



Keeping Career Fairs Current: What Are Youth Looking For And Is It Working?



Workforce Planning Board
of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

Our Vision: We envision the continuous development of a leading-edge workforce.

Our Mission: Engage partners to find solutions to local workforce development needs.

The material contained in this report has been prepared by the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin (WPBWWD) and is drawn from surveys conducted throughout April 2023—November 2023. In providing this material, WPBWWD does not assume any responsibility of liability.

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How we undertook this research

When attending career fairs, comments could be overheard regarding how they “looked the same as they were 15 years ago” and how they had not changed or adapted to meet the needs of new generations. Combine that outdated feel with the ongoing stigma towards certain “blue collar” industries, and career fairs are in need of a revamp to ensure they are worth the effort of both employers and attendees.

For this research, The Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin (WPBWWD) staff attended career fairs hosted by partner organizations Business Education Partnership Waterloo Region (BEPWR) and the Career Education Council (CEC). WPBWWD staff spoke first hand with youth attendees about what they were looking for, why they picked certain booths over others and what career paths they were thinking of taking. Youth were encouraged to take a quick survey where more specific data could be collected in order to view trends that may arise.

This data, once compiled, was shared with partner organizations and employers prior to Career Fairs in the fall of 2023 so that employers could try the ideas that youth suggested. At this time, employers were surveyed to determine if some of these small changes, such as having hands on activities or free candy/swag at their table, impacted not only the number of attendees who visited their booth but also the quality of the interactions.

Through this report, you will see what industries have the attention of youth at this time, what key factors help drive youth engagement, and data showcasing how this approach helped employers. This report is a guide for future career fairs for the time being, and best practices need to continue to evolve as generations continue to do the same.



Section A: Data Collection

Youth

Data was collected from 73 participants from various demographics during career fairs held by BEPWR and CEC in the Spring of 2023. The data was compiled by participant's highest education achieved to see if there were differences in the wants/needs as youth continued aging. Of the participants, 52 (71.23%) had an education of grade 8 or less, pre highschool with options fully open. These youth are the tail end of generation Z. This feedback allows employers and organizations running career fairs to create messaging that can target youth prior to high school, provide them alternative options prior to course selection which could broaden their post secondary education choices.

Employer

Data was collected via Career Education Council Career Fair feedback surveys given to employers who had booths at their Fall 2023 career fair events. Questions were asked regarding how employers would rate the number of attendees that visited their booth, if any new strategies were utilized in the hopes of attracting more attendees, and, if so, did they believe a difference was made in their outcome. A total of 37 employers from various industries were surveyed.

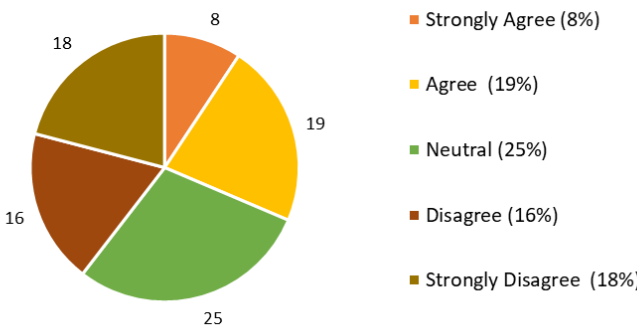


Section B: Attendee Thoughts

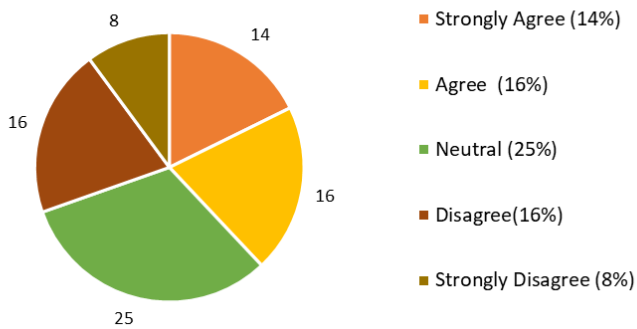
As part of the survey, the 73 Survey Participants were asked how they felt regarding pursuing a career in the major industries. Below are the answers regardless of age/education.

NOTE: multiple or no responses could be selected which led to total percentages higher/lower than 100%

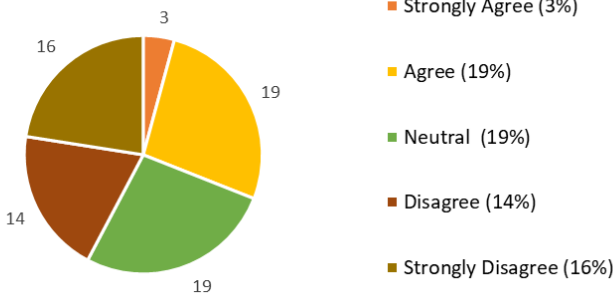
**Office Jobs/Business/Finance
(Negative Outlook)**



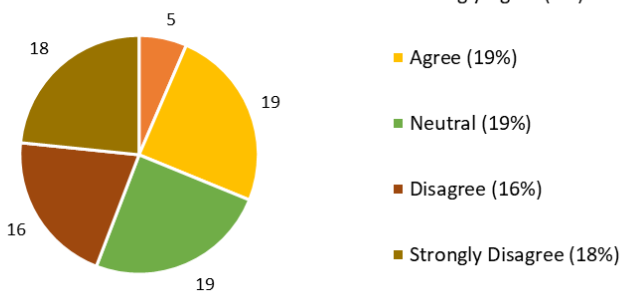
**Manufacturing/Construction/ Trades
(Positive Outlook)**



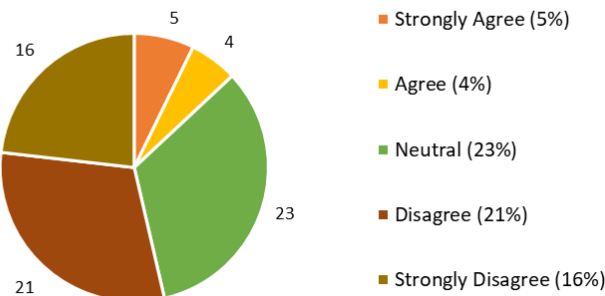
**Service Trades (Cook, Hairdresser, Early Childhood Educator, etc.)
(Negative Outlook)**



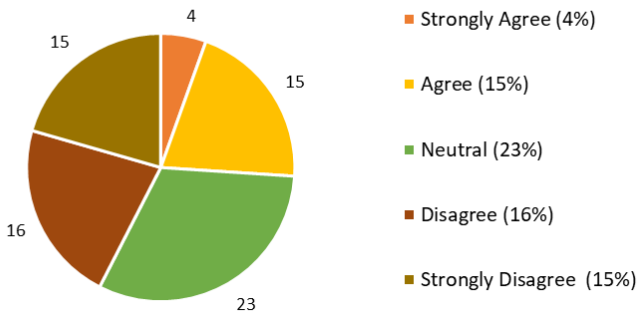
**Caring Work (Education, Health, Supporting Vulnerable Peoples)
(Negative Outlook)**



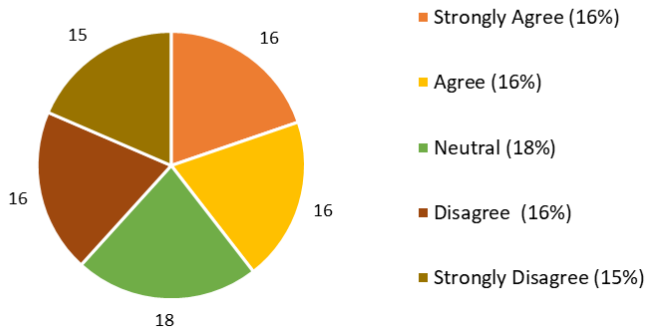
**Agriculture
(Negative Outlook)**



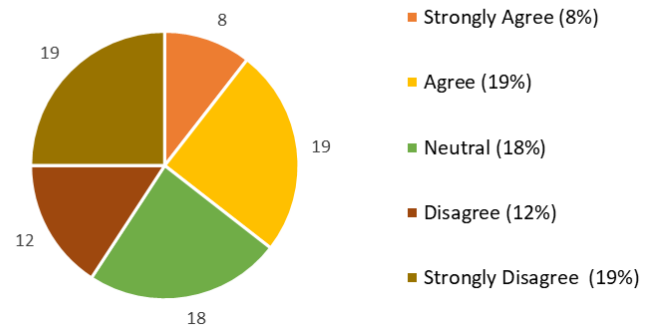
**Service Industry (Food, Restaurants, Hair/Nails)
(Negative Outlook)**



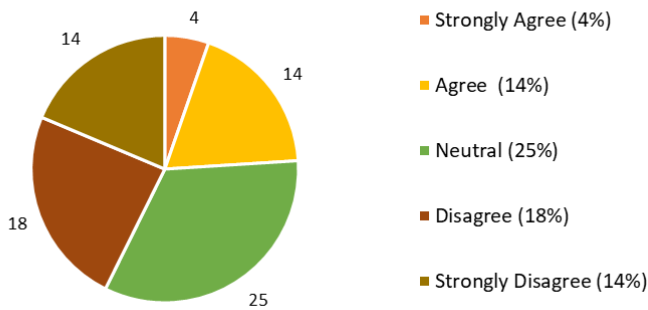
**IT Careers (Computer Science)
(Neutral Outlook)**



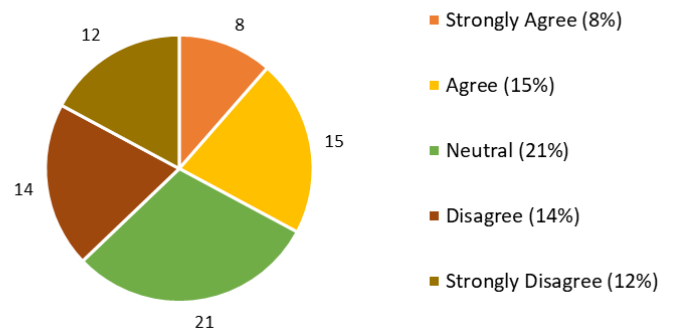
**Legal or Government Work
(Negative Outlook)**



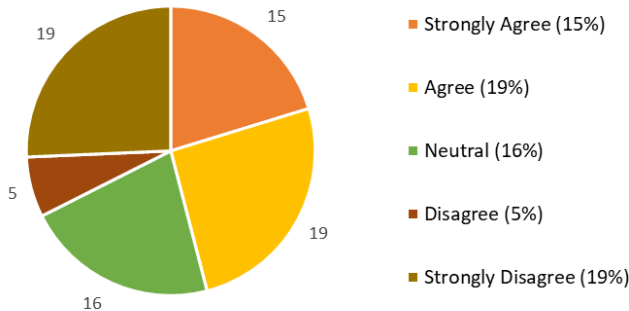
**Travel/Driving Careers
(Negative Outlook)**



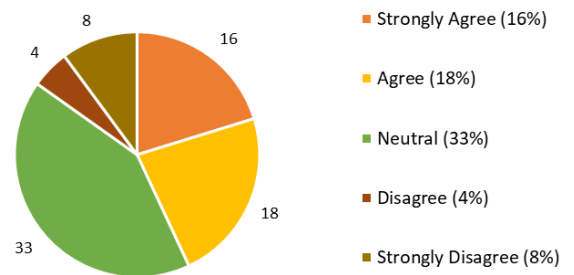
**Community Work
(Negative Outlook)**



**Science Based Jobs (Lab, Biologist, Conservation, etc.)
(Positive Outlook)**



**Entrepreneurship (Owning Own Business)
(Positive Outlook)**

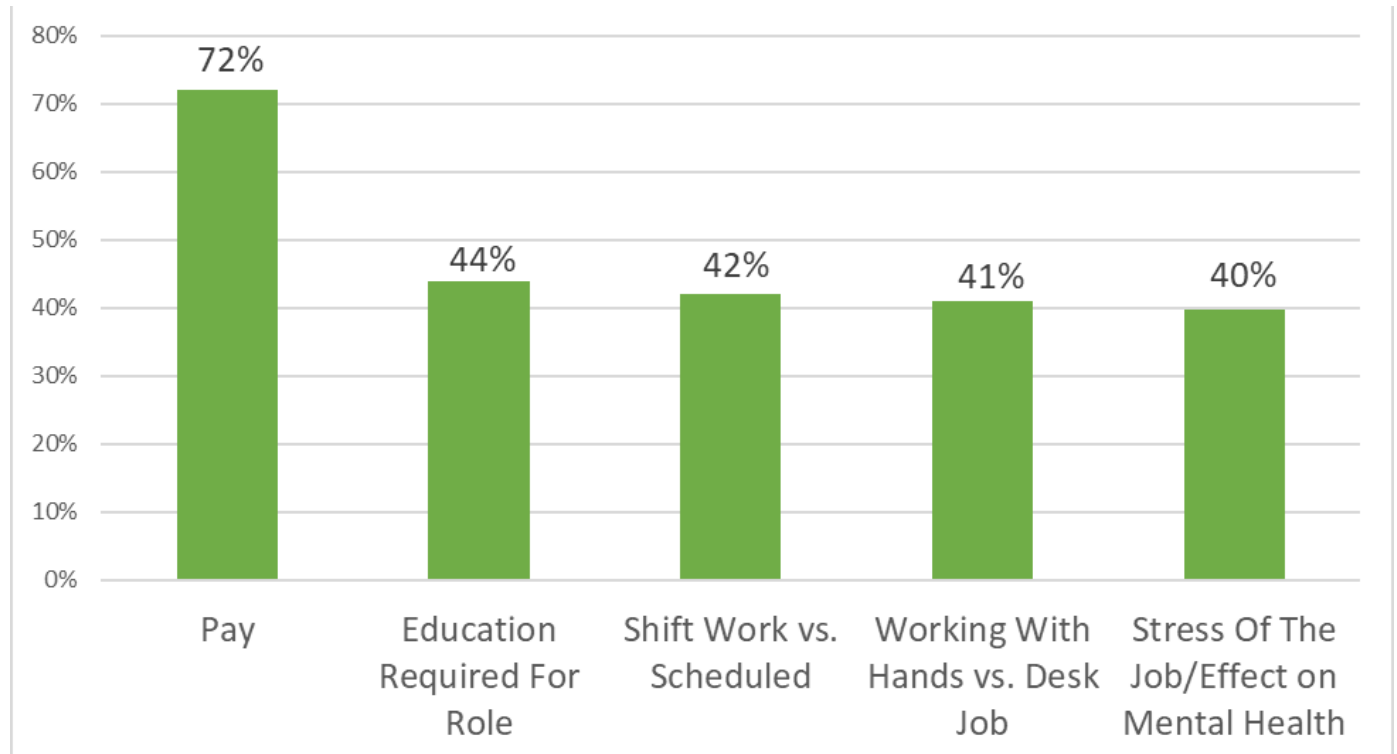


When looking at the mindset of youth in relation to industries, some patterns emerge. Neutrality or close to (agree/disagree) tend to be what is most applicable. This makes sense as the main sample size was those in grade 8, and they are still figuring out what they want to pursue.

Consider: 22 (30%) of the participants either agree or strongly agree that they would be interested in pursuing a career in manufacturing, construction and trades, all of which are industries which struggle to attract youth. Another 25% are neutral and may be convinced to pursue this work. Could this be the start of a generational shift back towards these industries with the right messaging and presence at career fairs.

Factors Important to Future Work

After finding out what participants thought about certain industries, the survey asked what factors would draw them towards a certain career. This information will help employers to guide their conversations with youth and their marketing efforts to tackle the important things that youth care about.



Looking at the important factors chosen throughout the survey, pay came out on top with 72% of participants saying it was an important factor to them.

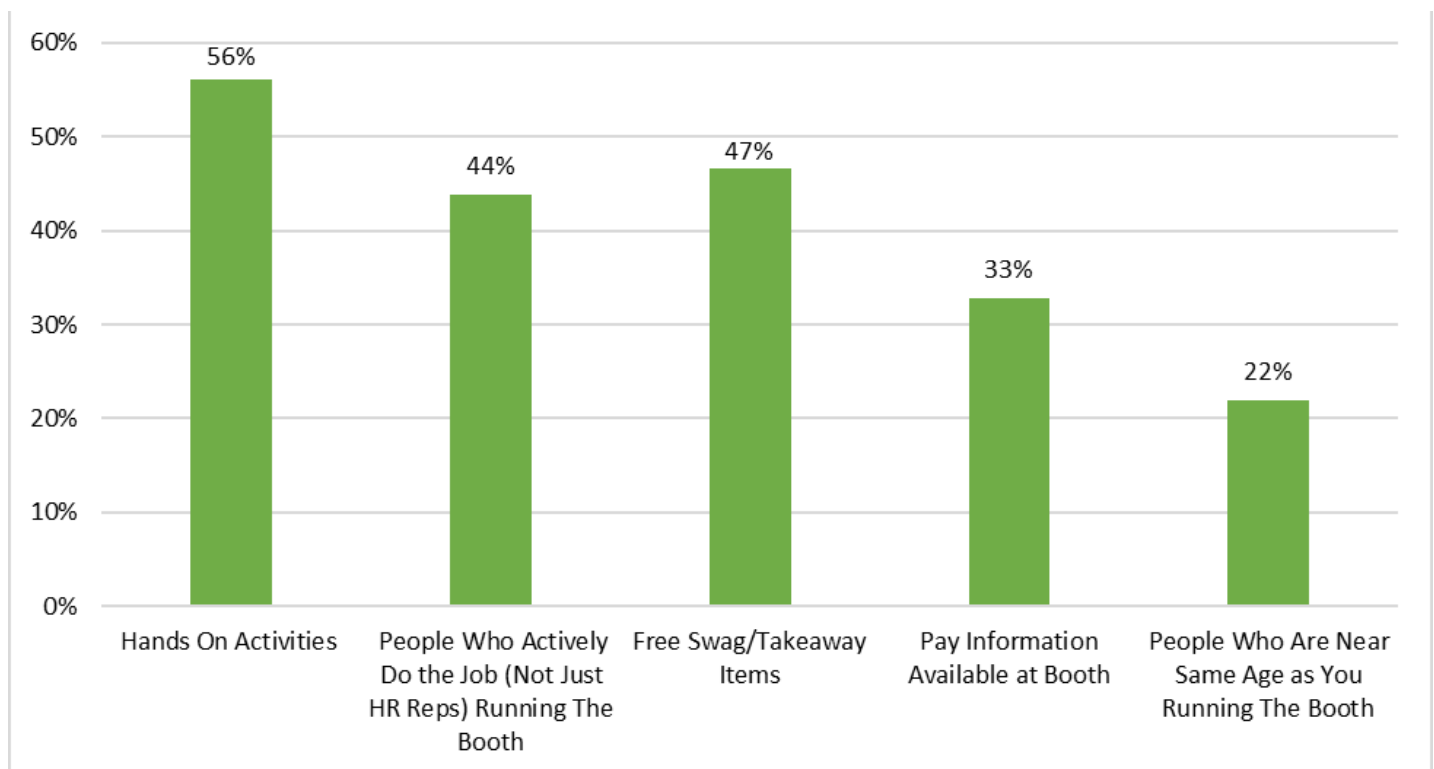
Upon further communication with participants, a common pattern was shown that although pay is important, youth want to be able to be comfortable and not stress about things like food, housing, etc., but they don't need to make massive amounts of money beyond that. Other factors were steady in how often participants chose them, hovering around 40%. This may indicate personal preferences around working conditions.

Consider: If every organization in your industry focuses on wage, then in theory job seekers will go to the "highest bidder." If your organization can't afford to pay top dollar, what are the other positive factors of your business that could be leveraged to help make jobs appealing to youth and meet these other factors.

Booth Visitation Factors

55% of surveyed attendees visited a booth they did not plan to attend prior to the event. No one industry dominated the visits. This fits with the data from participants regarding industries of interest, where the average response tended to be neutral and people were keeping their options open.

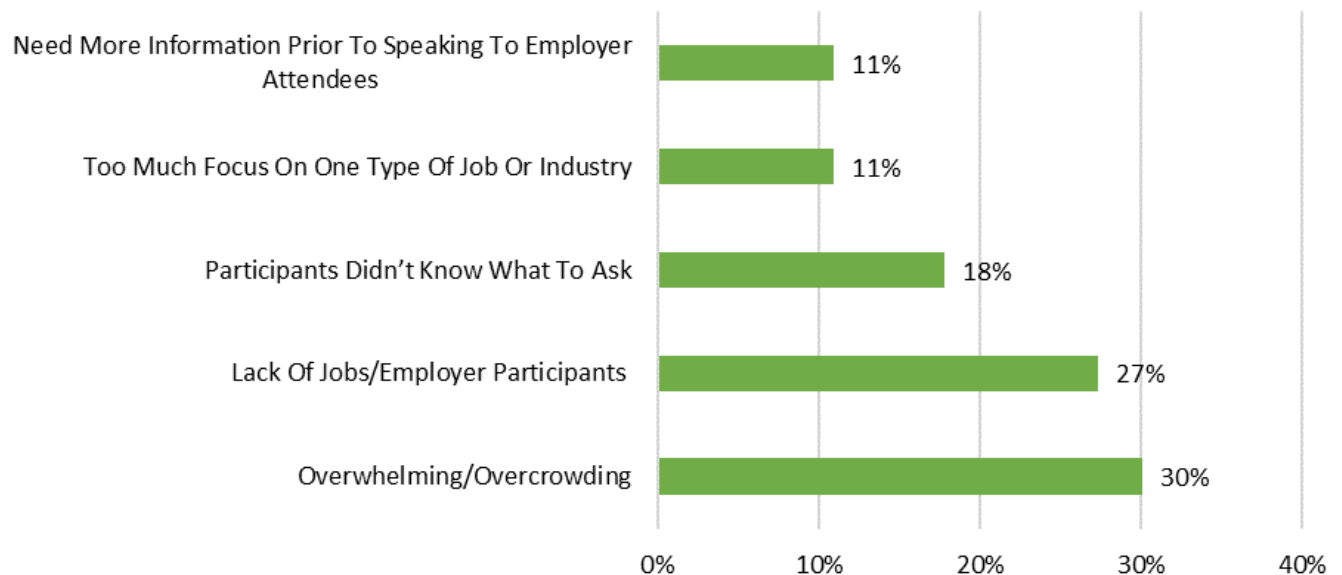
What Would Draw You To a Booth You Would Otherwise Not Visit



Many organizations try to utilize free swag or giveaway items in order to draw youth to their booths. Though effective for many attendees (47%) what is more likely to gain their interest is hands on activities (56%). Examples of this that have been seen in the past include, but are not limited to, hands-on usage of tools, or machines or software puzzles, simulated welding or driving set-ups and virtual reality experiences that allow attendees to actually “do the job” in real time.

Consider: Some of these options are obviously more costly and may not fit every organization. Employers need to determine “what makes us unique” and look at developing experiences centered on their uniqueness. Showcase what your business is about to draw in youth. This also goes for what kinds of swag you are giving out. Is it Sticky Notes that will get used then potentially tossed to the side? Or do you put your logo on something unique like a yo-yo or stress ball that attendees are more likely to have memories of, and utilize, beyond the event.

What Doesn't Work for Attendees



The survey asked participants what they did not enjoy about attending career fairs. The most common response (30%) was that the events were overcrowded or overwhelming. This was followed by a lack of jobs or employer participants (27%). These two items are connected to each other. When there are more employers, participants can spread out more, and it can feel less overwhelming or crowded. Having more employers lets youth really talk to the employers and not feel that their conversations are being rushed so that the employer can talk to the next booth attendee.

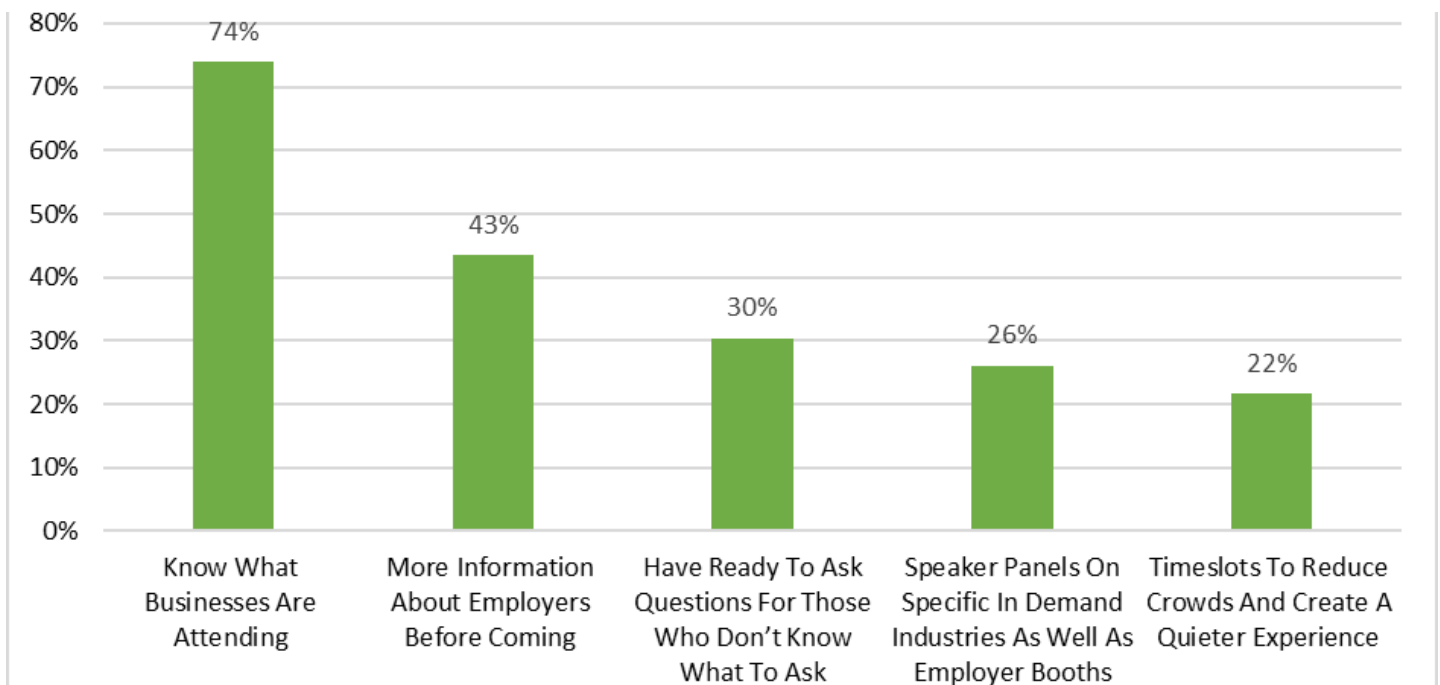
Overcrowding and attendance are only a part of the problem. One of the other large issues is that participants didn't know what to ask (18%). They don't feel they were prepped for the sessions. Employers need to have ideas for how to lead the conversation with the youth and to gain the attention of those passing by.

Consider: What sort of questions could you ask young people to get conversations started when they visit your booth? How can you greet them when they are uncertain about approaching and make them feel invited in? Standing behind tables will not help.



Section C: Engaging Non-Career Fair Attendees

To gather more youth information, a digital survey was released for those who had not recently attended a career fair but may want to in the future. 19 respondents filled out this portion of the survey around what they would want to see at a career fair.



The largest common response from 74% of survey participants was that they would be more likely to attend a career fair if they knew what businesses were attending. This allows them to make a plan as to the “must visits” and can help spark interest into those they may be on the fence about. Beyond this, many survey participants voiced that they want help in the social situations surrounding career fairs whether in the form of ready to ask questions to help get the conversation started (30%) or just having more information on the organizations attending beyond their name (43%).

Consider: As an employer, the more you make known about your organization ahead of time, the easier it is for someone to approach your booth. Sometimes, for youth, the initial interaction can be the hardest, especially if they feel like they’re “going in blind.”

Section D: Employers Trying New Ideas

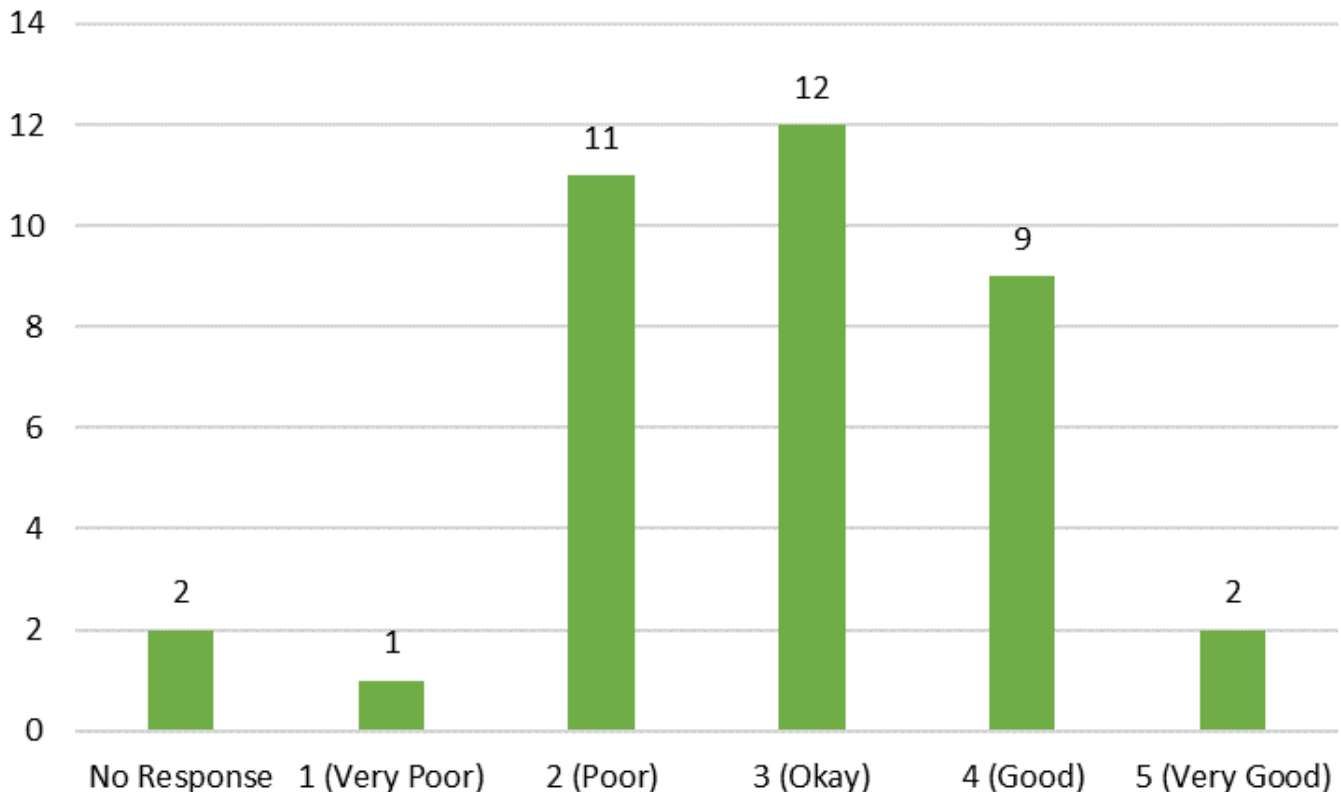
After concluding the youth survey in the Spring of 2023, key takeaways were developed and distributed to CEC and BEPWR. These organizations were able to share findings with employers at their events in Fall 2023. These employers were then surveyed to see if they found any difference by making some of the suggested changes and if they were satisfied with the number of participants that attended their booth. Suggestions offered can be found in Section E on page 14.

37 Employers were surveyed as part of the CEC event follow-up surveys after the “Your Future Your Choice” and “Your Pathways Your Choice” events. Three main questions were asked.

- 1) How would you rate the number of attendees that your booth received (Scale of 1 to 5)
 - 2) Did you attempt any strategies to help draw the interest of attendees to your booth?
 - 3) If so, what did you implement and do you believe you saw a difference due to it?
- Of those surveyed, 6 employers (16%) did not attempt any of the strategies in order to draw youth to their booths. Of those 6, none rated their engagement with participants above a 3.
 - Employers who were attempting strategies to draw in youth were more pleased with the number of attendees their booths received. 64% of employers who attempted strategies rated their interactions with youth as a 3 or higher.
 - Swag, or free items, tended to be the most consistent way employers were attempting to draw in youth with 21 (57%) of those surveyed using this strategy.



Employers Rating Their Participant Booth Engagement



When asked how they rated the number of booth attendees, employers were split almost directly down the middle with an average rating of 3. Despite this, in the comments, some employers who rated participation 2 or lower noted that they did see an increase in participation from youth due to the implemented strategies and that the lower rating was due to overall attendance of the event. These employers might have rated participation even lower if they had not implemented these strategies to start the conversation with participants.

Consider: Having strategies in order to draw in youth to your booth does not have to be anything high cost or flashy. The conversations and “selling point” should still be key, but strategies to begin those conversations need to be developed for successful interaction at career fairs. Some examples seen included a spinner wheel with questions about the attendee so the organization could tie the answer into what they do, free swag (the more unique, the better), or hands on demos of tools/software used in the job.

Section E: Employer Best Practices

- 1) Engage with Youth on a personal level to help showcase that their interests can be a part of your organization. Go beyond the job description and explain how your jobs have meaning to them and the world around them.
- 2) When thinking of what items you are putting your organizations logo on for giveaways, think to yourself “is this something unique that people will remember? Or is it just another office item that will get put to the side and forgotten about?” Even if it’s small and misplaced over time, something unique will make youth remember “oh that’s that company that gave me that Yo-Yo.”
- 3) Ensure that staff attending events can talk about company policies like EDI and the environment beyond just knowing they are in place at the organization. Youth have a need to “change the world” in their future careers and want to ensure that the organizations they work for are aligned with their values, as not only employees but as individuals. It will not be uncommon for youth to discuss with your organization how you can help them achieve that goal of changing the world.
- 4) Have hands on activities to draw in youth and help begin the conversation. Youth at events often don’t know what to ask to employers or where to start the conversation, especially if it is a field they have not necessarily thought of pursuing in the past. Having hands on activities can help break the ice and develop relationships. Your discussion with youth about your industry can start and go beyond the base level of. “this is the job and this is what we do.”
- 5) Make it known that you are attending the event ahead of time. 43% of surveyed youth stated that they would be more likely to attend a career fair if they knew more about the businesses attending. So by stating you will be there and giving prior information about your organization, more youth may come to the event and have brand recognition regarding your business which in turn can lead to more interactions and more interest at the event.



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**To get involved with future projects or if you have inquiries about
the data**

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