

Employer's Guidebook

Developing a Successful Internship Program



SciTech*experience*TM

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Driving Innovation & Technology

<http://www.mhta.org/work/scitechexperience-internships/>

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Why Offer an Internship Program?

The rise in global competition for a talented and innovative workforce brings opportunities for Minnesota businesses to gain a competitive edge. Developing a post-secondary internship program is an impactful strategy for investing in your business's future successes. Internship programs provide the answers to some of businesses' most challenging issues including increasing labor costs, gaining fresh perspectives, and recruiting future talent. An internship program is an often overlooked, untapped resource among businesses. Creating and maintaining an internship program is not as time-consuming or difficult as you may think.

This guide will outline the basic fundamentals involved in designing an internship program, and hopefully illustrate that the benefits of an internship program far exceed the costs involved.

10 Ways to Get the Most out of Your Internship Program

1. Recruit the right candidates by writing a clear and engaging internship description
2. Create a handbook for new interns to help orient them to your company and its expectations and to serve as a guide throughout the internship
3. Designate a professional mentor for each intern
4. Structure the internship with a balance of long- and short-term project work and non time-sensitive background or day-to-day work
5. Consider offering flex-time to give interns the freedom to plan their schedules on a weekly basis
6. Host social activities and local events to get to know your interns
7. Design and offer seminars, events, and other professional and personal development activities, including community volunteering for interns
8. Help out with housing or moving costs
9. Provide telecommunicating internships to save money, interest more applicants, and target your company's project-by-project needs
10. Offer interns full-time employment opportunities post graduation

Continue reading this guide to learn more about how to create a successful internship program.

What is an Internship?

An internship is any carefully monitored work or service experience in which a student has an intentional learning goal and reflects actively on what he or she is learning throughout the experience.

An internship¹...

- Includes an intentional "learning plan" that is structured into the experience.
- Promotes academic, career and/or personal development.
- Typically includes learning objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation and assessment.
- Balances the intern's learning goals with the specific work the organization needs completed.
- Can range from one month to one year in duration; a typical internship lasts three months.
- May be part-time or full-time.
- Could be part of an educational program and may be carefully monitored and evaluated for academic credit.

SciTechsperience Internship Program

SciTechsperience is an exciting internship program that creates the opportunity for Minnesota businesses to work with talented higher education STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) students from across the state to develop solutions for real world challenges. The program provides a low-cost solution for small and medium-sized companies that otherwise may not have access to qualified interns, and enables employers to find future employees, increase productivity and revitalize an organization with fresh perspectives and specialized skill sets. Interns gain valuable business experience that will help them in future careers, while successful internships help businesses develop the workforce and leaders of tomorrow. More than 50% of interns become full-time employees, according to the *National Association of Colleges and Employers*.

How Does My Company Benefit from an Internship Program?

Businesses offering internship programs gain a variety of benefits. One of the more significant advantages is the opportunity to select and develop your future talent. About four out of every five businesses using internships as a recruiting strategy report a 'good' to 'excellent' return on investment.² Internships also provide an opportunity to evaluate and screen students prior to making a full-time position offer, which can save your business money. Businesses have reported converting more than half of eligible interns into full-time hires. If hired in a permanent position, previous interns assimilate faster to their new roles and have shorter learning curves than external hires.

Internship programs give businesses the opportunity to:

- Assist with addressing business needs
 - College students are qualified candidates that can fill both entry-level and special skill set needs
 - Interns can help with projects and reduce the workload (short-term/part-time hiring)
- Provide freedom for professional staff to pursue creative or more advanced projects
- Increase retention rate
 - Within one year of hire, nearly 86 percent of those that have taken part in an internship at the hiring organization are still on the job, compared with about 81 percent of those who didn't do an internship.²
 - Almost 40% of employers reported a higher five-year retention rate among employees they'd hired via their internship programs.²
- Get fresh ideas
 - College students can assist a business in application of the latest business strategies and techniques by bringing new ideas.
- Stay connected to colleges and the community
 - Helps maintain connections with colleges and increase visibility on campus
 - Promotes community involvement; excellent public relations tool
 - Interns act as advocates in recruiting other students (brand ambassadors)

How Minnesota Communities Benefit from Internship Programs

Internship programs offer a competitive edge in retaining educated talent. Minnesota businesses and community leaders, specifically in rural areas, have shared concerns about the net outward migration of working age residents and the shortage of high-skilled workers. Connecting, engaging, and eventually converting interns to full-time, permanent employees will help keep educated talent in Minnesota and positively impact migration trends and skilled workforce shortages.

Internship programs help communities:

- Retain educated workers
 - Internships can influence a student's perspective of a community and encourage college graduates to stay in their communities or state post graduation, especially if the internship leads to a full-time job offer.
- Remain competitive in the global economy
 - Addressing the challenges related to the demand and availability of a high-skilled workforce is an important issue facing Minnesota's economic development efforts.
- Increase partnerships between educational institutions and the business community
 - Internships can help guide educational institutions' planning to ensure academic programs are responsive to industries' needs.

The Costs Involved

Internships are a cost-effective strategy for hiring young, educated talent. Some businesses may further benefit from internships by qualifying for grants through SciTechsperience. Visit <http://www.mhta.org/work/scitechexperience-internships/> to learn more about this opportunity.

Costs of internships:

- **Wages** - Internship wages aren't required, but highly recommended. For more information about paid vs. unpaid internships click [here](#).
- **Benefits and other forms of compensation** - A variety of benefits and incentives can be offered to build a competitive internship program. Click [here](#) to find out more.
- **Recruiting costs** - Internship programs will advertise and carry out various marketing tactics to recruit interns. There also are advantages to recruiting students over non-students for internships that eventually lead to full-time, permanent hires. Marketing to college students nearly always costs less; college career service departments will often post internships for free and social media sites can be effective in reaching students.
- **Various work materials** - Office supplies, equipment, training materials and other such items will be needed.

Designing Your Internship Program

Prior to hiring an intern, a business must understand how interns will fit within the company's goals and culture. A clear understanding of your company's needs and goals will help make the internship most valuable for the student, as well as maximize the benefits for your company.

Understanding Your Organization and Its Needs

As varied as organizations are in age, size, industry, and product, so too are 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?
- Is your organization growing quickly and having difficulty finding motivated new employees? How will this rapid growth affect your recruitment strategies?
- If your organization is searching for management potential, how will you frame your internship to determine and develop management talents?

Once you decide to create an internship program, here are additional questions to ask⁴:

- Where will you locate your intern(s)? Do you have adequate workspace for them? Do you plan to possibly help them with moving and living arrangements, etc.?
- 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?
- What projects or activities will the intern(s) work on? Be as specific as possible. Interns desire structure and meaningful, hands-on work.

A careful discussion with management can create a consensus on program goals. The program and internship can then be designed to best meet those expectations. For the program to be successful, it will require the commitment of management.

It is important to set goals for the internship up front, and to evaluate it once it is completed. Did the internship meet or exceed your organizational goals? If not, how can the program be redesigned to ensure a meaningful internship in the future?

Giving Your Internships Purpose

Students are seeking opportunities that stimulate their interests and provide real-world experiences. A meaningful, purposeful internship program will:

- Ensure the assignment of challenging projects and tasks
 - Design a preliminary list of potential activities that fit the needs of the department
 - Give interns focused, purposeful roles to keep them motivated
- Relate well to students
 - Design projects that complement students' academic programs

- Give them a broad exposure to the organization (remember: this is a chance for them to personally develop and explore career possibilities)
- Provide adequate, reliable, and regular supervision and mentoring
 - Serve as an information resource
 - Ensure interns are keeping pace and accomplishing goals

What Type of Work Does an Intern Expect?

The most essential step to a successful internship is deciding what kinds of work and projects the intern will do, and managing that process throughout the internship. Interns want to be challenged. The top issue in unsuccessful internships is not having enough work for the intern to do - rarely is the reverse true. The best way to structure the internship work is to plan for three types of work:

1. **Project work:** This can be a special analysis or project that will require the intern to use his/her skills relating to his/her major area of study. This work should be what draws the applicants to this position to give them experience for his/her future career.
2. **Background work:** This should be some general work that is not time-sensitive and may be less than exciting, but the work is important and requires some skill. The intern should be able to keep busy and feel productive with this work during times when the project work is "on hold" (i.e. waiting for approval or clarification).
3. **Unexpected work on issues that arise during the normal ebb and flow of business:** This could also be called "helping put out fires." Providing interns with a taste of the true nature of your business and the wide variety of issues that employees must handle is a valuable experience. Interns appreciate the challenge and variety that comes from helping with these new tasks.

This balance of primary, background, and day-to-day work will enable the intern to be productive and have a well rounded learning experience.⁵

Choosing the Right Length and Type of Internships

Internships should fit the needs of the organization or department *and* the needs of the student. Many varied types of programs are developed 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 and test a new product. 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 business 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 time frame, allowing them to experience ownership throughout their involvement. Overall, the intern should gain knowledge and experience through working on the project.
- **Summer Interns:** Interns' summer schedules are likely more flexible when it comes to working with businesses not located near a college or university campus. 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 company and intern. For example, training and orienting interns may leave little time for them to contribute their skills and knowledge if the internship is too short.

- **Multi-year or Semester Interns:** Multi-year or semester-length internships often require more flexibility in working around students' class schedules and activities. However, these longer-term internships provide ample time for the student and the business to learn from one another, accomplish goals, and create projects.
- **Telecommuting Interns:** Internships that offer the option for telecommuting can be a win-win for both students and businesses if managed correctly. If the intern lives more than 45 minutes away from the business, this type of internship may serve as a more cost-effective option for businesses and students. For more information about telecommuting internships click [here](#).

Providing Compensation and/or Benefits

If you are deciding between paid vs. unpaid internships, be aware of the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act and if this Act applies to your business.

The U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act restricts an employer's ability to use unpaid interns. This Act applies to businesses that have two or more employees directly engaged in interstate commerce as well as annual sales of \$500,000 or more. Interns who qualify as trainees do not have to be paid. There are six criteria for determining trainee status (as determined by the U.S. Department of Labor); click [here](#) for more information.⁴

Why Pay an Intern?

Beyond potential legal obligations, there are other advantages to paying an intern:

- Paying your intern a wage creates ownership in the program by both the business and intern. Unpaid interns may view the internship as a volunteer opportunity, potentially reducing their commitment or motivation.
- Advertising paid internships will likely increase interest in the position, boost your potential candidate pool, and improve your chances of finding your ideal candidate.

Paying an Intern

- Wages for most internships are usually determined before the intern is hired and are not typically negotiated.
- Consider paying consistent wages to all interns within each department.
- Students in technical fields are generally paid more than nontechnical fields.
- Pay for interns often varies by location, type of industry, size of business, etc.

Other Forms of Benefits⁶

Whether paid or unpaid, offering benefits may provide incentives for talented students to accept one internship position over another or increase the interns' commitment during the experience.

- Opportunity for academic credit (Inform your intern about this possibility)
- Scholarships
- Housing assistance for those who relocate
- Social activities
- Time worked as an intern can accumulate and apply toward benefits if turned into a full-time employee after graduation
- Paid holidays (if already receiving compensation)
- Medical and/or dental benefits
- Tuition reimbursement
- Vacation time

Housing Your Intern

You've found the perfect intern candidate with all the skills needed to help your company grow. One problem – the intern lives in another community. Students may be in the middle of a lease, or your rural community may lack affordable rental properties that offer short-term leases to students. Whatever the issues, housing an intern can be a daunting task and a major barrier to offering and accepting internships.

Prospective interns may be unfamiliar with your community, and the intern(s) may need help finding affordable, safe and strategically located housing. As an employer, it is a good idea to be ready and willing to assist interns in finding housing and to have a good feel for the local housing market. It is always best to have housing options lined up prior to hiring an intern to avoid future delays and obstacles.

Know Your Market

- How many rental properties are available on the market? (Check out www.housing.ne.gov for housing options in your community.)
- What is the average rent?
- What are the average costs for utilities (gas, water and electricity)?
- Are there laundry facilities available?
- How much is the security deposit?
- Do any rental properties offer short-term leases (i.e. summer break)?
- Where are the rental units located in relation to other establishments and your company?
- What is the general atmosphere around the available rental properties?

Get Creative

- College and university housing: Is there a college or university nearby that offers dormitory housing?
- Are other area businesses hiring interns? Is partnering with these local businesses to connect students an option? Not only will it reduce rent per intern, but it also will help interns connect with one another.
- Area realtors may know of properties that have been on the market for an extended period of time but are still in good condition. They may be able to encourage sellers to offer temporary short-term rentals.
- Perhaps your business can offer to cover housing costs for interns who may be in the middle of leases in other communities and unable to afford another lease in your community.
- If you're planning to offer multiple internships at one time, or hiring interns consecutively, you might consider purchasing a standard single-family home to serve as temporary rental housing for interns (and full-time employees if needed in the future). This solution also serves as a great way to maintain and improve the overall quality and appearance of housing stock and your community. If the intern decides to stay as a full-time employee, they could be given the option to purchase the house.
- If, for whatever reason, housing assistance is not a feasible option, consider [telecommuting internship\(s\)](#).

Telecommuting vs. Onsite Internships

Telecommuting is working at an offsite location (typically from one's home) and communicating electronically with the business (or through some other means).

If the internship position requires students to travel more than 45 minutes to the business (typically relevant for businesses in rural areas) there are several options to consider that may make the students' experience more worthwhile.

- If the internship is limited to the summer months, consider providing housing assistance (finding housing and/or provide a stipend for housing costs) so students can work onsite. For more information about providing housing assistance click [here](#).
- If the internship takes place during the school year, students will most likely live within minutes of their academic institution, and a telecommuting internship should be considered.
- Telecommuting internships will increase your potential candidate pool and improve chances of finding your ideal candidate.

Things to consider when you determine if a telecommuting internship is right for your business:

- Does the student have the appropriate equipment to complete the assigned tasks?
- Does the student have a designated area away from distractions where he or she can work?
- Is the intern supervisor comfortable managing off-site interns?
- If the intern needs to visit the on-site location, will mileage be reimbursed?
- How can the intern network with other staff to create team trust and loyalty? Some companies set up online discussion forums or arrange outings so virtual workers can mingle.
- What additional advice or recommendations are available for telecommunicating interns? While these students may have greater flexibility in their work schedule, they also must be

mindful to balance their internships with other activities (school and personal lives). Tip: target self-starters during interviews.

Whether you're in a rural community or metropolitan city, the advantages and disadvantages of on-site internships and telecommuting internships should be considered when designing the program.

Benefits of Onsite Internships

For businesses:

- Provides an opportunity for instant communication and feedback
- May inspire interns' commitment to the business as they build personal relationships
- Allows greater personal interaction with the intern and a better understanding of their areas of interest and skills that may help when assigning project tasks
- Allows interns greater flexibility in helping with last-minute or immediate tasks

For students:

- Provides experience working in a professional environment
- Allows for direct contact and more personal interaction with supervisors, mentors, employees and other interns

Benefits of Telecommuting Internships

For businesses:

- Creates a larger applicant pool leading to the greater probability of discovering the student that's a perfect fit for the organization
- Allows greater leeway in using interns on a project by project basis (especially for small businesses that don't know if they have enough work for an internship program)
- Reduces workspace and equipment costs

For students:

- Allows flexibility for the students who can then complete projects within their busy schedules
- Provides internship opportunities for students who don't have adequate transportation

Recommendations:

- Provide detailed objectives from the beginning so there is little confusion
- Give students challenging tasks, but also provide proper direction
- Maintain frequent contact with the intern(s) via phone and email
- If possible, visit students on campus every few weeks to answer any questions and ensure they are on the right track

Recruiting and Hiring Your Intern

Where Have All the Interns Gone? – Finding an Intern Candidate

Recruiting quality interns is one of the greatest challenges to developing a successful internship program. Whether you live in a rural community or a major city, locating interns can be difficult due to a number of factors including not knowing how to reach or market to students and competition that may exist among Nebraska businesses and those in other states. If, however, you effectively promote your internship through various outlets – such as the SciTechsperience Internship Program, which helps find and screen qualified applicants – finding an intern can be simple and easy.

Successful Recruiting Tools

A number of tools exist to help you find the intern who is right for your business. The big take-away from the lists below is to use multiple recruiting methods and outlets to help increase awareness about your internship program and ultimately connect with students.

Effective Traditional Recruiting Strategies

- Career Fairs: These provide a chance to meet many students within a short period of time. Click [here](#) for a list of Career Service contacts who can provide you with more information about these events.
- Guest Lecturer in Classes: Your personal insight helps students learn more about your company as you develop a positive image and working relationship with the college or university. Contact Career Services or the designated college departmental advising office to find out how you can take advantage of this opportunity.
- Employee Referrals: Company employees can be a great source of information about potential candidates.
- Faculty Referrals: If you already have a professional relationship with faculty members on campus, they can help refer their top students as well as provide students with information about your business.
- Online Job Postings: There are many different outlets through which to post internship information, including your business's website, Career Services websites and SciTechsperience, which will post your opening on the MHTA website (www.mhta.org)
- Postings in Print: College newspapers and other publications on campus provide a way to advertise internship opportunities.

Creative Recruiting Strategies

- Announcements made via social media, such as on an established Facebook fan page or Twitter, will certainly attract students' attention.
- Virtual Career Fairs offer a convenient way to connect with students.
- Posting on social media professional sites, such as LinkedIn and related industry groups
- Become a mentor or speaker for an organization/club on campus.

Recruiting on College Campuses

Each campus has a Career Services department that can provide businesses with a wealth of resources and opportunities; contact a Career Services representative to find out more information about these resources and opportunities.

Many colleges offer career fairs, networking events, and other activities that provide beneficial recruitment opportunities. These events get businesses connected to students, and the types of events offered vary by college campus. Career Services is also a valuable resource for learning more information about developing internship programs.

Hiring an Intern

In many ways, hiring an intern is similar to hiring an employee. The following information will guide you in making the right hiring decisions for your business and its needs.

Creating an Internship Job Description

Treat the job description as an opportunity to showcase the internship(s). For some students the internship job description may be the first time they have ever heard about your internship program *and* even your company. Why will students want to apply for your internship over others? Does your job description illustrate how it will be a unique experience? Do you fully define the benefits or incentives your company can provide? Do you describe what makes your company different or stand above the rest in its industry? Write the job description in an interesting way that engages students; this may increase your chances of finding the ideal student.

Writing an effective internship description is essential to recruiting the right kind of intern. Students really want to know what kind of work they will be doing. Students are not experts in "HR-speak" or your company's acronyms - so write the internship description in clear, everyday language that will help the candidate know what kind of position it is and what kind of company you are.⁵

Tip: If you're not sure what specific projects you might have the intern work on, provide a range of potential projects and responsibilities. Then state that you will match the actual duties to the intern's interests and skills or with the specific business needs. Students will appreciate that. If you know that the intern will be working on a wide variety of projects that may change daily, state that in the internship description. Candidates that like variety and new challenges will be drawn to apply, and those who need routine and predictability will pass up this opportunity. Giving a clear internship description is the first step in recruiting the right type of candidates.⁵

An effective job description should:

- Explain the organization's goals and mission
- Outline the intern's responsibilities and potential tasks/projects
- Illustrate the necessary qualifications
 - Skills (computer, analytical, design, communications, etc.)
 - Education level (year, GPA, etc.)
 - Majors
- Clarify the duration of the internship

- Hours required per week
- Flexibility with schedule or specific hours that need to be covered
- Type: summer, semester, etc.
- Note if it's paid or unpaid
- Provide the job location and whether telecommuting is an option
- Specify how to apply
 - Provide contact information

See the [Sample Internship Job Description](#) for an example of how to incorporate this information.

What to Look for When Hiring Interns

Your excellent recruiting skills and appealing internship job description have netted you numerous applicants. Now how do you choose whom to interview? Generally, this process will most likely follow the business's guidelines for hiring employees. Consider the following recommendations as well.

When evaluating resumes and applications students should be evaluated on:

- Skills and qualifications
- Relevant coursework or class projects that relate to the internship
- Other internships and/or work experiences
- Extracurricular activities
 - Leadership positions
- Honors and achievements

Also consider:

- Writing skills (proper spelling and grammar)
- Submission of a cover letter (shows an interest in the internship)
- Specific talents indicated in the application/resume as well as observed in the interview process (such as being a self-starter, creative, positive, an achiever, adaptable, etc.)

Keep in mind that you are working with a pool of students who may not have all of the desired qualifications/skills you seek since they're still in school and may have little work experience. However, if you select students who have the right talents for the job, with some training, students may be able to learn these desired skills and even bring fresh, new perspectives and ideas. Choose candidates you feel have the most potential; then begin the interview process.

The Interview Process

Internship interviews will help you evaluate if a student is a good fit for your business. The interview process for internships will most likely not be as in-depth as a regular job interview. Since students may be new to the interview process, it's recommended that you share in advance the types of questions (or even specific questions) students will be asked as well as any relevant work, a portfolio of writing, project samples, etc. to share with the interviewers.

The following are potential interview questions to help you better evaluate and understand the student:

- Why did you apply for this internship?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What is your experience with (software, programs, etc.)?
- What relevant experience do you have that relates to this internship?
- What do you hope to gain from this internship?
- Provide a recent example of when you _____?
- When are you available to start the internship?
- What does your schedule look like during the week? How many hours do you feel you can work?
- When do you plan on graduating?

Create an evaluation form to rate the candidates and make additional comments. By the end of the interview process, hopefully you have found a top candidate and now you can make an offer!

We Want You! - Selecting an Intern

Now that you've found the right intern, let them know! Send the selected student(s) an offer letter or email. An offer letter should include:

- Dates/duration of the internship
- Specific pay
- Deadline for acceptance
- Contact information

See the [Sample Offer Letter](#) and [Sample Rejection Letter](#)

Do not send out rejection letters to the non-selected students until you have been notified by the selected intern of their acceptance or denial. Once you have been notified of an acceptance, give notice to the non-selected students about the decision made in a letter.

Making the Most of the Internship Program

Orientation

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/acronyms 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?

In an internship, having mutually agreeable goals among the business and student is essential. Students may choose suitable internships on the basis of an organization's pre-established goals. If the company or department does not have pre-established internships goals, the student and organization may work together to articulate clear, measurable goals. If the student's goals don't match those of the sponsoring organization, the internship is unlikely to be successful from either party's perspective.

See the [Sample Orientation Checklist](#) to make sure you have identified all areas of information that are important for interns to know.

Tip: Provide an Intern Handbook. This internship may represent many interns' first opportunity to work in a professional environment. Policies, procedures, objectives, and other information may be overwhelming. A handbook or designated (password-protected) section on your website will help guide interns throughout their internship. This will be a resource they can access in the future for common questions. This can be especially beneficial for interns who are not working on-site.

Training and Supervision

A well-organized internship requires plenty of training and supervision. On-the-job training should include the same orientation all new employees receive. The work should be structured, and the intern should be assigned an employee supervisor/mentor with whom he or she can consult as needed.

Mentor

A mentor can prove to be an invaluable resource throughout the internship. A mentor will most surely enhance the student's experience and help them get the most out of their time with your company. This mentor also will serve as an excellent reference when deciding whether or not the intern would be a good candidate to hire as an employee upon graduation.

Mentors must have the time necessary to mentor a student. They also should have an interest in facilitating personal development. Mentors generally work in the same department as the intern and work closely with them on related projects.

Mentors serve as:

- Teachers
 - Help the intern learn about the business and its offerings
 - Explain projects and processes
- Supporters
 - Help make the transition to the workplace as easy as possible
 - Answer questions or concerns
 - Serve as a positive role model
- Evaluators
 - Provide constructive feedback to the intern on a regular basis

Due to the nature of an internship, it is imperative that interns are provided with sufficient supervision. Considerable time investment will be needed, especially on the front end, to plan for and implement necessary training. It also is recommended that the mentor plan ongoing weekly meetings to stay up-to-date with the intern's progress. Use care in identifying a seasoned staff member who "buys into" the importance of utilizing interns. The person should realize that the purpose of an internship is twofold. Interns will provide useful assistance for the organization while also gaining on-the-job training that assists them with their future career search.

Activities Beyond Work Tasks

Interns not only want their internship experience to be an opportunity for personal and professional development but also an enjoyable experience. Internships should be a positive, worthwhile experience for the business and students. There are many ways to make the internship both memorable and engaging for both the student and employer; consequently this translates into more than including interns in meetings and having them become members of project teams.

- **Social Activities:** Whether it is employees and interns going out to lunch, or employees taking interns to a local baseball game, these kinds of activities provide a great opportunity to get to know one another on a more personal level. They also provide interns a chance to get to know other interns and employees with whom they have not worked. Many Nebraska companies with successful internship programs state that their social activities are rated by interns as one of the top highlights of their experience. Remember: Reasonably discussing one's personal life with colleagues isn't a waste of time--it's how people build trust and loyalty. Try setting up an online discussion forum or arranging outings so virtual workers can develop connections.
- **Professional Development Activities:** There are a number of professional development activities that are beneficial to interns, employees and the company.
 - **Community Involvement:** Volunteering at a non-profit organization or community event will not only be a great opportunity for interns and employees to get to know one another, but it serves as an excellent public relations opportunity. These activities also familiarize students with the community and new activities. In fact, this may provide an opportunity for them to grow personally and get involved in something outside of work.
 - **Training classes and/or seminars:** Help interns develop their professional skills by allowing them to sit in on meetings and work with employees in other departments for a day. Provide opportunities for interns to attend career development events/seminars in the community or to learn new skills. Interns will learn new concepts they can use during their internships and future careers.

Working with College Students

As an employee or business owner, it is understood that your business' needs take priority. However, the primary goal of most interns is to get a degree. It is important that businesses 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.

Schedule your interns to meet your needs yet not exceed their capabilities. Agree on a set number of hours interns will work each week. Consider offering flex-time to give interns the freedom to plan their schedules on a weekly basis. Flexibility allows interns to arrange their work schedule around time to work on group projects, study for tests, etc. If you find students taking advantage of flex-time, but you are consistently having trouble meeting the allotted number of weekly hours, you may need to jointly review their schedule and pinpoint the hours they are able to work each week. In summary, take time to understand your intern's obligations outside of the internship, and work with the student in setting and adjusting his or her schedule.

Evaluating Your Intern

An internship can only be a true learning experience if constructive feedback is provided. An effective evaluation will focus on the interns' initial learning objectives identified at the start of the internship. Supervisors should take time to evaluate both the student's positive accomplishments and areas for improvement.

Evaluation Throughout the Internship

Interns will look to their mentors and/or supervisors to help them transition from the classroom to the workplace. It is recommended that mentors regularly meet with interns to receive and provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meetings the students may:

- Report on a project's status
- Ask questions
- Learn how their work is contributing to the organization
- Participate in evaluating their strengths
- Discuss areas needing growth and development
- Get insight about what work lies ahead

Final Evaluation

As the internship draws to a close, you'll want to have the intern undergo a final evaluation (exit interview/survey) to provide insight and perceptions about the internship program and activities. You may allow students who are in remote locations to interview by telephone. For an example of a student's final evaluation form, see the [Sample Intern Exit Survey Questions](#).

Supervisors and/or mentors also should evaluate interns at the end of the internship. Mentors should be encouraged to review the internship with the intern before he or she leaves. Final evaluations are helpful when determining the intern's success within the company for future internships or employment upon graduation. These evaluations should be in the form of a written evaluation. See the [Sample Manager/Mentor Evaluation Questions](#) for an example.

What if an Internship is Not Working Out?

As you can see, there are many factors involved in developing a successful internship. What can you do if students are dissatisfied with the experience or aren't meeting expectations?

There are various reasons an intern may not be successful or fully engaged in the internship position. He or she may feel unchallenged or overwhelmed. The intern may not fully understand his or her role or have received proper, ongoing feedback. The available workspace and/or equipment may be inadequate for accomplishing job tasks. The student also may have unrealistic expectations, trouble managing time or be ill-equipped or unable to adapt to the business culture. The three keys to avoiding these types of issues involve:

- The selection process
 - Have an efficient and effective selection process
- The orientation

- Clearly communicate goals and expectations to the intern (beginning in orientation)
- The mentor and/or supervisor
 - Make sure the mentor and/or supervisor understands his or her responsibilities prior to the internship starting

Programs may have been underdeveloped, contain inefficiencies, or lack elements necessary for interns to succeed. Reasons for failure may include lack of support from top management, lack of consistency, poor or inadequately defined required skill sets, or allowing the program to languish over time without taking the time to improve it. While budget cuts and changes in management may be a powerful factor in a program's failure, many of these problems can be avoided. Make sure the program is well-established by incorporating the following:

- Understand the role of student internships in your business; evaluate whether or not your business is in need of, or may benefit from intern(s)
- Make sure top management is fully supportive of the internship program and understands the benefits of hiring interns
- Include the staff in the development of the internship program and show them how they can benefit from it (such as getting helping with projects)
- Involve several individuals in operating the internship program
- Ensure all internship program policies and guidelines are clearly written and easily accessible

If, for whatever reason, you experience problems with an intern, be sure to clearly, openly and regularly communicate with him or her. Meet to express your concerns, objectively listen to the intern's perspective, and offer assistance and suggestions. If the intern is not responsive to the situation, or doesn't improve within the addressed areas, allow the intern the opportunity to leave on his or her own terms, or consider respectfully letting the intern go. Remember, because most internships are only for a brief period of time, dismissing interns may not always be the best answer. Interns serve as ambassadors for your business – whether their experience was a good or bad one.

Transitioning an Intern to a Full-Time Employee

For many, the ultimate goal of an internship program is to recruit, select and develop future employees. Internship programs should provide a positive experience for both the intern and the employer, and employers should consider and evaluate each intern as a potential future full-time employee. In general, most internship programs have a minimum conversion rate of 50%.⁵

Recommendations for Evaluating Interns and Extending an Offer

- Use evaluations from managers and/or mentors to weigh the considerations of hiring the intern post-graduation
- If possible, make offers before the end of the student's final semester
- If making an offer before the internship concludes isn't possible, be sure to maintain contact with the student(s) and make offers as soon as you are able. Be aware that students will pursue other opportunities and may not be able to wait for your offer. Communicate through email correspondence, phone calls, or even enlist them to help you reach out to additional students at on-campus activities (i.e. career fairs).

Tips for Transitioning an Intern to a Full-Time Employee

- **Explain the new role.** Typically, when transitioning from an internship position to a full-time employee, the person will be engaged in doing different work or handling situations differently. Provide as much detail about their new or expanded tasks and any resources they may need.
- **Provide a mentor.** The new employee will likely have many questions while transitioning and orientating to their new role; it is recommended that you match your new full-time employee with a mentor. Typically, you will have lower turnover rates and higher productivity when providing a mentor to a new hire. Appropriate pairing of mentor and mentee is very important to ensuring a productive and valuable relationship; the best mentor may be someone other than their direct supervisor.
- **Provide training.** Proper training will help them feel prepared for their new role. Even though the employee has worked at the company as intern, new employee orientation is still important.
- **Provide immediate feedback.** Once they've completed a few tasks, give them feedback. This will help keep communication channels open and productivity at a high level as they begin their new position.
- **Instill confidence in your new employee.** Give the employee a chance to take the lead on a project or share his or her expertise gained from the previous position.

Evaluating Your Internship Program

Creating and building a successful internship program is just the beginning. Evaluating your internship program on a regular basis will help you connect more effectively with students and provide you with the best opportunities for discovering future business leaders. Evaluations will encourage improvements, and these developments will continue to keep both the interns and your employees satisfied with the program. The following evaluators should be considered:

- Conversion Rate
 - An effective internship program may convert at least half of its interns to employees.
- Retention Rate
 - Measure how long interns are with your business after they are hired full-time compared with employees hired without a prior internship at your business. Most statistics show that former interns will remain at their workplace longer than other employees.
- Performance Ratings
 - Compare the performance ratings among your employees. If your ratings could be improved, consider adjusting your intern selection process to meet these unaddressed areas for improvement.
- Student Evaluation
 - Periodic surveys and exit interviews can help you to meet students' internship expectations and goals. Testimonials can serve as elements for future marketing pieces.
- Manager and/or Mentor Evaluation
 - Similar to student evaluations, manager and/or mentor evaluations can address how an internship program can more effectively meet the needs of staff.

Other Resources and Contributing Materials

Contributing Materials

¹Adapted from materials published by the *National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE)*

²National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (May 2010). *2010 Internship & Co-op Survey*. Bethlehem, Penn.

For more information from the National Association of Colleges and Employers visit www.naceweb.org

³Battelle Technology Partnership Practice (October 2010). *Growing Jobs, Industries and Talent: A Competitive Advantage Assessment and Strategy for Nebraska*. For more information: http://www.neded.org/files/businessdevelopment/battelle/Main_Report_NE_CompetitiveAdvantageAssessment_v8a.pdf

⁴True, M. "Starting and Maintaining a Quality Internship Program." Grantham, PA. Technology Council of Central Pennsylvania.

⁵Adapted from materials contributed by Jonna Holland, Associate Professor and Internship Coordinator at the University of Nebraska-Omaha

⁶Cunningham, J. (2010). "Building a Premier Internship Program; A Practical Guide for Employers." Bethlehem, Penn. National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE].

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can I find out more information about SciTechsperience?

Go to <http://www.mhta.org/work/scitechspexperience-internships/> to learn more.

2. Am I legally obligated to pay interns, or cover interns under worker's compensation insurance?

These types of questions and other legal aspects of internship programs can be answered by consulting legal counsel before implementing policies in your internship program.

3. How can a student obtain academic credit for an internship?

Students should consult with their academic department for more information regarding this opportunity.

4. I have a specific question regarding the development of an internship program that is not answered in this guide. Where can I find more information?

Career services departments at colleges and universities serve as a great resource for providing specific information and further guidance.

Contact Us

Have specific questions related to this guide or SciTechsperience?

Contact: Becky Siekmeier | beckys@mhta.org | 952-230-4241

<http://www.mhta.org/work/scitechspexperience-internships/>

SAMPLE INTERNSHIP JOB DESCRIPTION

Employer: _____ Industry: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Contact Person: _____ Title: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

(Brief introduction explaining organization's goals and missions)

Internship Job Title:

Duties/Responsibilities:

Qualifications:

- Required:

- Desired:

Anticipated Work Schedule and Other Job Specifications:

No. of Hours per Week: _____ Days/Times Preferred _____

Start Date: _____ Expected End Date: _____

Hourly rate: _____ Is telecommuting an option? yes _____ no _____

Application Process:

Application deadline: _____

Please attach any additional information (including your job description for this position, if available) that would be helpful to students interested in this position.

We affirm that we are an equal opportunity employer, offering employment without regard to race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other factor prohibited by law.

SAMPLE OFFER LETTER

<Date>

<Name>

<Address>

<Address>

Dear <Name>:

Thank you for taking the time to interview with <Company Name>. We would like to extend an offer to you to intern with <Company> during the <Semester/Dates>. The starting pay is <\$> per hour.

Please contact me no later than <date> to accept or deny the offer and work out possible start dates.

If you have questions about the internship, please contact me at <phone/email>.

Congratulations! I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

<Name>

SAMPLE REJECTION LETTER

<Date>

<Name>

<Address>

<Address>

Dear <Name>:

Thank you for your application and interest in the internship position at <Company Name>. After a careful review of each candidate's qualifications and a lengthy interview process, another candidate was offered, and has accepted, the position. At this time, we are not able to offer you an intern position.

Though you were not selected for this position, we hope you will again consider applying to our company when future position vacancies correspond to your qualifications and career objectives.

Thank you again for taking time to interview for the position, and we wish you luck in your personal and professional endeavors.

Sincerely,

<Name>

SAMPLE ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

<input type="checkbox"/>	Review organization and department missions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explain need-to-know items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Parking <input type="checkbox"/> Workstation <input type="checkbox"/> Specific Work Dates/Times <input type="checkbox"/> Office Hours/Breaks/Lunches <input type="checkbox"/> Pay Period and Payment Information <input type="checkbox"/> Receive Contact Information from the Intern(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Use Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment Policies <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking Policy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review the internship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Job Description <input type="checkbox"/> Expectations <input type="checkbox"/> How the Internship Relates to the Company <input type="checkbox"/> Action Plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review company standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Standards <input type="checkbox"/> Attendance and Punctuality <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct in a Corporate Environment <input type="checkbox"/> General Appearance and Expected Attire
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explain the work process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Job Authority and Responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> Tact and Concern <input type="checkbox"/> Resources and Secretarial Assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Open Door Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Two-way Communication <input type="checkbox"/> End of Internship Evaluation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Orient the intern to the work area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notify All Staff of the New Intern <input type="checkbox"/> Give a Tour <input type="checkbox"/> Introduce the Intern (Name, School, Department, Applicable Projects/Duties) <input type="checkbox"/> Make Personal Introductions and Explain Work Relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Allow Time for Them to Meet with Their Mentor (If Not Already Done So) <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a Security Card (If Required)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin the internship

SAMPLE INTERN EXIT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Name _____

Department _____

Manager _____

Mentor _____

Why did you choose this internship?

If housing was provided, were you satisfied or not? Please specify.

Do you feel the compensation and/or benefits offered were adequate?

Did you find the tasks involved were relevant to your major?

How would you describe the supervisor and mentor experience?

Did you understand what was expected of you?

Describe some of the most satisfying responsibilities/tasks you were involved in.

What did you like most about your internship?

Are there any suggestions you may have for improvements with the internship program?

SAMPLE MANAGER/MENTOR EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Intern _____

Department _____

Manager _____

Mentor _____

Please answer and provide an explanation for the following:

Was the intern a self-starter, and did he/she take initiative?

Did the intern demonstrate adequate knowledge and skill levels when completing tasks?

Did the intern complete tasks of high quality?

Was the intern able to prioritize and organize tasks?

Did the intern demonstrate teamwork and adequate interaction among others?

How would you rate the intern's overall performance?

Would you recommend this intern for another internship, or a position after graduation (within the business)?