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Internship Guide

Excerpted from Grads of Life - this guide provides a roadmap for your company to develop an internship program. Internships are a great way to build your talent pipeline and boost employee engagement.

The Business Benefits of Internships

Internships are a low-cost way to reap high rewards. They offer employers a change to test out individual performance and fit while providing vital experience to young adults. Key benefits include the following:

1. Cost-effective Talent Development
 - a. "Try before you buy" by evaluating potential job candidates before making a full-time offer.
 - b. Build your pipeline with more qualified and motivated workers.
 - c. Provide management experience for employees who do not have direct reports.
2. Increased Retention
 - a. Increase retention among newly hired and existing employees by developing loyal, more fulfilled workers.
3. Stronger Community Presence
 - a. Boost visibility with your community, your consumers, future leaders and potential talent.
 - b. Get your products and work in front of young, in-touch consumers.
4. Enhanced Employee Engagement
 - a. Strengthen employee satisfaction and morale.

Step 1: Prepare from Within

Developing a great internship model does not cost a lot of money; however it does involve careful planning and clear goals, much of which a partner organization can help you shape.

What is your capacity?

Answering questions like these will help define how you can make the biggest impact with your existing resources.

- Do you have dedicated staff to oversee planning, development, and implementation?
- Do you currently have systems to capture and track data to measure program outcomes?
- How much support do you have from key decision makers to bring this to life?
- Do you have resource and training support from HR to devote to interns?
- Do you have a group of supervisors who have time to devote to interns?

Questions to help define goals:

- What do you hope to achieve from these internships (e.g., gain extra support, build future talent)?
- How will you measure success (e.g., number of full-time interns hired, number of interns who accept, number of interns who provide referral candidates)?
- What skills will the intern acquire during the internship period (e.g., problem-solving, communication)?

Designate an Internship Manager

This person will be responsible for the day-to-day oversight and may be an HR person. If you are building a larger program, an executive champion or “sponsor” who is invested in promoting your program internally and externally is critical to success.

Determine if a Budget is Needed

- Will your company offer paid or unpaid opportunities? For specific guidance and requirements, see the criteria from the U. S. Department of Labor.

Step 2: Develop a Program

Set Internship Parameters

Together with your partnership organization, start defining details, such as the length of the internship, the number of interns you will take on and if you will compensate them.

Additional parameters

- *Determine which departments your interns will support*
- *Set baseline eligibility criteria for choosing interns (education, background, geographic area, demographics, etc.)*
- *Write internship job descriptions*

Set Supervision Parameters

Develop a similar written document for training and management of interns. Identify who will be responsible for supervising interns and how you will match an intern with an employee supervisor. This person should be a strong trainer and have the resources and knowledge to contribute to the learning experience.

Set Training Parameters

Determine how interns will be trained and developed and generate a list of the job-related skills that will be involved in developing your interns (many of these skills are the same skills used to develop current employees). You may want to consider creating an internship handbook with helpful FAQ's and company policies.

Set Evaluation Parameters

How will you will evaluate your interns and your program?

- Who will provide feedback?
- How often will you evaluate?
- How will you measure progress against goals?

Step 3: Implement Your Program

Checklist:

- Give interns assigned work spaces
- Provide office supplies on their desks
- Conduct a facility tour on the first day
- Make introductions
- Set them up with tech support
- Discuss basic expectations and first-week schedules

Make sure your internship supervisors set aside time to kick off the internship by discussing expectations and goals so that interns feel comfortable approaching them for guidance and support.

Step 4: Manage Your Program

In addition to managing interns, your internship manager will need to oversee the program itself, as well as collaborate with your partner organization. Manage activities according to program goals and use the following guidelines to help you and your internship manager.

Monitor and Evaluate the Program

Ensure that your program is following established policies and staying within budget and scope. You will also want to make sure that the program is going well and that interns have rewarding experiences.

15 Best Practices for Internship Programs

Excerpted from [Building a Premier Internship Program: A Practical Guide for Employers](#) (NACE university relations and relations members receive a complimentary copy of this resource as part of their welcome kit.)

Best Practice #1: 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 that is challenging, that is recognized by the organization as valuable, and that fills the entire work term.

You can guarantee that hiring managers provide real work assignments by checking job descriptions, emphasizing the importance of real work assignments during a manager/mentor orientation sessions, and communicating with interns frequently throughout the work term to determine who they perceive what they are doing.

Best Practice #2: Hold orientations for all involved.

It's important that everyone "be on the same page," so to speak. Make this happen by holding an orientation session for managers and mentors as well as a session for interns. 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.

Best Practice #3: Provide interns with a handbook and/or website.

Whether in paper booklet format, or presented as a special section on your website, a handbook serves as a guide for interns, answering frequently asked questions and communicating the "rules" in a warm and welcoming way.

A separate intern website serves many of the purposes of the handbook, but has the advantage of being easy to change. You can use your website as a communication tool, with announcements from the college relations staff or even articles of interest written by the interns themselves.

Best Practice #4: Invite Ready to Work staff and cooperating agency to visit interns on site.

By inviting them to your site, you will build a better working relationship with these groups, which can lead to more intern referrals, enhanced visibility, and increased flexibility on their parts when your business needs dictate it.

Best Practice #5: Hold new-hire panels.

New-hire panels are one of the best ways to showcase an organization to interns as a great place to work. These are panels of five or six people who were hired. They act as panelists in a meeting of interns, giving a brief summary of their background and then answering questions from the intern audience. Your interns get insight about your organization from your new hires—people who they perceive are like themselves and who they consequently view as credible sources of information.

Best Practice #6: Bring in speakers from your company's executive ranks.

One of the greatest advantages to having internships is the access they get to accomplished professionals in their field. Consequently, speakers from the executive ranks are very popular with interns—it's a great career development and role modeling experience for interns. Having a CEO speak is especially impressive. Best scenario: Your CEO speaker is personable, willing to answer questions, and willing and able to spend a little informal time with the interns after speaking—your interns will be *quite* impressed.

Best Practice #7: Offer training/encourage outside classes.

Providing interns with access to in-house training—both in work-skills-related areas, such as a computer language, and in general skills areas, such as time management—is a tangible way to show interns you are interested in their development.

Best Practice #8: Conduct exit interviews.

An exit interview is an excellent way to gather feedback on the intern's experience and to assess their interest in coming back. Having the interns fill out an exit survey and bring it to the interview gives some structure to the conversation.