career fair/career event planning strategies

Each event has individual needs, budget, curriculum, and other characteristics. The strategies below are general tips to keep in mind when planning a career event in your area.

Form a planning committee
1) Identify one person who has a real interest in career exploration/development and is willing to serve as coordinator, contact person, agenda-setter, and a taskmaster. In most schools, this will be a school counselor, business teacher, technology expert, or similar professional.

2) Recruit staff members and people from interested partners (including VSAC, Linking Learning to Life, Workforce Investment Board, Chamber of Commerce, and the Department of Labor) to form a steering committee that will meet once or twice a month, more often as the date of each event approaches. Make certain that the committee is willing to meet throughout the year because effective career fair planning is an ongoing process.

Steering committee members will need to make use of their community contacts, be willing to send their students to the fair, and promote the genuine value of career fairs and career development efforts.

3) Set up a task force to publicize the career fair through local newspaper articles, parent newsletters, and local businesses. Journalism classes are a great way to recruit students to write articles.

4) Contact VSAC’s Career Planning Initiative team and visit Start Where You Are (SWYA) Professional on the Web for resources and advice on planning a career event at your school.

Developing the fair
1) Be sure the committee clearly articulates the goals of your career event and matches the event design with those goals.

2) Decide on a model that best meets the needs of your school and community, be it a school-based fair, a multi-school regional event, or something in between. See VSAC’s Career Fair Model document on SWYA Professional for ideas.

3) Throughout your planning, don’t forget to consider the following items:
   • gender of presenters and the careers they represent
   • community connections
   • interest and developmental stage of targeted age group
   • using parents of current students as resources
   • time of day of fair (most people find it easier to take a few hours off in the morning, as opposed to the afternoon or evening)

4) Create a database of possible presenters and track your successful/unsuccessful contacts by committee members.

5) Prepare presenters by training them how to engage your students effectively. Consider partnering with the VSAC Career Planning Initiative team or your local Linking Learning to Life office for presenter training.
Pre-fair classroom activities

1) Communicate early and often with teachers about their involvement in and responsibilities for the fair.

2) Arrange for teachers to prepare their classes for the fair by covering the following topics:
   • purpose of the career fair
   • pre-fair curriculum activities (go to SWYA Professional on the Web for suggestions)
   • appropriate behavior at the fair
   • good questions to ask presenters
   • the importance of thank-you notes

During the fair

1) Assign one to three individuals (depending on the size of the event) to help career fair presenters with equipment and other needs.

2) Consider having art teachers and art classes create decorations, and asking family/consumer sciences teachers and classes provide refreshments.

3) Have fun!

After the fair

1) Have a follow-up meeting to thank the committee and other volunteers, to examine some of the problems that may have arisen on the day of the fair, and to evaluate the event informally.

2) Consider sending thank-you gifts to presenters.

3) Arrange for teachers to use follow-up activities in their classrooms.
   • Follow-up helps solidify the importance of career fairs and prevents the fair from being a one-shot event unconnected to education.
   • See SWYA Professional on the Web for ideas and curriculum.
   • Suggestions for follow-up include essay contests, discussion, and arranging informational interviews.