



APEX Internship Resource

Created by Nick Heffernan, Adapted from Greater St. Cloud Development Group's "Internship Guidebook"

Introduction

This guide is the final product of an internship project created by APEX's 2025 summer intern, Nick Heffernan.

This resource includes information to help you start or improve your internship program. Topics include: internship compensation, sample intern tasks, useful resources, and more.

Benefits of having an intern

Internships bring numerous benefits to our region's companies, students, and individuals. Benefits such as increased retention of young adults, workforce development, and students gaining job experience and experimenting with different fields.

"As a recent college graduate, my most meaningful professional work experience thus far has been through internships. 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, Greater Saint Cloud Development Corporation
Summer Intern 2019

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. Below, we've listed things to consider when hiring an intern.

- Thorough, thoughtful preparation before the intern's arrival will result in a productive and beneficial experience for everyone.
- 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 the needs of the organization.
- Identify the 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.
- 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.
- Ideally, the intern's supervisor's characteristics will include flexibility, clear communication, and encouraging support.
- 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 finish their assignments more quickly than expected.

Internship compensation

The employer determines whether an internship is paid or unpaid. If the budget supports it, we encourage you to provide some sort of compensation to interns. The nature of that compensation can vary.

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

- Budget capacity, fair compensation for contribution, and a balance between contribution to the company and cost to the company for training and overseeing the intern.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 coursework and often other employment.
- Other forms of compensation can include transportation reimbursement, gift cards, or meals.

Job description form

What to include in a job description:

1. A general description and the goals of your organization
2. Internship length and timeframe
3. A general list of tasks and responsibilities
4. Expectations for the Intern
5. Compensation for the intern

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 them 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.

Hiring an intern

What to look for in an Intern:

- 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 about your organization.
- 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.
- Academic GPA can be a good indicator of the success of 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 look for an intern

- Job Apps: [Indeed](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Handshake](#), etc.
- Contacting career centers and attending career fairs at local colleges
 - Career centers and job fairs information:
 - [University of Minnesota Duluth](#)
 - [Lake Superior College](#)
 - [College of St. Scholastica](#)
 - [University of Wisconsin Superior](#)
 - [Minnesota North College](#)
- A family or friend connection
- Hiring non-traditional students
 - 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 are balancing a job and family responsibilities.

Other considerations when pursuing an internship program include:

- Use inclusive language in the internship description and related documents. An intern needs to know they are joining an organization that is aware, inclusive, and representative.
- Diversity of all kinds in an organization is one key to success. To diversify your workforce, 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.
- Consistency is key when wanting to attract diverse talent – be visible and relatable early on.

Suggested Interview Questions

Intern interview questions are like 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.

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

You can also ask a question that enables you not only to 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 coursework. 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, 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 onboarding process.

On-boarding

Ideally, have the intern's workspace 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 interns stay motivated and on track throughout their internship.

Onboarding 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 ensure 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 of a positive experience for both an intern and the organization.

Mentorship & employee engagement

Mentorship is an important aspect of working with interns. As students, interns are eager to learn and take advantage of new opportunities around them.

Mentoring tips:

- Keep mentoring relationships informal, yet professional
- Tailor teaching and advising to the needs of the intern
- Provide detailed and effective feedback
- 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 two 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 the intern. The staff should reflect on the good and bad of the internship and record the projects completed by the intern. 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.

Additional resources

There are many resources available that can assist you in creating or improving your internship program

Contacts:

- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
 - [Shayla Drake](mailto:shayla.drake@state.mn.us)- shayla.drake@state.mn.us
- City of Duluth – Workforce Development
 - [Elena Foshay](mailto:efoshay@duluthmn.gov)- efoshay@duluthmn.gov
 - [Betsy Hill](mailto:bhill@duluthmn.gov)- bhill@duluthmn.gov
- [Robert Shindell](#), CEO, [Intern Bridge](#) - Nationally recognized for helping employers and educational institutions build, maintain, and grow internship programs. Creator of *the Total Internship Management Workshop* and other resources. He's worked with hundreds of companies across America.

Guidebooks and Toolkits:

- [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#)- A great place to go for any information on internships and experiential learning opportunities
- [Greater St Cloud Development, Internship Guidebook](#)- Gail Cruikshank from GSDC shared this PDF with me that gives information on preparing, starting, and running a successful internship program. This is the document that the APEX internship resource is based on!

Notes

We would like to give a huge thank you to the Greater St. Cloud Development Group for letting us reference their 2019 Internship Guidebook. Their guidebook played a vital role in the development of this resource, and we are again grateful for their assistance.