



Internship Guide

This guide provides a roadmap for any company, no matter the size of the business or the industry. Whether you're just getting started or already have an internship program that you want to expand for opportunity youth, we hope these tools will prove useful to you.

Get Started

- 1 If this is a new effort, it's okay to start small. Regardless of scope, every internship opportunity that you develop is a win for both your business and the young adults.
- 2 Partner organizations can significantly help you develop successful initiatives in many key areas, such as recruiting young adults.

Internship Definitions and Benefits

Internships are a great way to build your talent pipeline and boost employee engagement.

Internship Definitions

Defined as work-based learning experiences, company internships range from hosting a few interns to structuring a large-scale program that usually involves partner organizations. Internships differ from volunteer work or mentoring in that an intentional “learning agenda” is usually incorporated into the experience.

1 Single Internship

2 Small-Scale Program

A small number of interns managed directly by one to two employees.

3 Large-Scale Program

A large number of interns in multiple departments managed by several individuals and coordinated by a single point of contact.

The Business Benefits of Internships

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

1 Cost-effective Talent Development

- “Try before you buy” by evaluating potential job candidates before making a full-time offer
- Build your pipeline with more qualified and motivated workers
- Provide management experience for employees who don’t have direct reports

2 Increased Retention

Increase retention among newly hired and existing employees by developing loyal, more fulfilled workers

3 Stronger Community Impact

- Boost visibility with your community, your consumers, future leaders and potential talent
- Get your products and work in front of young, in-touch consumers

4 Enhanced Employee Engagement

Strengthen employee satisfaction and morale

“Currently, State Street brings in about 1,000 interns into our Boston office every year. And I’m proud to say that 60 percent of those interns are from community-based programs...This expansion of the last eight years is a direct result of the positive relationship with [partner organization] Year Up”

- Richard curtis, VP of Talent Aquisition, State Street financial

Step 1: Prepare From Within

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

Identify a partner organization.

Many employers welcome the expertise and support that community partners offer. Partners can help streamline your outreach efforts to build a successful program.

Assess your readiness and resources.

Together with your partner, determine how ready your company is to engage with opportunity youth. For example, are you starting from scratch or do you have an existing internship program from which you can adapt best practices?

What’s your capacity?

Answering questions like these will help define how you can make the biggest impact with your existing resources. Together with your partner, you can scope within your capacity. (note: these questions are geared towards larger employers)

- Do you have access to an executive leader who can help champion your efforts?
- 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?

Define your scope and goals.

Work with your partner to set realistic and measurable goals so you can evaluate and optimize your efforts. Think about performance measurements and what to include in program reports. If you're a small company, start with a few simple metrics.

Questions to help define goals:

- What do you hope to achieve with 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 learn 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 externally is critical to success.

Determine a budget.

Estimate the financial commitment involved in developing an internship program. This might include contributions to partner organizations and stipends to interns. An internship should include a wage, stipend or academic credit for the intern. For specific guidance and requirements, see the criteria from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Step 2: Develop a Program

You've got an internal team in place and identified a partner organization. Excellent. Now it's time to start program design and development. This is the phase where you'll collaborate with a chosen partner organization to scope out parameters that will shape your program.

Develop partner collaboration guidelines.

Your partner organization will be a huge asset during program design and development. In this phase, with your partner, you should establish roles and responsibilities, preferred communication channels and potential challenges.

Set internship parameters.

Together with your partner organization, start defining details, such as the length of the internship, the number of interns you'll take on and how you'll compensate them. If applicable, build off parameters already established through your existing internship programs.

You'll also want to do the following:

- Determine which departments your interns will support
 - Set baseline eligibility criteria for choosing interns (education, background, geographic area, demographics, etc.)
 - Write internship job descriptions
 - Decide how you'll recruit, screen and select candidates
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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'll match an intern with an employee supervisor. Assign a "buddy" to your interns who will be the intern's go-to source for information and guidance. Carefully select and assign a supervisor for each intern to provide guidance and direction. This person should be a strong trainer and have the resources and knowledge to contribute.

The supervisor is responsible for the following:

- Day-to-day management of interns
- Work oversight, direction and feedback
- Training, motivating and developing
- Evaluating intern performance

Carefully select and assign a supervisor for each intern to provide guidance and direction. This person should be a strong trainer and have the resources and knowledge to contribute.

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 FAQs and company policies.

Set evaluation parameters.

You'll want to learn from your successes and challenges, so it's important to think about how you'll evaluate your interns and your program during and after an internship period.

Evaluating your interns

- Who will provide feedback?
- How often will you evaluate?
- How will you assess the skills acquired?
- How will you measure progress against goals?

Evaluating your program

- What activities will be monitored?
- What outcomes will be measured?
- How often will you evaluate results?

Determine how you'll spread the word.

Decide how you'll promote and communicate your internship program within your company and to your community. Review past efforts, if applicable, for inspiration.

Identify key milestones.

This is an important part of phase planning, and partners can help. Milestones may include, but are not limited to, a pilot launch date (if you're doing one), a scaled-up launch program date and end date, as well as midway and final evaluations.

Best practices for step 2

- Start a pilot internship program with a limited number of interns (one or two) and use your learnings to improve overall program structure. Then scale up
- Hold orientation sessions for all involved parties (interns, managers, mentors) to cover goals, roles and responsibilities and expectations
- Match interns with a supervisor who can provide answers, direction and advice
- Adequately compensate interns for their time through a stipend, a scholarship, a salary and/or school credits
- Offer meaningful work assignments to interns, not just busy work
- Encourage interns to join company events, meetings and outings
- Provide interns with a set of clear objectives, tasks and evaluation criteria
- Continue communicating and collaborating with your partner organization during the internship to support the success of your interns
- Adequately compensate interns for their time through a stipend, a scholarship, a salary and/or school credits.

Step 3: Implement Your Program

Now it's time to bring your planning to life. Remember that the beginning days of a program are the defining days. Execute with good planning and focus.

Recruit your interns.

This is another key step in which partners prove to be a source of support. They can help you screen and select interns based on your established criteria

Conduct onboarding for all.

Setting the right tone makes all the difference. Hold orientation sessions for your employee mentors, supervisors and any other relevant company participants to set the tone for a well-run program. Then do the same for your interns. Build on any existing orientation sessions to help you.

Checklist: Successful onboarding

- 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

Offer support from day one.

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. You might also consider assigning each intern a mentor for more informal advice. Don't forget to set up an internship training schedule and a list of activities so interns have a clear path to success.

Train and develop.

- Interns are meant to train and contribute, so give them a great training experience.
- Include interns in relevant training sessions
- Give them access to online training courses, if available
- Coordinate regular shadowing sessions
- Provide frequent, immediate and specific feedback—written and informal

“Appreciative inquiry” is a great feedback model. You acknowledge all positive behaviors and encourage (but don’t prescribe) specific improvements.

End on a high note.

Conduct an exit interview to gather feedback from interns about their experiences and provide them with an overall evaluation. Don’t forget to provide a letter of recommendation, if appropriate. You should also share feedback with your partner organization.

Best practice:

Test your plan with a pilot. You’ll learn a lot during the pilot phase, and it will give you the flexibility to refine your program prior to a broad scale launch.

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 and mentors are having rewarding experiences.

Manage the partner relationship.

A strong partnership means that both sides should be checking in with one another. Frequent, ongoing and transparent communication is essential to success. Incorporate any feedback into a continuous improvement strategy.

Report program results.

Choose a time during the internship period to report preliminary findings to key stakeholders and/or supervisors. This may relate to internship and employee satisfaction, productivity and/or smooth communication among interns, mentors and teams.

Step 5: Measure Your Program

Maintaining success in your internship program will require evidence that your company is getting a return on its investment. From the outset, it's important to determine what activities and outcomes will be tracked and evaluated.

Measure performance.

Performance measures should align with program goals. For example, if your goal is to engage with a specific number of opportunity youth annually, then you should measure the number of opportunity youth enrolled in your program. Build on existing measures already in place from other internship program examples. It's important to assess both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Quantitative measures

- Number of interns engaged in the program
- Number of interns successfully completing the program
- Number of interns hired from the program
- Number of employees engaged in the program
- Retention rate of hired interns

Qualitative measures

- Satisfaction levels of interns and employees engaged in the program
- Diversity outcomes
- PR and marketing outcomes
- Ultimately, each company will want to measure its ROI.

DON'T FORGET: Setting too many performance measures will make the program cumbersome. Too few won't be substantial enough to evaluate performance and gather learnings.

Use the right measurement tools.

Provide managers and mentors with the right tools and instruction on how to track activities and results. These could be anything from simple Excel spreadsheets, existing materials from college/summer internship programs or sophisticated systems for monitoring and evaluating training and development programs. Internship program performance should be evaluated on a regular basis (at least annually) to make sure program results align with program objectives so you can continue to make improvements.

Get the right people to evaluate measurement.

Program evaluation can be internal or external. Internal evaluation should include the internship coordinator, the executive champion and any other relevant employees/mentors who are engaged in supporting the program. Once a program has gained traction, an external evaluation involving a non-biased, third party consultant might be an option to consider.

Evaluation Questions

How well did the program achieve its objectives?

What challenges did the team experience and how were they resolved?

What improvements should be made?

What were effective strategies?

How can the program be scaled-up to other business units?

Evaluate future potential.

If your internship pathway is successful, you've just nurtured future talent for your company. Consider each intern for full or part-time positions with your company.

Use your learnings to optimize your next effort.

Remember, the best-laid plans make the best internships and create the most value for both the employer and the interns. Most interns prove to be enthusiastic employees who bring new life to projects. They also become strong brand ambassadors in your community, which will help boost your visibility and goodwill - a cycle that keeps giving back to everyone involved.
