Designing Your Internship Program

Prior to hiring an intern, an employer must understand how interns will fit within the company’s goals and culture. Since organizations vary in age, size, industry, and product, so too will internship activities.

Questions that may determine what kind of program will work best for you:

- What does your organization hope to achieve from the program?
- Is your organization looking to fulfill a need on a specific project? Will this internship(s) encompass one major project, or entail a variety of small projects?
- What are the tools and workspace necessary to provide the student?
- What talents, academic background and experience do you want in an intern? Decide on standards of quality early on to help you select the best candidate.
- Who will be primarily responsible for the intern(s)? Will that person be a mentor, supervisor, or both?

It is important that employers realize that school and classes must remain a top priority for interns. The internship position should enhance their learning experience. At the same time, understand that for most interns this is a new experience and they may need support in balancing their schoolwork and internship. Agreeing on a set number of hours interns will work each week and offering flex-time for freedom to plan their schedules on a weekly basis are two ways to support balance.

Choosing the right length and type of Internship

Internships should fit the needs of the organization or department and the needs of the student. Many varied types of programs exist to benefit both employers and students:

**Project-Related Interns:** Project-related interns may be brought on to lead or assist with specific short-term projects. For example, an intern may be hired to help develop a new product launch marketing campaign. When designing a project-related internship, the timeframe, as well as objectives, must be clearly defined. There should be a set end-date, with defined accomplishments that must be met. However, to avoid project-related internships from turning into part-time or temporary work, it is important that the employer allow the intern to explore other aspects of the company and provide feedback to aid in the personal development of the student. It also is important for interns to complete their projects within the established timeframe, allowing them to experience ownership throughout their involvement.

**Summer Interns:** Interns’ summer schedules are likely more flexible when it comes to working with employers in and out of state. However, it may be more difficult to recruit interns during the school year due to their existing educational commitments. Summer internships often last three months or less. It is important to retain an intern long enough to create mutual value for the employer and intern.
Providing a Student Intern Orientation to your Organization

It is very important that interns be warmly welcomed and introduced throughout your organization, just as you would welcome a new full-time employee. Not only are interns new to your organization, in many cases, they are new to the professional world of work.

Many students are unfamiliar with the activities, environment and objectives of your organization. Even though your interns may have worked part-time to support their education, these experiences may not have exposed them to organizational politics, the need for confidentiality, the importance of teamwork, or the profit-making nature of business. It is the orientation and training of the internship experience that emphasizes these issues and provides information about the organization.

The sooner your intern understands your organization and how it operates, the sooner he or she can assume assigned responsibilities and contribute to your organization. You can help this process by providing the following kinds of information about your site/organization:

- How did the organization start? Why?
- What is unique about your product(s) or service(s)?
- Who benefits from your product(s) or service(s)?
- What are the organization’s current objectives?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?
- Is there any special, relevant jargon that should be made known?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- When will the supervisor be accessible (days, times, duration) to the intern?
- How should they process requests?
- How do the mail and telephone systems work?
- What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- By what safety regulations must they abide?
- What periodic forms or reports need to be completed?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues of which the intern should be aware?