



# **Employer Guide to Organizing a Successful Internship Program**

**BE BRAVE. TAKE RISKS.**

**NOTHING CAN SUBSTITUTE EXPERIENCE.**

The dream...hire experienced employees who required very little, if any, training. But this dream conflicts with reality. How can organizations meet the needs of today and prepare the workforce for the future? One solution is to develop a quality internship program.

# Table of Contents

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What Is the Best Experiential Option for Your Organization? .....	3
A Closer Look at an Internship? .....	4
How do employers benefit from an Internship Program? .....	4
Benefits to Employers.....	4
Designing an Internship Program that Meets Your Needs.....	5
Step 1: Set Goals.....	5
Step 2: Write a Plan .....	5
Step 3: Supervising the intern(s).....	6
Finding the Right Intern for Your Organization .....	6
Making an Internship Offer .....	7
Benefits to Students .....	7
Learning Goals.....	7
Designing Your Internship Program .....	8
Role of an Internship Supervisor and Mentor .....	8
Role of a Mentor.....	8
Orienting and Training Interns.....	9
Key Points .....	10
Orientation Checklist.....	10
Paying an Intern.....	11
Workers’ and Unemployment Compensation.....	12
Keep in Mind .....	12
Writing an Internship Posting Description.....	12
Evaluations .....	13
Conclusion .....	13
Resources.....	13

# What Is the Best Experiential Option for Your Organization?

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Experiential Learning provides students with direct experience through which they can use analytical skills and reflection to apply new ideas gained from the experience to their classroom learning. Experiential learning includes internships, service learning, and various practicum opportunities. Determine what the best fit for the organization is by considering the following definitions:



**Volunteer** is a person who performs a service willingly, without pay or credit in order to support a cause.

**Service Learning** is curriculum-based emphasizing hands-on learning while addressing real world concerns. The service experience provides a context for translating discipline based theories into practice.

**Civic Engagement** offers a broad concept of community involvement and awareness that can include service, advocacy, service learning, volunteerism and political participation, with the goal of helping to develop community based knowledge, values and skills.

**Capstone/Project Based Learning** course is the culmination of learning in the major. A student generally works on a single large project-such as a thesis paper or large research project-for the entire semester.

**Externships** (Job Shadow) provide an initial exposure to a career for a brief period of time (such as one day a week or a couple hours per week) by having students “shadow” an experienced employee or professional. Externships may include academic credit when connected to a course.

**Internships** are defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as: “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.” In addition, an internship is a semester (fall, spring, summer) in duration, may or may not carry credit, may be paid or unpaid based on the Department of Labor criteria (See Page 11 for DOL Requirements).

A **Student Employee** is a person who is hired to provide services to an organization on a regular basis in exchange for compensation, not for academic credit. This is appropriate when you don't meet Department of Labor 6 Prong test. (See page 11)

**Apprenticeship** is a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs can be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labor groups, and/or employer associations. After completing an apprenticeship program, the worker's journey-level status provides an additional benefit of nationwide mobility at journey level scale.

## A Closer Look at an Internship?

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Often times an internship is the ideal fit for an individual and employer. An internship is any carefully monitored meaningful learning experience in which a individual has intentional professional goals and reflects actively on what he or she is accomplishing throughout the experience. Developing an internship program is an excellent strategy for investing in your organization's future successes, often leading to discovering future colleagues and leaders.

A typical internship:

- Includes developing intentional learning objective goals that are structured into the experience and supervised by a professional with relevant and related background in the field.
- Promotes academic, career and/or personal development.
- Includes learning objectives, observation, reflection, and evaluation.
- Balances the intern's learning goals with the organization's needs.
- Typically lasts three months. May be part-time or full-time.
- Involves industry related and soft skill development.
- May be carefully monitored and evaluated for academic credit.
- Provides adequate supervision in a reasonably safe environment with the necessary tools to perform the learning goals agreed upon for the duration of the internship.

An internship is not:

- Free help.
- Meant to replace an employee.
- More than 20% busy work (filing, covering phone, errands).

## How do employers benefit from an Internship Program?

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One of the more significant advantages to providing internships is the opportunity to select and develop your future talent. You have the opportunity to evaluate and screen potential employees prior to making a full-time position offer, which leads to financial savings. Employers have reported converting more than half of eligible interns into full-time hires. If hired in a permanent position, previous interns assimilate faster to their new roles and have shorter learning curves than external hires.

## Benefits to Employers

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- Provide freedom for professional staff to pursue creative or more advanced projects.
- Increase staff retention rate.
- Assist an organization in application of the latest strategies and techniques in the field.
- Maintain connections with colleges and increase visibility on campus.
- Promote community involvement-excellent public relations tool.
- Recruit other students and generate enthusiasm.
- Creates awareness of the field for future hires.
- Giving to the community by teaching the prospective work force.

# Designing an Internship Program that Meets Your Needs

As varied as companies are in age, size, industry and product, so too are their internship activities. How do you know what kind of program will work best for you? Designing an internship program to meet needs is as easy as five steps.



To determine if an intern is the right choice for your company, ask the following questions:

- Are there specific projects or assignments that will provide quality working and learning opportunity for an intern?
- Can the company commit time to develop a student, promote community goodwill, and offer insight into the organization?
- Are there any benefits from the latest technology, perspectives, and relevant skills being used in our school?
- Does the company have a desire to help mold the future of the workforce's talent?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, then you are ready to support an intern!

## Step 1: Set Goals

- What does the employer hope to achieve from the program?
- Is the employer a small company searching for additional help on a project?
- Is the company growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees?
- Is the employer or organization searching out new employees with management potential?

A careful discussion with management in the organization can create a consensus on program goals that can be understood by all involved. The program and internship can be designed to best meet those expectations. As many staffing professionals may know, in order for a program to be successful, it will require the commitment of management. After all, management may be the people providing the internship experience.

## Step 2: Write a Plan

Carefully plan and write out the internships program and goals. After all, managers, mentors, interns and the community college career center are all going to be reading about the internship. Draft a job description that clearly explains the job's duties. Does the company want someone for a specific project? General support around the workplace? To give the intern a taste of everything the company does?

### Things to think about include:

**Will you pay the intern?** If so, how much? Wages vary widely from field to field and location to location, so be sure wages are competitive or offer competitive incentives.

**What sort of academic background and experience will be required in an intern?** Decide on standards for quality beforehand – it'll help narrow down the choices and find the best candidates.

**Who will have the primary responsibility for the intern?** Will that person be a mentor or merely a junior manager gaining management experience?

**How many hours per week will the intern work?** Does the company need someone full-time in the summer? During the school year, the intern will also be meeting academic requirements. How many hours will be required of the student to commit to while they do so?

**What will the intern be doing?** Be as specific as possible. Interns, like others in the process of learning, need structure so they don't become lost, confused or bored.

**Do you want to plan a program beyond the work you give your interns?** Will there be special training programs, performance reviews, lunches with executives, social events? Keep in mind that interns are walking advertisements for the company. If they have a good experience working for the company, they're likely to tell their friends – word gets around.

These are just some of the questions to consider. The company's approach will depend on specific resources and needs.

**A very important part of the plan should be the assignment of a mentor or supervisor** – that is, someone who will be in charge of the intern. This person does not have to be a teacher per se, but should be selected because he or she likes to teach or train and has the resources to do it. If the person selected has never mentored an intern before, give him or her some basic training in mentoring.

### Step 3: Supervising the intern(s)

An intern must have a designated site supervisor who is responsible for providing orientation and supervision. This should be someone who will be available to the student on a regular basis, and who possesses expertise in the area in which the intern will work. Even if the intern will rotate through various departments in order to gain broad-based experience, there still should be a single overall supervisor who oversees the internship as a whole. When choosing a supervisor, it is important to choose someone who is interested in working with college students; has the time to invest in the internship, especially during the first few weeks; and possesses qualities such as leadership, strong communication skills, and patience.

Because an internship is defined as a learning experience, proper supervision of the intern is essential. The supervisor serves as a teacher, mentor, critic, and boss. Ongoing supervision of the student intern is the key to the success of the internship. This is especially true for students who do not have extensive work experience. Acknowledging and identifying the different expectations between the workplace and school can help interns make a successful transition to the world of work.

And effective method of intern supervision is to have a set time (biweekly is recommended) to meet with the intern to review progress on projects, touch base, and provide feedback. Some supervisors do this over lunch; others choose a more formal setting.

## Finding the Right Intern for Your Organization

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**High School:** High School students are interested in developing interpersonal and professional skills. These skills will allow them to discover what areas they excel in, and they could potentially remain with the organization through college. This experience can also increase the students desire to graduate and pursue higher education in the future.

**Community College Student:** A community college intern could be beneficial for your organization because of their experience in and out of the classroom. They have an opportunity to apply things they've learned in their curriculums into the workplace. Many students participate in internship to explore career niches and to develop their professional skills. Ideally an internship for a college student is an opportunity to network, enhance industry related and soft skills, leading from education to employment.

**Career Changer:** By transitioning to a new industry they are hoping to expand a professional network in this new field and incorporate their professional skills into your organization.

## Making an Internship Offer

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When you feel you have found the candidate with the appropriate experience, professionalism, maturity and who is a mutually beneficial fit for the organization, make an offer. Just as in a permanent full-time job search, students may be applying and interviewing for internships with multiple organizations. Thus, it is best to make an offer as soon as a decision has been made. At this time, a work schedule should be set, compensation agreed upon, and appropriate paperwork completed for human resources need and the student's internship requirements.

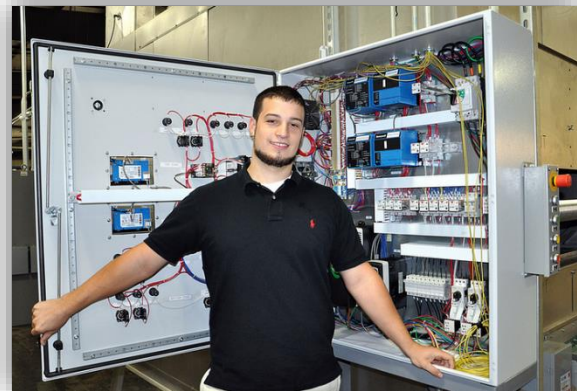
## Benefits to Students

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Students are seeking opportunities that stimulate their interests and provide real-world experiences.

A meaningful, purposeful internship program:

- Ensure the assignment of challenging projects and tasks.
- Provide projects that complement academic programs and/or career interests.
- Give broad exposure to the organization (remember: this is a chance for them to personally develop and explore career possibilities).
- Provide adequate, reliable, and regular supervision and mentoring.
- Ensure interns are keeping pace and accomplishing goals.
- Orientation.
- Create a professional network.
- Industry relevance.
- Real life experience.
- Enable the intern to establish a profession network.



## Learning Goals

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At the start of the internship it is recommended that the supervisor and intern create a list of learning goals the intern hopes to complete. The learning goals serve as the academic and professional roadmap for the intern's

semester/time with your organization. This activity helps to clearly identify the intern's learning objectives and how the intern plans to accomplish them. Creating these goals is also an opportune time to discuss work

## Designing Your Internship Program

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Prior to hiring an intern, an employer must understand how interns will fit within the company's goals and culture. Since organizations vary in age, size, industry, and product, so too will internship activities.

Questions that may determine what kind of program will work best for you:

- What does your organization hope to gain from the program?
- Is your organization looking to fulfill a need on a specific project? Will this internship(s) encompass one major project, or entail a variety of small projects?
- What are the tools and workspace necessary to provide the student?
- What talents, academic background and experience do you want in an intern? Decide on qualifications early on to help you select the best candidate.
- Who will be primarily responsible for the intern(s)? Will that person be a mentor, supervisor, or both?

**Learn about prospective Interns:** Whether a high school student, college student or adult learner, we want to develop skills. The best way to know what skills an intern is hoping to gain is to interview.

**It is important that employers realize that school and classes must remain a top priority for interns.** The internship position should enhance their learning experience. Understand that for most interns this is a new experience and they may need support in balancing their schoolwork and internship. Agreeing on a set number of hours interns will work each week and offering flex-time for freedom to plan their schedules on a weekly basis are two ways to support balance.

## Role of an Internship Supervisor and Mentor

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It's going to be important to identify a supervisor for your intern(s) who will familiarize them with the organization, provide assignments and serves as a "contact" person for questions. It's recommended that the intern supervisor be an expert in the type of work the intern(s) will be performing to provide the appropriate guidance for the intern's assignments. An intern supervisor's responsibilities will include:

- Taking part in an intern's application, screening, and interview process
- Conducting intern orientation
- Developing learning goals
- Meeting with an intern regularly to evaluate performance and if needs or goals are being met; and assessing the internship program's success

### Role of a Mentor

In addition to the supervisor, a mentor may assist with transition into this new learning environment. This is done by answering general questions related to personal and professional growth, and sharing career knowledge leading to networking in the field.



# Orienting and Training Interns

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Many students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment and objectives of business and industry. Even though your interns may have worked part-time to support their education, these experiences may not have exposed them to organizational politics, the need for confidentiality, the importance of teamwork, or the profit-making orientation of business. It is this orientation and training dimension of the internship experience that emphasizes the partnership role of the sponsoring organization.

The sooner the student interns understand what the organization does and how it operates, the sooner they can assume assigned responsibilities and become productive. You can help this process by providing the following kinds of information about the site:

## Personnel Structure

- Company organization
- Special industry jargon
- Specific work standards and procedures
- Reporting relationships
- Access to the supervisor (days, times, and duration)
- Tasks that can be completed without supervisory approval
- Work processing requests and timeliness
- Mail and telephone systems
- Approved form(s) for correspondence
- Safety regulations
- Procedure for signing off completed work
- Periodic forms or reports to be completed
- Security and confidentiality issues, if relevant
- Acceptable dress and appearance
- Maintaining the premises and work station
- Productive interaction with others at the work site
- Personnel who can answer different kinds of questions
- How the organization wants the intern to deal with clients, customers, and vendors

You can communicate this information in several ways:

- Take your interns on a tour of the facilities and introduce them to the other employees
- Give your interns company materials to read such as newsletters, annual reports, an organization chart, or memos from the CEO
- Encourage your interns to spend break and lunchtimes in places where employees gather
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with them
- Give the interns opportunities to observe (or participate in) professional meetings

- Allow the interns to interview company personnel
- Encourage the interns to walk around and observe others at work

The success of an internship depends on the partnership between representatives of the organization, the college, and the student. These three parties need to agree on the conditions of the internship, the responsibilities of each party, and the reporting requirements. The site supervisor is the critical link. You guide your interns by providing direction and feedback. If a problem occurs, you counsel the students and contact the faculty supervisor, when necessary.

## Key Points

Develop a thorough orientation and training plan to be implemented when the interns begin work, so they will learn quickly and become productive members of your team. Invest supervisory time to establish an important bond with interns and set a crucial tone for the internship experience.

## Orientation Checklist

Experience shows that employers who take adequate time at the beginning of the internship to orient the student reap productivity and effectiveness more quickly than those who don't. To help acclimate interns, please take time initially to:

### **Explain the Mission of the Organization**

- How did the organization start? Why?
- What is unique about your product or service?
- Who benefits from your product or service?
- What are the organization's current objectives?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?

### **Explain the Organization Structure**

- Who reports to whom, and who, specifically, is the intern's supervisor?
- What is the intern's department responsible for?
- How are decisions made?
- Which personnel can answer different kinds of questions?

### **Outline Organizational Rules, Policies, Decorum and Expectations**

- Is there special industry jargon?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- What access to the supervisor (days, times, and duration) does the intern have?
- How should they process requests?
- How do the mail, telephone and e-mail/network systems work?
- What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- By what safety regulations must they abide?
- Is there a procedure for signing off completed work?
- What periodic forms or reports need to be completed?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues the intern should be aware of?
- What is acceptable with regard to dress and appearance?
- How should they maintain the premises and their work area?

### **Define the Intern's Responsibilities**

- What is the intern's role?
- What projects will be assigned to him or her?
- What resources are available to the intern?
- What training is necessary?
- How does the organization want the intern to deal with clients and vendors?
- What tasks can be completed without supervisory approval?
- Do other employees understand the intern's role?

### **Monitor the Intern's Adjustment and Understanding of What is Expected**

- Make yourself visibly available to the intern and encourage the intern to ask questions
- Assign someone who can periodically "check-in" with the intern
- Provide feedback and constructive criticism

place requirements, intern responsibilities, and hours expected to complete. We ask our supervisors to take the time to meet with the interns during the first week of the internship to discuss and negotiate learning goals.

## **Paying an Intern**

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- Wages for most internship opportunities are usually determined before the intern is hired and are not typically negotiated.
- Consider paying consistent wages to all interns within each department.
- Students in technical fields are generally paid more than nontechnical fields.
- Pay for interns often varies by location, type of industry, size of organization, etc.

If you are deciding between paid and unpaid internships, it is important to know if the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act applies to your organization.

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which applies to all companies that have at least two employees directly engaged in interstate commerce and annual sales of at least \$500,000.00, severely restricts an employer's ability to use unpaid interns or trainees. It does not limit an employer's ability to hire paid interns.

You don't have to pay interns who qualify as leaders/trainees. The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six criteria for determining trainee status:

1. Interns cannot displace regular employees
2. Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship (though you may decide to hire them at the conclusion of the experience)
3. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship
4. Interns must receive training from your company, even if it somewhat impedes the work of your organization
5. Interns must get hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry

6. Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the company

## Workers' and Unemployment Compensation

Workers' compensation boards have found that interns contribute enough to a company to make them employees. It's wise to cover interns under your workers' compensation policy even though you aren't required to do so. Student interns are not generally eligible for unemployment compensation at the end of the internship.

## Keep in Mind

Paid interns make ideal workers – hungry to learn, eager to make a good impression and willing to perform even the most menial tasks. The relatively small amount of money employers spend on intern wages and benefits is a good investment, because it often produces future, long-term employees.

The employer should identify the specific terms and conditions of employment (e.g., dates of employment as intern, including date internship will end; compensation; organizational and/or reporting relationships; principal duties, tasks or responsibilities; working conditions; any other expectations of the employer), should discuss these with the prospective intern, so that there is no misunderstanding regarding the relationship. Also, it may make good sense to document such a discussion with a written agreement setting forth both parties' understandings, and have it signed by both the employer and the intern.

## Writing an Internship Posting Description

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Employers are competing to gain a student's interest and stand out among the rest. When writing your posting, treat the description as an opportunity to showcase the internship.

Questions to consider BEFORE writing the position description:

- Why will students want to apply for your opportunity over others in the industry?
- Does your opportunity illustrate how it will be a unique experience?
- Do you fully define the benefits and incentives your organization can provide?

Writing an internship description is essential to recruiting the right individual. Write the description in clear, everyday language that will help the student understand the position and your organization culture. If the opportunity offers a broad exposure to many elements in your organization, be sure to state that in the description. Interns appreciate knowing the expectations upfront.

**The essential components of an effective internship description include:**

- Explain the organization's goals and mission
- Outline the intern's responsibilities and potential tasks/projects
  - Describe skills that will be developed
- Illustrate the necessary qualifications
  - Skills (computer, analytical, design, communications, etc.)
  - Education level (year, GPA, etc.) and Majors
- Clarify the duration of the internship
  - Hours required per week / semester (fall, spring, summer)
  - Flexibility with schedule or specific hours
- Note if it's paid or unpaid

# Evaluations

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An internship can only be a true learning experience if constructive feedback is provided. An effective evaluation will focus on the interns' initial learning objectives identified at the start of the internship. Supervisors should take time to evaluate both the student's positive accomplishments and areas for improvement.

Interns will look to their mentors and/or supervisors to help them transition from the classroom to the workplace. IT is recommended that mentors and/or supervisors regularly meet with interns to receive and provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meeting the students may:

- Report on a project's status
- Learn how their work is contributing to the organization
- Participate in evaluating their strengths
- Discuss areas needing growth and development
- Get insight about what work lies ahead



Typically, supervisors are asked to evaluate interns at the midpoint and end of the internship. Employers are encouraged to review the internship with the intern before he or she leaves. Evaluations are helpful when determining the intern's success within the organization for future internships or employment upon graduation.

# Conclusion

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Thank you for your interest in supervising and mentoring an intern. Your participation provides interns the opportunity for both personal and professional growth. Interns have been commended for their diligence, work ethic, and professionalism. We are confident that you will find them a welcomed addition to your staff.

# Resources

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*Intern Today, Employee Tomorrow: The Indiana Employer's Guide to Internships* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://indianaintern.net/pdf/IIN-EmployersGuide1-11-1.pdf>.

*Employer Guide to Structuring a Successful Internship Program* (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://career.bryant.edu/resources/files/RI%20Employer%20Guide%20Good%20Internships%20are%20Good%20Business2%20\(3\).pdf](http://career.bryant.edu/resources/files/RI%20Employer%20Guide%20Good%20Internships%20are%20Good%20Business2%20(3).pdf).

*Employer's Guidebook to Developing a Successful Internship Program* (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://neded.org/files/businessdevelopment/internne/EmployerGuidebook\\_DevelopingSuccessfulInternshipProgram.pdf](http://neded.org/files/businessdevelopment/internne/EmployerGuidebook_DevelopingSuccessfulInternshipProgram.pdf).