STEPS TO BEGINNING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Designing an internship program that meets your needs
As varied as organizations 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 your needs is as easy as five steps.

Step 1: Set goals

Project Planning
What does your organization hope to achieve from the internship program? Is the organization searching for additional help on a project?

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Succession Planning
Is your organization growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees? Is your organization searching out new employees with management potential? How will this intern assist with building a talent pipeline?

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Learning Objectives
Does this experience meet the definition of an internship? An intern is not: (a) free help, (b) meant to replace an employee, or (c) more than 20% busy work (filing, covering phones, errands). An internship program is mutually beneficial. What will the intern learn as a result of the experience?

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A careful discussion with management 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. In order for a program to be successful, it will require the commitment of management.

Step 2: Write a plan
Carefully plan and write out your internship program and goals. Managers, mentors, prospective interns, students, and university career centers are all going to be reading what you write about the internship. Draft a job description that clearly explains the job’s duties. Structure the internship ahead of time so that you can be sure to meet your goals and not find yourself floundering partway through. See the Sample Internship Posting and create an internship job description that will align with your organization’s goals.

Considerations:

What project(s) will the intern accomplish? Be as specific as possible. Interns, like everyone in the process of learning, need structure so they do not become lost, confused, or bored.


Who will select candidates to interview and make the ultimate hiring decision? How will others have input?

What kind of documentation will the intern need, including work authorization, confidentiality agreements, or background checks?

Who will have primary responsibility and provide supervision for the intern? How will performance reviews and feedback be conducted? Has the supervisor been trained on supervision best practices?

If different from the supervisor, will anyone mentor and guide the intern within the organization?

What kind of training will be provided? Are there additional opportunities to learn, such as special workshops, lunches with executives, social events? Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your company. If they have a positive experience, they’re likely to recruit future interns.

Will the intern have a physical work location or telecommute? Will they need to provide their own laptop or equipment?

What is the organization able to provide as compensation, if anything? Wages vary widely from field to field; be sure yours are competitive. How many hours per week will be required? During the summer months only or year-round?

Will you help make parking arrangements, living arrangements, transportation, etc.?

These are just some of the questions to consider. Your organization’s approach will depend on your specific resources and needs.