WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I ATTEND?

With a little legwork before the event, a career fair can be a more efficient and enjoyable experience for you. First, a list of attending organizations is typically published in advance of the career fair. You should review this list and make note of organizations in which you are interested, and research the companies that interest you

through the company's website prior to the fair. This is a good means of prioritizing which organizations you want to speak with in case you run out of time, as career fairs can often be very large.

Once you do your research, practice answering some common questions that employers may ask you:

- What type of position/career are you looking for?
Remember, you should not be looking for positions based on what department you are in. Many positions are interdisciplinary, so look for positions based on what types of skills organizations are searching for.
- What skills and strengths do you have that would match this position?
These skills can range from anything as simple as word processing or familiarity with Microsoft Excel to knowledge of curriculum development or advanced epidemiological methods. Be comfortable with what you know how to do well.
- What experience do you have and how will you contribute to the organization?
Feel comfortable discussing past work experiences, your practicum experience, your thesis, or even some major projects that you have participated in class.

Prepare questions you would like to ask specific employers. Questions can include the following topics:

- ✓ *What types of skills, experiences, characteristics and degrees do employers look for in potential candidates?*
- ✓ *What types of entry-level positions or internships are available?*
- ✓ *What is the hiring process like? (When and how often are people hired, and how long does the hiring process take?)*
- ✓ *What are employees hired 2, 5 or 10 years ago doing in the organization now? How long do employees usually stay with the company?*
- ✓ *What is the culture of the organization? What made you choose the company and how long have you been with the company?*

WHAT SHOULD I BRING?

Be sure to have multiple up-to-date copies of your resume on thick, resume paper. The Office of Career Development offers resume reviews to help make your resume as effective as possible.

Make sure you have the following in your professional-looking bag or portfolio on the day of the fair:

- Several clean printed copies of your resume, free of smudges. Keep them free of smudges by placing them in a folder or portfolio.
- Paper, professional pen, pocket calendar or day planner
- Breath mints
- Business cards (Optional, but a nice touch - business cards can be purchased through Career Services)

HOW SHOULD I DRESS?

A career fair is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to individuals who represent many organizations and companies. Thus, it is important that you make an appropriate first impression. One aspect of that first impression is how you look. In fact, it is said that 70% of a first impression is a result of appearance and body language. You want your looks to say, I am a professional, responsible, and respectable individual. You may be wondering: how can my looks say all that?

Think of it this way, if you were to show up at a career fair with a rainbow wig and a red foam nose, individuals would think you are a clown. Therefore, this would be appropriate attire for you if you were going to a career fair looking for a job in the circus entertainment industry. Clearly, the wardrobe in public health is different from that of a clown, but the key is that you want to dress for the job you will have. The difficult thing about a career fair is that each company or organization may, in the workplace, have different cultures as to how employees dress. Luckily, at career fairs, regardless of individual corporate culture, there is a standard and expected mode of dress – *corporate conservative*.

Corporate Conservative Attire

Both men and women should plan on wearing a suit. The suit should be without any wild patterns or loud colors. It is best to stick to traditional and conservative colors such as navy blue, grey, or black. Your clothing should be neat and pressed. Keep your clothing understated. You want employers to remember you for your skills and what you could bring to the organization, not because you wore a loud shirt or neon green shoes. Make sure that your shoes are clean and scuff free. Women should wear flat shoes or low heels. Similarly, keep jewelry and makeup to a minimum. If you choose to wear a little jewelry, be sure it does not jingle or make noise. Last, keep your nails short and clean. Avoid wearing colored nail polish.

Grooming

Be sure you are clean and your hair is tidy. Avoid wearing perfume or strong aftershave. You do not want people to smell you before even having shaken your hand. Of course, make sure your breath is “minty fresh” and do not chew gum or smoke.

Remember, it is not that employers think that individuals with combed hair and a clean outfit have more skills than those who are less tidy, but presenting yourself in a positive manner can say you a) are truly invested in your job search, and b) have enough social skills to recognize how you should prepare for an event like a career fair.

TIPS FOR DURING A CAREER FAIR

Try to arrive at the career fair early. Career fairs tend to become crowded and getting there early will allow representatives from each organization to spend more individual time talking with you. In addition, there is no guarantee that recruiters will not begin to pack up early at the end of a long day, so if you show up during the final hour you may miss out.

Be careful not to monopolize any one person’s time. When the career fair gets more crowded, be sensitive to those waiting behind you. Recruiters oftentimes like to talk to groups when a line begins to form.

Do not expect employers to approach you! You must approach employers no matter how uncomfortable this may be. With time, approaching an employer and introducing yourself will make you feel less uncomfortable. Be confident when you approach an employer and introduce yourself. A firm handshake and eye contact will convey to an employer that you are confident. Have your brief “elevator speech” prepared ahead of time to get the conversation started (see the Networking guide on the Career Development website on how to craft an effective elevator speech). Ask questions that show you have done your research on the organization beforehand.

Make sure to get a business card from all the organizations in which you have an interest. This will make following up with a recruiter much easier as you will have his/her name, title and accurate contact information. Follow-up letters should be sent to recruiters approximately two weeks after the fair. Sending a follow-up letter will distinguish you from other candidates. In the letter make sure to specify where you met the representative and tailor the letter to the specific representative/company. Use the information you wrote down during the initial meeting at the career fair to tailor the letter.