

Guide to Internship Programs

Tools to create an effective internship for your organization

Created by GSDC, Adapted from “Total Internship Management” by Richard Bottner, Robert Shindell Ph.D. & Intern Bridge, INC.

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Introduction

We have created this toolkit to guide you in creating an internship program or increasing the effectiveness of an existing program. Included are tips regarding the benefits of internships, suggested steps in finding and preparing for an intern, and a job description template and outline for your use.

Benefits of having an Intern

“As a recent college graduate, my most meaningful professional work experience thus far has been through internships. Being both a young professional and someone who is ready to jump into meaningful work, it is through these internships that I have learned how to apply the skills learned in the classroom. Internships have allowed me to sit in on meetings and be exposed to work I never would have as an entry level employee. Not only has this been more than beneficial for thinking personally about future careers, but also has allowed me to truly engage in new kinds of work, helping me strive for intentionality and effectiveness each day.”

-Amelia, GSDC Summer Intern 2019

From an organizational standpoint, the benefits of having an intern are many. For example, an intern can bring new ideas and energy, help you build relationships with educational institutions, contribute productivity where needed, and give you an opportunity to assess a candidate for possible future employment.

Considerations when hiring an Intern

Creating a well-structured and efficient internship program is essential for a successful internship experience for the organization and the intern. A commitment to an ongoing internship program also demonstrates that your organization values personal contributions and personal and workforce development. Below we've listed things to consider when hiring an intern.

1. Thorough, thoughtful preparation prior to the intern's arrival will result in a productive and beneficial experience for everyone.
2. Consult with colleagues and departments as to where an intern might be a good fit. Align the interests, knowledge and capabilities of the intern with needs of the organization.
3. Identify goals of the internship. Having clear goals helps the intern know what to expect and assists your organization in specifying what you would like the intern to accomplish.
4. Select a supervisor who can dedicate time and guidance to an intern. Although it is beneficial to have an intern work with multiple people, having a consistent person to whom they can bring questions is essential. Scheduling regular check-in meetings between the intern and supervisor is recommended.
5. Ideally, the intern's supervisor's characteristics will include flexibility, clear communication, and encouraging support.
6. Interns want to make a meaningful contribution and be busy during their internship hours. If possible, keep interns occupied with short and long-term projects. This variety can help interns stay occupied, increasing independence and self-sufficiency. You may find that Interns actually finish their assignments more quickly than expected.

Internship Compensation

The employer determines whether an internship is paid or unpaid. If the budget will support it, we encourage you to provide some sort of compensation to interns. The nature of that compensation can vary. Below are a few things to consider when determining intern compensation.

The compensation system in place in your organization should be a point of reference. There may be resources and information available within your industry, the state or the individual's area of study. The book, *Total Internship Management*, includes information on compensation data. Justworks.com features an article on this topic, as well. [Click for article](#). It is generally advisable to pay your interns the state's minimum wage, at a minimum. Below are some considerations regarding internship compensation.

1. Budget capacity, fair compensation for contribution, and balance between contribution to company and cost to company for training and overseeing the intern.
2. It may be difficult for some students to afford an unpaid internship as they will continue to have expenses. By not providing compensation you may be limiting the pool of interns available to you.
3. Compensation, whether through a stipend or hourly pay, will demonstrate to the intern that their work is meaningful to the organization and may positively affect their sense of pride and motivation. While compensation is typically not the reason a student is seeking an internship, it provides a small benefit for getting meaningful professional experience.
4. College credit is usually not considered compensation. Although students may be getting credit for the internship, it is advised that you still think about providing some form of compensation. The internship commitment is commonly in addition to their course work and often times other employment.
5. Other forms of compensation can include transportation reimbursement, gift cards, or meals.

Job Description Formation

What to include in a job description

1. A general description and goals of your organization
2. Duration of Internship
3. A general list of tasks and responsibilities
4. Expectations of the Intern
5. Compensation for the Intern
6. Information about your inclusive and non-discriminatory policies

Sample Intern Tasks

Intern tasks should be tailored to the company, department, and position.

1. Create a poster or flyer for an upcoming event or meeting.
2. Attend patient consultations.
3. Decorate or organize a classroom.
4. Maintain social media platforms.
5. Aid in the modification or enhancement of your internship program.
6. Contact and schedule volunteers.
7. Take responsibility for a regular task, such as placing the weekly supply order.

8. Draft internal or external communications.
9. Assist with research projects.
10. Create reports.

Tasks given to your intern should reflect the needs of the organization and enable the intern to take on something that interests them.

Although interns can easily assist you with more tedious tasks such as stuffing envelopes, consider assigning them something more substantial. Interns want and need to be challenged, as well as contribute meaningful work.

Job Description Template

For a template of an internship job description could look like, and for further assistance in creating your own, see the document [Internship Job Description Template](#) created by Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation.

Ideally, your job description should be completed before you begin your intern search. Creating a document based on the template above will provide you with the ability to post the position on multiple platforms, especially since you have all the necessary information compiled in advance.

Hiring an Intern

What to look for in an Intern

1. Remember that many students looking for an internship likely have not had extensive professional experience. That is why they are looking for an internship! Don't be afraid to interview them to learn more about why they are looking for an internship or what interests them to your organization in particular.
2. Many internships, especially if you are looking to hire a student during the school year, are associated with school credit. This is something the student will share with you, but it is good to include a question on your application asking if this will be part of the internship.
3. Academic GPA can be a good indicator for the success as a student, but should not be treated as the most important indicator of a student's work ethic or capabilities. Most students take pride in their grades, but understand the importance of involvement outside the classroom.

Where to find an Intern

There are a number of resources available that can assist you in your search for an intern.

1. Hiring Interns with Disabilities

Disabilities take many forms, and most are not impediments to internships and employment.

- a. Information and contact at WACOSA: <https://wacosa.org/staffing-your-business/>
- b. Work Opportunity Tax Credit. This tax credit can be used for populations who experience high rates of unemployment. More information on this can be found on the [DEED website](#).
- c. Contact student accessibility offices at local colleges and universities.
2. Hiring International Students

- a. International students are allowed to work in the United States with the proper paperwork that is often easy to complete.
 - b. For more information, below is a guide for hiring international students and a list of answers to many frequently asked questions.
 - i. [Guide to Hiring International Students](#)
 - ii. [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
 - c. Hiring international students is a great way to further diversity your workforce.
- 3. Hiring Non-traditional Students
 - a. Non-traditional students at colleges and universities are individuals who are pursuing their undergraduate degree at an older age, are in different financial circumstances, or could be balancing a job and family responsibilities.
- 4. Career Centers at Local Colleges, Universities, and High Schools

The career centers at local colleges and universities are typical places to find interns, but it is also beneficial to connect with specific academic department heads regarding partnership with students.

 - a. St. Cloud State University Career Center
 - i. Contact Information: Michelle Schmitz, Executive Director
maschmitz@stcloudstate.edu
 - b. St. Cloud Technical and Community College Academic Advising Center
 - i. Stacy Griffey, Director of Academic Advising Center
sgriffey@sctcc.edu
 - c. College of Saint Benedict & St. John's University Experience & Professional Development
 - i. Contact Information: xpdexternalrelations@csbsju.edu.
 - d. Guidance counselors at area high schools.

Other considerations when pursuing an intern include:

- 1. Use inclusive language in the internship description and related documents. It is important for an intern to know they are joining an organization that is aware, inclusive, and representative.
- 2. Diversity of all kinds in an organization is one key to success. To diversify your work force, look for interns in new places. Send recruiters to target areas and populations to market effectively to specific demographics. Be flexible and willing to adjust recruiting methods, contact career centers and department chairs at local colleges and universities.
- 3. Consistency is key when wanting to attract diverse talent – be visible and relatable early on.

Suggested Interview Questions

Intern interview questions are similar those you use to hire regular employees. Focus questions on understanding whether the intern will be a good fit for your organization and the responsibilities of the internship.

Ask questions that determine whether the internship and the organization align with the potential intern's career goals and include questions that allow the student to transfer their previous experiences to future ones.

- a. For example: When was a time you failed and what did you learn from it? This question could either be directed toward academic or professional experience.

- b. You can also ask a question that enables you to not only know that the student can learn from their mistakes but is also willing to accept feedback for improvement and personal development.

Below is a list of other common interview questions for interns:

1. Tell me about your course work? In what ways is it relevant to this position?
2. Tell me about your volunteer or community service experience?
3. What skills do you want to gain from this experience, and what skills can you offer us?
4. Why do you want to intern here?
5. What questions do you have for us?

Selecting an Intern

Once you have completed all your interviews and given your potential interns a hiring timeline, take a day or two to decide who will be the best fit for your organization. Once you have selected your next intern, a call or send an acceptance or decline email to each of your candidates. It is advised to follow up with a candidate within 48 hours of their interview.

For intern acceptance and decline emails, tailor those you would use for full or part-time employees. These emails can be adapted for any stage of the hiring process.

Before your intern's first day, send them a memorandum, a form of a job agreement, to review. Have them sign it on their first day during their on-boarding process. Since you have already completed your job description, you have all the information ready to place in the memorandum, just add the proper specifics for the particular intern. This [memorandum template](#) can serve as a more proper internship agreement than a job description and is easy to reference throughout the intern's experience.

On-boarding

Ideally, have the intern's work space already set up for them when they arrive on their first day. Explain the company terminology and overview, dress code, and communication expectations (e.g., what to do if they are sick or running late). Depending on the structure of your internship, it is also advised to set goals with the intern either based on projects that will be assigned or ones related to their personal goals. This activity can help an intern stay motivated and on track during the duration of their internship.

On-boarding also provides an opportunity to set expectations, both for the intern and the supervisor. Clear expectations can decrease confusion and transparent timelines can assist in keeping everyone on the same page throughout the experience.

Supervisors

Choosing a supervisor for your intern is one of the most important steps in preparation. Interns are different from new employees. They may need more time to have their questions answered and activities explained. Weekly check-in meetings and intentional mentoring are ways to assure effective two-way communication. A supervisor's oversight will also change depending on the intern's abilities, interests, and skill set. A high school student and a college student will have different needs throughout their internship. It's wise to pick a supervisor based on the type and number of assignments available in

that department. Supervisors are a key determinant to a positive experience for both an intern and organization.

Mentorship & Employee Engagement with an Intern

The importance of mentorship is high when working with interns. As students, interns are eager to learn and take advantage of new opportunities around them.

Mentoring tips:

1. Keep mentoring relationships informal, yet professional
2. Tailor teaching and advising to the needs of the intern
3. Provide detailed and effective feedback
4. Invite input from the intern

Although your intern may be assigned to one specific person, introduce them to as many people as possible. Some ideas for this may be having them meet with your executive(s), or arrange a coffee break or lunch with various people in your organization. This is another helpful way for the intern to learn about different career paths and develop their own career goals. It also allows the intern, and you, to better understand whether your organization may be a good fit for them long term.

Off-boarding

About 2 weeks before the internship ends, begin transitioning the intern out of the work they've been assigned. Structure work assignments in a way that the intern knows what should get done before they leave. Set up a time for the intern and supervisor to meet so the intern can give any necessary updates regarding their progress on any projects that will be left uncompleted. This last step is crucial to ensure a smooth transition and minimal work disruption.

Show your interns appreciation at the end of their time. A simple card, lunch with staff members, or company gear is great. It doesn't have to be a big gift - a small token of appreciation can go a long way.

Internship Evaluation

At the end of any internship, the supervisor(s) and intern should complete an evaluation regarding the effectiveness of the internship and intern. The staff should reflect on and record the projects completed by the intern, and evaluate what the intern did well and what they could improve on. If possible, share the evaluation with the intern when completed. The feedback will assist the intern in being successful in future endeavors. The intern should also complete a survey about their internship experience, including what they did and did not like about the experience, and how the organization could better serve interns in the future.

Here is a [sample intern evaluation](#) and a [sample supervisor evaluation](#) . These documents should be adapted for your specific internship program and organization.

Conclusion

The beauty of an internship is that its focus and duration can be designed to serve the needs of the organization as well as the intern.

The key to a successful internship is structure and communication. A benefit of a positive internship is that the intern will speak well of your organization before, during, and after their internship.

There are plenty of resources to assist you during your internship preparation. Please don't hesitate to learn more. *Total Internship Management* by Richard Bottner & Robert Shindell Ph.D., and resources from Intern Bridge, Inc., are great sources of quality information.

We wish you all the best with your internship program!