



**UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE**

Designing and Implementing an Internship Program

Career & Employment Hub

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Contents

Introduction	4
What is an Internship?	4
How Do Internships Benefit Employers?	4
Creating an Internship Programs	5
Design an Internship Program that Meets Your Needs	5
Discuss and Plan the Logistics	5
Develop a Program and Job Description	6
Recruit, Recruit, Recruit!	7
Starting an Internship Program	8
Onboarding and Other Next Steps	8
Orienting Interns into Your Organization	9
Appendix	11
What are the Legal Implications for Having Interns	12
Do You Have to Pay Interns?	12
International Students	12
Ten Common Concerns of Interns	14
Internship Job Description Cheat Sheet	16
Internship Timeline Template	18

Introduction

What is an Internship?

An internship is a professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical, project-based work related to a student's field of study or career interest. Internships offer students the opportunity for career exploration, professional development, and skill building. It offers the employer the opportunity to bring new ideas and energy into the workplace, develop talent, and build a pipeline for potential full-time employees. A quality internship:

- May be anywhere from three months to two years, but a typical experience usually lasts from three to six months.
- May be part-time or full-time.
- May be paid or unpaid.
- May be part of an educational program, providing careful monitoring and evaluation for academic credit.
- Has an intentional "learning agenda" structured into the experience.
- Establishes a reasonable balance between the interns' learning goals and the specific work an organization needs done.
- Promotes academic, career and/or personal development.

How Do Internships Benefit Employers?

- High Return; Small Investment. Hiring an intern is a fraction of the cost of a full-time employee with a huge return. Internship wages range \$14-\$18 an hour.
- Great way to find the right fit with low commitment. Internships offer a unique opportunity to test-drive talent before hiring them as full-time employees. With an internship program, there are concrete beginning and end dates where companies and interns can see if there is a good fit.
- Support USM students and your workforce. Did you know that 75% of USM graduates stay in Maine? This means when an employer hires a USM student as an intern, the chances that they will return as a full-time applicant are very high. Furthermore, offering a paid internship is beneficial because it gives students with a financial need a chance to participate.
- Revolving door for recruitment. Having an internship program is one of the best recruitment strategies because it develops a group of students that can be tapped for future hires. Even more, developing a good relationship with a college/university, its students, and faculty make this connection much easier. Word of mouth is a great tool!

Creating an Internship Program

Being thoughtful and intentional as you design your internship opportunity will result in a more successful and satisfying experience for all involved. We encourage you to consult the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) resources on internship best practices as you are building and conceptualizing your opportunity. We also suggest connecting with the Employer Relationship Managers at the University of Southern Maine.

Design an Internship Program that Meets Your Needs

Organizations vary in size, industry, and scope of work, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating and maintaining an internship program. This is what makes internships special: no two programs are the same. Therefore, it's important to know what will make your organization's internship program authentic and unique. How do you know what kind of program will work best for you? This requires an internal needs assessment and goal setting. Start by asking some of these questions:

- Why does the organization want to create an internship program? An internship program can be a part of a talent recruitment strategy and an opportunity to participate in the development of students. It's important to understand your organization's reason for creating an internship program.
- What are the goals and outcomes of the internship? Is there a conversion rate from intern to employee that your organization hopes to accomplish over a number of years? Perhaps your organization creates a new product or resource that otherwise wouldn't exist due to staff capacity. Understanding how an intern contributes to the goals and outcomes of an organization will add gravitas to the program.

Discuss and Plan the Logistics

There are logistics that are required when bringing on interns. Who will supervise them? Where will they sit? While these questions may not seem as important as job descriptions and recruitment strategies, they make the difference in the overall intern experience. Consider the following:

- Will you pay the intern? Wages differ widely based on industry and scope of work; they also change often. You'll want to be sure that the organization offers competitive compensation (this will help with recruitment, also)!

- Where will you put the intern? Do you have adequate workspace for them? Will you help make parking arrangements, living arrangements, etc.?
- How many interns can your organization afford and support? Perhaps there is limited office space or a maximum amount of money each department can spend on interns.
- Which departments/teams want to be involved? Is there capacity to supervise more team members? Knowing which teams are onboard and have the capacity to add an intern will help your organization determine the program's maximum number of interns, and assign supervisors.
- How will the intern contribute? Is there a specific project your organization needs help with? The best internships are project-based! Be as specific as possible in defining the expectations and desired outcomes of the internship position.

Develop a Program and Job Description

Internship programs become a part of an organization's culture. They are often a key recruitment strategy and reserve for talent. Therefore, it is important to develop an internship program that clearly explains organizational goals, and the role and responsibilities of the intern. Spend the time, and intricately structure your program ahead of time.

- Decide the qualifications of a candidate. Know the specific standards you're looking for in an intern such as major or matriculation level. Deciding the qualifications of an intern will help align your program with your overall organizational strategy and goals. This will also narrow down the applicants and help you select ideal candidates.
- Assign a supervisor for the intern(s). Be sure to assign a supervisor from the department in which the intern will work. This person will be responsible for onboarding, guiding the intern as needed, and off-boarding the intern at the conclusion of the program. This person doesn't need to be a supervisor currently, but the supervisor should be selected based on a desire to teach or train. If the selected person has never supervised or managed before, it is best to provide specified basic training in supervision and management.
- Engage interns holistically. Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your company. If they have a positive experience working for you, they're likely to tell their friends, family, and coworkers. Word of mouth can be an organization's best recruitment tool. Offer interns opportunities to volunteer, socialize, and learn within your organization. More engagement from you makes the internship memorable and unique.

Recruit, Recruit, Recruit!

You've planned and strategized; now, it's time to recruit students for the program. Recruiting and hiring an intern requires planning, like any other recruitment strategy. Below are some helpful tips for recruiting interns. You'll notice the process is not very different from recruiting a full-time employee!

- Get out there early! This cannot be overemphasized. You can attract and hire the best candidates when you begin your search three to four months before you need an intern to start. Also, the longer you accept applications, the better your chances are of finding the best person for the job.
- Connect with the University of Southern Maine as a recruitment source. Promote internship opportunities with the Career & Employment Hub using [USMCareerConnections](#), contact Employer Relationship Managers to connect with different departments and faculty, attend internship and job fairs.
- Treat potential interns like potential employees. After all, they may be permanent employees someday; you are making an investment into this person. During the interview, keep in mind the following questions: Is the candidate truly motivated, or does the person just want a job? Do they understand your organization's culture? Does the individual have the experience you need? With careful criteria at the beginning of the process, some of the most common pitfalls that occur during internships can be avoided.
- Understand the legal implications of hiring an intern. Just like other employees, interns are subject to legal protections and regulations. Protect yourself and your intern by knowing the laws. What work can or cannot be assigned by you? This is especially important if your company employs a lot of international students who need special qualifications to work in the United States. Consult legal counsel or the intern's institutional office of international education if you think you might run into problems. See appendix for more details.

Starting an Internship Program

Onboarding and Other Next Steps

Like any other employee, an intern should have a planned onboarding process. Apart from their recruitment and hiring processes, the first days on the job are imperative to the success of the experience. First impressions are lasting; make this a good one!

- First, orient your intern to their new workplace. This might take the form of a conventional orientation program or merely a walk around the office. When giving interns an overview of your organization, some companies present and/or distribute information about the company's history, vision, and services. Explain who does what in relation to the intern's specific duties. Be sure to introduce the intern to coworkers and give them a complete tour of the facility. Making your intern comfortable in the office is invaluable.
- Give your intern the resources they need to do the job. Give the intern a desk, point out the supply room, and introduce them to the essential tech support personnel. If there is a new hire/employee handbook, provide the intern a copy. Perhaps there is a list of employees' favorite places to eat lunch, or a sign-up sheet for a trivia team that you can include in a welcome packet for the intern.
- Provide the intern with adequate supervision. It's helpful for interns to have outlined goals and outcomes supported by a strategy. For some students, an internship may be their first experience in a professional environment. A supervisor will be able to offer structure that will be invaluable to their experience.
- Give lots of feedback. Interns will want to know if their work is measuring up to your expectations. Be it praise or concern, interns need to receive feedback no matter their level of experience. Periodically, take time to examine what your intern has produced and make suggestions as needed.
- Evaluate progress. Remember those goals you outlined before? A few weeks after the internship begins, evaluate if the goals are being met. Evaluation processes differ. Some are formal written evaluations every three weeks. Others might be as informal as having occasional lunches with the internship coordinator and/or the intern's mentor. Some companies have the intern evaluate the experience and the company, as well as evaluate themselves. Your structure is largely up to your corporate culture and needs. Evaluations will be helpful later if you decide to interview a former intern for full-time work or if you wish to publicize how successful your program has been.

- Continue to make the case. Maintaining, sustaining, and growing an internship program requires hard evidence that there is a return on investment. Some organizations adopt an off-boarding process of formal exit interviews. Through this process, they determine the quality of the internship program and the areas where it can be improved. In addition to qualitative measures, your organization may consider tracking metrics. Common metrics include the conversion rate from intern to full-time employee, repeat requests for interns from departments/teams, and an increase in the number of intern applicants. Always keep in mind that the program goals serve as a roadmap!
- Keep your focus on the future. By creating an internship program, your organization has the opportunity to interact with its future workforce; this is a competitive advantage when recruiting the best talent! Your new workforce of interns will be trained for your workplace and loyal to your company which reduces new hire training time, recruiting costs, and turnover rates. You will build an ideal reputation with students, colleges, and the community. With these advantages, you may find that you cannot afford to not have an internship program.

Orienting Interns into Your Organization

Develop a thorough orientation and training plan to be implemented when the interns begin work. Research 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. Invest supervisory time to establish an important bond with interns and set a crucial tone for the internship experience.

Prior to the First Day:

- Set up an organized work area for the intern.
- Set up phone, voicemail, computer, email, and internet access and/or other resources necessary for them to accomplish the tasks you have stipulated in the internship position description.
- Outline work expectations for the duration of the internship.
- Prepare forms to be signed, including a confidentiality agreement, if necessary.

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 your organization's current objectives?
- Which personnel can answer different kinds of questions?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?

Explain the Organization Structure:

- Who reports to whom?
- Who is the intern's direct report?
- 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 and abbreviations? How does the intern learn them?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- How should they process requests?
- How do the communication 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?
- What local, state, and/or federal guidelines or laws apply to their work? Are there security or confidentiality issues? What is acceptable in dress and appearance?

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

- Make yourself visibly available to the intern.
- Encourage non-supervisory staff to casually check-in with the intern.
- Offer accolades for good work and feedback for areas needing growth.
- Encourage the intern to ask questions!

Appendix

Appendix A: What are the Legal Implications for Having Interns?

Appendix B: Ten Common Concerns of Interns

Appendix C: Sample Internship Job Description

Appendix D: Internship Timeline Template

What are the Legal Implications for Having Interns

Do you have to pay interns?

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. (See Fact Sheet #71 from the U.S. Dept. of Labor – Retrieved from: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>)

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. You may decide at the conclusion of the internship contract, to hire the intern.
3. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship.
4. Interns must receive training from your organization, even if it somewhat impedes the work.
5. Interns must receive hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry.
6. Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the organization.

Workers' and Unemployment Compensation:

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

International Students

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the most common visa types employers will see on college campuses, when recruiting international undergraduate or graduate students for either full-time or internship positions, are the F-1 and J-1 visas.

An F-1 visa is granted to a person coming to the United States to attend a college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or language training program approved by the U.S. Attorney General for study by foreign students. The visa holder plans to return home after completing studies. This is the most common non-immigrant

visa for an international student attending undergraduate and graduate school. Students are granted F-1 status until the completion of the academic program and 12 months of post-program practical training.

The purpose of the F-1 visa is to provide an opportunity for study in the United States. Anything outside of study, including employment, is an exception to the visa. Authorization for employment is strictly limited to certain situations. The student holding F-1 status for a full academic year and in good academic standing may work off campus. Such work authorization is granted when the student has a sustained an unforeseen economic hardship. Also, the student may not work for more than 20 hours per week when school is in session, but may work full-time during holidays and vacations, including breaks between terms, provided the student intends to register for the next school term.

For more information on these and other legal issues, go to: www.nacweb.org.

Ten Common Concerns of Interns

1. “Give us real work!” Interns want to work and learn. A part of the mutual benefits of having an internship program is the ability to have a project completed or a process created by an intern who’s hoping to add value. Giving interns value-adding tasks is a win for everyone.
2. “Do what you say, and say what you do!” Be honest with your interns about what to expect during their internship. If the job will require stuffing some envelopes, then make that clear. If you tell the intern they will be researching a project, and they spend the majority of their time doing “grunt work,” then you can expect a negative experience and opinion about the program.
3. “We like feedback!” Remember that interns are students, and that they may not have the business skills and experiences that you expect. If your intern makes an oversight, pull them aside and explain how the situation should be handled in the future.
4. “We want to be included, too!” Is there a staff meeting they can attend? Can they quietly tag along to that next scheduled project meeting or senior leadership team meeting? Include the interns into the daily life of your workplace. If you help the intern gain a broader perspective, it will benefit everyone involved.
5. “Please explain?” When you assign work, be sure to give a detailed explanation and then verify that the intern fully understands. While the work may seem trivial and obvious to you, it may not be obvious to someone who has never done the work before. Patience and a few extra minutes at the beginning will pay off later when the intern can produce good work independently.
6. I want a mentor! Make sure that interns have an assigned mentor or supervisor to provide guidance as needed. Put someone in this role who truly likes to teach or guide to maximize the shared benefits for everyone.
7. “A minute of your time, please?” The best mentor in the world is useless if they can’t or won’t spend the necessary time effectively mentoring. As newcomers, interns may not speak up if they are feeling ignored. Therefore, the burden of making sure the interns are okay is on the mentor. Mentors should schedule regular meetings with the intern to check in on their experience, struggles, questions, feedback, and growth.

8. Be inclusive and prepared! Nothing says, “We’re unprepared,” more than the first day of an intern’s experience, and they learn that no one knew they were coming. Brief your staff of the intern’s start date to help the intern get started on a positive note that says, “Welcome, we are so pleased to have you joining us!”
9. “Um...I need a chair.” Many employers hire an intern and forget to consider the supplies and materials an intern needs such as a desk, chair, phone, and a computer to do the expected task assigned. In your planning stage, spend the requisite time thinking about all the supplies an intern will need to be successful in their role.
10. “Show me the money (as best you can).” While internships programs and industries differ, remember that interns have expenses. Your organization may not be in the position to pay much, but anything will help. Maybe you can help pay for their parking and/or transportation, or develop some other creative way to offer financial assistance, e.g. providing lunch every day.

Internship Job Description Cheat Sheet

Position Title

Consider titling the position something that is clear and transferrable.

Department

List the department the intern will work. Ideally, the intern will have work space within the department, too.

Location

List the address of your office.

Schedule

What are the typical office/working hours? Is it flexible? If the internship is during the academic year, we suggest 6-12 hours a week. If offered during the summer, up to 40 hours a week is great.

Reports to

Who will supervise the intern? Supervisors for interns should be trained on best practices. During the first week, supervisors should allot a minimum of 5 hours for onboarding. Supervisors should schedule weekly check-ins with interns.

Rate of Pay

Keep in mind that internship wages should be competitive, but be realistic about what your Company/Organization can afford. We recommend \$12-\$18 an hour depending on scope of work. We encourage employers to ensure interns are within the wage of their full-time employees to maintain equity.

Duration

What is the time frame? How long is the internship? If the internship is during the academic year, we suggest a maximum of 15 hours. If during the summer, 10-12 weeks.

Application Instructions

How will a student apply? Be very clear about what materials are needed, the process, and point of contact.

Application Deadline

When will you no longer accept applications? We recommend accepting applications for 3 months. This provides your Company/Organization a wider candidate pool.6007860

Statement of the Job and Company/Organization

Write a summary that describes the position at a high level and grabs the attention of the reader. Also a great space to share the uniqueness of the Company/Organization. Make sure this statement is clear, brief, and jargon-free.

Responsibilities and Duties

Outline the typical daily tasks a person would do in this role. Be sure to use short, clear, bullet points. You may also organize the bullets from tasks that are more common and less common.

Requirements and Preferences

Consider the qualities, skills, and experiences that will contribute to a candidate's success in this role. For internships, be specific about academic majors that align with the role. If training on a specific skill, technology, or process is offered, then it may not need to be a requirement. Providing both will help students match their own skills to your expectations.

Internship Timeline Template

Date	Event	Stakeholders	Notes
7 - 10 months before start date	Secure internship position within Company departments	Internal Internship Program Coordinator	Identify number of positions and the projects interns will work on, write internship description, assign supervisors
6 - 9 months before start date	Recruitment	USM, Company recruiting team	Recruitment will involve a mix of on campus and online efforts. May include open house, job shadow, and onsite interview events
3 - 5 months before start date	Screening, interviews, and hiring	Recruiting team and host departments	All applicants will need to submit a cover letter and resume. They will also go through an initial screening, following by an in person interview prior to hiring
1 - 3 months before start date	Interns set up with payroll and general onboarding	Finance, HR, IT	Ongoing HR onboarding process
1 - 2 months before start date	Meetings with supervisors	Internal Internship Program Coordinator	Internal meeting with departments to discuss program structure, goals, and projects
Start Date		Interns, Supervisors, Internship Program Coordinator	Onboarding process should be organized for intern(s)
10 - 12 week internship program	New Employee Orientation		Welcome from sr. leadership. Includes a welcome packet, swag bags, and icebreaker activities
	Team Building Activity		Should be done in the first two weeks of the program to help establish camaraderie among the group.
	Community Service/Volunteer		Optional Activity
	Social Activity		
	End of program celebration		
Within one month after end date	Internal debrief	All departments involved	Debrief program
1 - 2 months after end date	External debrief	Lead department, external partners (may include: USM)	Debrief program

This is adapted from an employer partner's internship timeline

Notes

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