

# INTERNSHIP BEST PRACTICES

## Best Practices for Internships (for managers and supervisors)

Getting started: How to develop an internship experience

- Identify organizational need: Determine whether a highly educational, vocational opportunity could be created to fulfill need
- Identify an on-site mentor, supervisor, or manager to oversee the intern
- Determine time commitment and duration of internship experience
- Hours per week: 12 to 17 hours is typical during the school year and can be up to full-time in summer. Less time than this doesn't provide enough time for an intern to assimilate to the team and County.
- Duration: How long will the project take?
- Offer flex-time and/or other unusual work arrangements. Students mention flex-time as one of their most-desired features in a job (a flexible time schedule during their internship allows them to work while continuing classes and eases their transition to the workplace).
- Paid Internships: One term, 6 months, summer, or full academic year. Paid internships are highly recommended over unpaid to help make opportunities accessible to more students, some of whom may not be in a position to accept an unpaid internship. The U.S. Government tightly regulates the employment (and internships) of international students. If you are considering placing an international student in your department for an internship, contact Human Resources for guidance.
- Unpaid internships: If you cannot offer compensation, ensure you've met the Department of Labor's [six criteria for unpaid internships](https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf) at <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>.
- Determine compensation - below are national average hourly wages (according to [NACE 2015](#))
  - Undergraduate range: minimum wage to \$17/hour, with the exception of computer science and engineering internships which average \$18-22/hour.
  - Bachelor's Degree average: \$17/hour
  - Master's Degree average: \$23/hour
  - Unpaid internships with for-profits must meet [Department of Labor criteria](#).
- Outline the scope of the internship: Develop and provide the student with a job description for the internship. Even if project-based or of limited duration, the expectations, responsibilities, and projects to be performed by the intern should be outlined in writing. Describe the context of the intern's project or work.
- [Some universities allow you to complete an online Internship Posting Form to advertise your opportunity on their website.](#)

Recruiting your intern

- To recruit the best candidates, begin searching three to four months before you need a student to begin. The longer you accept applications, the better your chance of finding the best student for the job.
- Choose your intern as carefully as you would choose a permanent employee. After all, they may be a regular employee someday. Craft interview questions to determine whether the applicant has the skills and background you need.
- Build relationships with the internship program staff at local colleges to assist you in getting the word out about your internship opening.

#### Best practices for providing ongoing support to your intern

- Provide interns with real work assignments. Providing interns with real work is number one to ensuring your program's success. Interns should be doing work related to their major, that is challenging, that is recognized by the organization as valuable, and that fills the entire work term.
- Develop goals and learning objectives: Work with your intern to outline projects and tasks that will meet the learning objectives. Review and sign an Internship Learning Contract or similar document with the intern prior to the start date of their internship.
- Appoint a mentor or supervisor: The intern's mentor provides ongoing support and feedback throughout the duration of the experience. The mentor also helps the intern navigate the organization's structure and takes an active role in the intern's professional development.
- Provide orientation and review worksite policies: At the beginning of the internship provide an orientation to your organization and clearly convey workplace expectations and protocol. Orientations ensure that everyone starts with the same expectations and role definitions. This is time well spent—the effort you put into these sessions will pay off throughout the program. At minimum you should cover the following:
  - Normal work hours, holidays, protocol for sick or personal time
  - Office dress code
  - Where/how to obtain office supplies
  - Introductions to co-workers
  - Office or site tour, including restrooms, lunch or break room, vending machines or cafes, and smoking areas (if applicable)
  - Policies on Drug-Free Workplace and Political Activity (available in the Employee Handbook on the intranet at <http://www.clackamas.us/des/documents/ehb.pdf>)
  - Policies on personal phone, email, or social media use
  - Emergency and safety procedures
  - How to report harassment or other serious concerns
  - Time sheets and pay periods (if applicable)

- Invest in your interns: Find ways to demonstrate that your organization is invested in its interns and their professional development. You can arrange meetings with members of your organization's executive ranks that provide students with great career development and networking opportunities. Offering in-house training in work skills or general skills areas is also a very tangible way to demonstrate to your interns that you are interested in their development.
- Develop cohorts among interns by hosting an orientation or checking in with them regularly as a group.

#### After the internship

- Evaluate intern and provide feedback: The intern's mentor should provide ongoing informal feedback throughout the internship. However, a more formal evaluation mid-term and at the end of the internship will help all involved meet the objectives of the experience. Sample evaluation forms are available in the appendices to this manual. Be sure to review and provide copies of any written evaluations with the intern. Many academic institutions will have requirements for an evaluation and the student may be required to write a final paper. Coordinate with the academic institution to ensure the student receives academic credit, if applicable.
- Showcase intern work through presentations/conferences. Setting up a venue for students to do presentations (formal presentations or in a fair-type setting such as an expo) not only allows them to demonstrate their achievements, but also showcases the internship program to all employees.
- Conduct exit interviews as an excellent way to gather feedback on the student's experience and to assess their interest in coming back. Having the students fill out an exit survey and bring it to the interview gives some structure to the conversation.

#### Best practices for a future Clackamas County Internship Program

- Have an Internship Coordinator or Manager. Having a dedicated employee managing an intern program is the best way to ensure that it runs smoothly and consistently. If your program is unable to dedicate a full-time staff member, an excellent short-term solution is to hire a graduate student (look for a student working toward an advanced HR degree) to be your intern, and put this college relations intern in charge of the daily operation of the internship program. This gives the interns a "go-to" person, and gives you and your staff a break from the many daily tasks involved in running a program of any size. For this to work, you have to plan the program structure in advance (don't expect your intern to do it), and be very accessible to your college relations intern.
- Develop and update an Intern Handbook.
- Have clear, measurable goals for your program.
- Strive to attract a diversity of interns.

- Attend college internship fairs and other events, send employees/executives to speak to students, and look for other ways to have a presence on college campuses. Having your executives speak to interns is another way to “sell” your organization to the interns, and get your executives invested in (and supporting) your program.
- Invite career center staff and faculty to visit interns on site. In general, career center staff and faculty members have few opportunities to visit employer work sites to see firsthand the types of experiences that their students are getting. By inviting them to your site, you will build a better working relationship with these groups, which can lead to more student referrals, enhanced campus visibility, and increased flexibility on their parts when your business needs dictate it.
- Conduct focus groups and feedback surveys with representatives of your target group as a great way to see your organization as the students see it. Focus groups in particular can yield information about what your competitors are doing that students find appealing.
- Evaluate the program’s effectiveness based on exit interviews and by evaluating how well you are meeting your goals. Communicate the results to your agency and other agencies. Many agencies can learn from each other.
- Based on findings, refine your program.

### **Orienting and Training Interns**

Even though your interns may have worked part-time, these experiences may not have exposed them to organizational politics, the need for confidentiality or the public service orientation of government. It is this orientation and training dimension of the internship experience that emphasizes the partnership role of the sponsoring organization.

Develop a thorough orientation and training plan to be implemented when your 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.

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.

### **Explain the Department’s Mission**

- What is unique about your department’s services?
- Who are your department’s customers?
- What are your department’s current objectives?
- How can the intern contribute to those objectives?

### **Explain the Department's Organizational Structure**

- Provide an organizational chart showing reporting relationships.
- Who, specifically, is your intern's supervisor?
- How are decisions made?
- Which staff members can answer different kinds of questions?

### **Outline Department and County Rules, Policies, Procedures and Expectations**

- Is there special department jargon or acronyms?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- What access to the supervisor/mentor (days, times, and duration) does your intern have?
- How should interns process requests?
- How do the mail and telephone systems work?
- What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- What safety training and/or policies regulations must interns adhere to?
- Is there a procedure for signing off completed work?
- What periodic forms or reports need to be completed?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues your intern should be aware of? Do they need to sign a confidentiality agreement?
- What is acceptable with regard to dress and appearance?
- How should your intern maintain the premises and personal work area?

### **Defining the Intern's Responsibilities**

#### **Set your intern up for success by addressing these issues.**

- What is your intern's role?
- What projects will be assigned to him or her?
- What resources are available to your intern?
- What training is necessary?
- How does your organization want your 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**

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

**The following are suggestions for communicating this information:**

- Take your intern on a tour of the facilities and introduce him or her to the other employees.
- Give your intern materials to read such as newsletter, annual reports, or memos from top management.
- Provide access to your department's web site.
- Encourage your intern to spend breaks and lunchtimes in places where other employees gather.
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with your intern.
- Give your intern opportunities to observe or participate in professional meetings.
- Allow your intern to interview other staff.
- Encourage your intern to walk around and observe others at work.

The success of an internship depends on the partnership between representatives of the department and the student. Both parties need to agree on the conditions of the internship, the responsibilities of each party, and the reporting requirements. The direct 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 college internship coordinator when necessary.

### Evaluations

The following professional qualities can be used to evaluate interns, if the college does not provide a framework for doing so:

Quantity of Work: Meets productivity standards; completes work in a quick and timely manner; strives to increase productivity.

Quality of Work: Demonstrates accuracy and thoroughness; displays commitment to excellence; looks for ways to improve and promote quality; shows good attention to detail.

Work Ethic: Demonstrates a good work ethic; offers assistance and support to co-workers; willing to go the extra mile; makes maximum use of time.

Job Knowledge and Competency: Competent in required job skills and knowledge; exhibits ability to learn and apply new skills; keeps abreast of current developments in field; requires minimal supervision.

Teachability: Shows an openness and eagerness to learn from others; accepts criticism and feedback; applies feedback to improve performance; open to new ways of doing things.

Communication: Exhibits good listening and comprehension; expresses ideas and thoughts effectively; keeps other adequately informed; resolves conflict effectively and timely.

Attitude/Self Control: Is positive about the organization, co-workers, and management; displays positive outlook and pleasant manner; takes a solution-focused approach to problems; maintains self-control under stressful situations.

Organization: Sets goals and objectives; prioritizes and plans work activities; able to minimize distractions; works in an organized manner; able to multi-task and balance competing demands.

Adaptability: Adapts easily to changes in the work environment; changes approach or method to best fit the situation.

Initiative: Seeks increased responsibilities; undertakes self-development activities; takes independent action and calculated risks; effectively deals with issues before they become problems; asks for help when needed.

Reliability: Meets attendance and punctuality expectations; completes assigned tasks completely and timely; keeps commitments to co-workers and supervisors; takes responsibility for own actions.

Overall Satisfaction With Student Intern –use the following scale:

1 = Low Satisfaction 3 = Average Satisfaction 5 = High Satisfaction

## Top 10 Concerns of Interns

### **1. Give us real work!**

Interns want to work and learn. An intern can help you get a job done that you couldn't otherwise do. If you've brought on interns as a recruitment tool, then how will you be able to assess their abilities? It just makes sense to utilize your interns well.

### **2. Do what you say, and say what you do!**

Be honest with your interns about what they can expect during their internship. If the job will require stuffing some envelopes, then make that clear. But if you tell the intern they will be researching a project, and they spend 90% of their time doing "grunt work", then bad feelings will develop. Honesty doesn't cost you anything, and it will make the interns feel that much more respected.

### **3. We like feedback!**

Remember that interns are students, and they may not have the professional experiences that you take for granted. If your intern makes a mistake, just pull him or her aside and explain how the situation should be handled in the future.

### **4. We want to be included too!**

Is there a staff meeting that they can attend? Can they quietly tag along to that next project meeting? Headed to lunch with a couple of people in the office? Please include them in the daily life of your workplace.

### **5. Please explain.**

When you assign work, make sure you give a detailed explanation. While the work may seem trivial and obvious to you, it may not be obvious to someone who's never done it before. Patience and a few extra minutes at the beginning will pay off later when your intern produces good work independently.

### **6. I want a mentor!**

Make sure that interns have a mentor or supervisor to provide guidance. Make it someone who truly likes to teach, and the experience will be even better.

### **7. A minute of your time please.**

The best mentor in the world is useless if he or she can't or won't spend the necessary time mentoring. As newcomers, interns may not speak up if they're feeling ignored, so the burden of making sure they're okay is on the mentor. If the busiest person in the office wants to be the designated mentor, he or she should schedule regular times to meet with the intern.

### **8. Be prepared!**



That wonderful day has arrived and your intern goes to start their internship only to learn that no one knew they were coming, and there is no place for them to work.

#### **9. Um . . . I need a chair.**

It is amazing how many employers hire an intern and don't think about the fact that they will need a desk, chair, phone and a computer in order to do the task assigned. It is no fun, and not efficient to move an intern from desk to desk as people are out one day to the next. If you want to get a job done, you need to supply the intern with the tools to do the job.

#### **10. Show me the money (as best you can).**

While all internships are different, and each industry has its own culture, remember that interns have expenses. Your organization may not be in a position to pay much, but anything can help. Maybe you can help pay for their parking, take them to lunch every so often, or develop some other creative way to assist them.

What are appropriate intern assignments?

Here are some sample internship assignments from Internships.com. Consider having an intern...

- Research the viability of a new program, campaign, or initiative; compile and present statistics.
- Complete a backburner project that has been bogging down permanent staff.
- Create a proposal on a potential social media strategy, evaluate various social media platforms, or come up with suggestions for how your current social media strategy might be improved.
- Critique your company's website...from a user perspective; brainstorm ideas for boosting usability.
- Propose solutions for a mid-level problem that no one has had time to address.
- Research and identify the most influential blogs in your industry. Follow them and provide weekly reports.
- Scan industry media for news items; provide regularly scheduled updates.
- Accompany employees to client, site visit, or other outside meetings; have them take an observer role, but ask for their input and ideas (and answer any questions) after you've left.
- Evaluate some area of IT functionality (for tech-savvy interns); ask if they see a way to improve efficiency, streamline programs, or cut costs.
- Take responsibility for some regular task. Even if it's as simple as taking, and placing, the weekly supply order, it will demonstrate follow-through and an ability to take ownership.
- Prepare a budget.

- Create support materials, such as charts, graphs, or other visuals.
- Plan and coordinate an event or meeting.
- Generate a marketing plan, financial forecast, or other report.
- Produce a video or slide presentation.
- Perform a study or survey; analyze and present results.
- Write internal communications.
- Compile employee manuals or develop process directions for tasks with high employee turnover.
- Source goods or search for lower-cost sources for high-volume materials.
- Clean up a database.
- Serve as a liaison between the company and clients or vendors (freeing up staff members to communicate on only more crucial issues).
- Aid in the modification or enhancement of your internship program.
- Help screen and train replacement interns prior to departure.

The bottom line when it comes to assigning intern tasks is to strike a balance between those activities that will provide a meaningful learning experience and those activities that will increase productivity in the organization.

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