



Creating & Implementing An Internship Program



Introduction

Internship programs have come a long way. Forget coffee runs and copy jobs. Today, interns expect the companies they work for to treat them like real employees, even if their roles are limited in scope. They want increased responsibility and true training for a future job. So employers need to be sure their internship opportunities align with these new expectations.

In this offer, we'll share best practices for establishing and implementing an exceptional internship program, as well as liabilities to watch out for.



Section 1: Identify your ideal interns.

Finding your ideal interns can be one of the more difficult aspects of the process because the pool of candidates is widespread and diverse.

Modes that have been successful for our clients and other companies with well-developed internship programs include:

- **Social media advertising.** This free (for the most part) method of finding interns is one you can't ignore. If your company can reflect its true personality on social media, you'll have a much easier time attracting applicants who mirror that personality and want to be a part of what you're doing.
- **Leveraging partnerships.** Many interns come to companies because their colleges have established pipelines with the company. They may be geographically-based (the college is close to your company) or academically-based (the institution's focus of study applies directly to careers within your industry). Colleges and universities can be a gold mine for good interns; once you establish these partnerships, they'll continue to pay off year after year.



Section 2: Set expectations and create timelines for the internship program.

After you've identified where you're going to source interns, assemble a team that can dedicate the time to determine the scope of the internship, as well as establish timelines for the length of your internship program. Who should be involved? We suggest including staff from any departments that plan to use interns, as well as an HR team member and the department supervisor or manager, just to name a few. The goal is to get as much collaboration as possible so your entire team can have buy-in as to what the program looks like, what you hope to get out of it, and what you can provide to your interns.

For many companies, the goal of an internship program is twofold: 1) to find qualified students who could become good employees, and 2) to provide an educational environment for those students.

Before you can design a program, find out what your company hopes to achieve by hiring interns:

- Are you looking to build a pipeline for potential future employees?
- Do you want to promote a teaching/learning environment in your organization?
- Do you want to contribute new talent to your industry?
- Are you simply looking for cheap labor?

If your only goal is the latter, we caution against this line of thinking. Once upon a time this viewpoint was prevalent, but in today's world, the program you establish has the ability to impact more than just the interns. How your company treats its interns will get out on social media, and a negative review could drive away future applicants (not to mention potential employees). If you desire quality candidates for your program, you must think in terms of the value you can provide your interns.

Make sure you provide thorough, clear communication at all points of the internship program.

Before The Program Starts

Provide a written outline (or something you can display or hand out to prospective interns) to show clearly what the internship entails, expectations for the job, processes involved, people who can assist the intern, etc.

During The Program

Set communication expectations for both program stakeholders and interns. During the program, communication between the interns and the program stakeholders and managers should be conversational. Questions like "How are things going?" are crucial and should be asked consistently. Both parties should speak up if an issue arises between the company and the intern.

After The Program

Once the internship program ends, don't miss the opportunity to cultivate data about it from the intern's point of view. Surveys and exit interviews are a great way to do this.

Section 3: Be mindful of your internship program's impact.

In the age of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat, your program's positive or negative impact can play out larger than you expect. If you treat your interns well and run a quality internship program, you can position your organization as an employer of choice. But if you run the program (or treat interns) poorly, recruiting will be harder and you could potentially damage your reputation. (Just take a look at Glassdoor and see how negative reviews can affect an organization's ability to recruit and retain talent!)

You should also utilize your feedback from each round of internships before you bring in your next class of interns. Was it successful? Do some tweaks need to be made before bringing in the next group?

Your goal is to have interns leave your company knowing it was a valuable exercise for them—that they learned something, made connections, and felt valued. By taking stock of the feedback from previous classes of interns, you can be sure your program is being received in the way you hope, thus laying the groundwork for continued success.



Section 4: Guidelines for intern payment and compensation.

This year, the [Department of Labor issued new guidance on internship programs](#). Previous guidelines concerning how interns are paid are now being loosened; the current administration is not taking a firm stance on the idea that interns should be paid for their work during their internships.

From [Womble Bond Dickinson \(US\) LLP](#):

In January 2018, the Department of Labor set forth new, clarified criteria to determine whether unpaid internships are lawful. At their core, these criteria are designed to ensure interns receive a genuine educational experience during their time with your business rather than being treated as unpaid underlings.

If you plan to use unpaid interns, we caution you to think through this approach very carefully. In fact, we're still advising companies to pay their interns despite the new guidelines. We believe that paying interns makes an organization an employer of choice (except in the case where an intern receives school credit for their work, in which case he or she may not be able to accept payment).

With regard to liability, at Genesis, we advise our clients who are bringing interns into the office to make sure their worker's compensation carrier is aware of the interns. That way, if any workplace accidents occur, your company will be covered.

Section 5: Exploring the benefits of mentorship within an internship program.

Well-run internship programs offer benefits for both the interns and employers: Interns gain valuable insight from experts in the field, build practical knowledge, get on-the-job experience, and often meet people (both employees and other interns) who will change the course of their lives for the better.

Mentors themselves are rewarded by providing guidance to someone starting their career—it feels good to make a difference. In fact, [data shows](#) that things like internship programs may improve employee engagement for those acting as mentors, which is excellent for the organization from a retention standpoint.

Interested in learning more about what it takes to build an exceptional internship program?

Just contact us today!

