

Developing an Internship Program

Steps to creating an organized Internship Program

1. Set goals and policies
2. Write a Plan
3. Recruit qualified intern(s)
4. Manage the Intern
5. Conduct exit interview/presentation

Step 1: Set Goals and Policies

Prior to hiring an intern, careful thought to the internship or internship program is imperative as well as thinking how your employees will buy-in to mentoring and supervising is imperative. Some questions to be answered by all parties involved are:

What is the main goal for the internship? *Why are you seeking to hire interns for your organization and how will they assist your team for accomplishing company goals? Use the reasoning behind the “Why” to create the internship guidelines and activities planned for the intern(s). Is the work to be completed ongoing or will the work be based on special projects? Is your organization seeking interns for additional help or is your main focus to create a talent-pipeline for future Full-Time positions? All of these questions must be considered carefully!*

Who will supervise and mentor the intern(s)? *Internship success depends on supervision and mentorship. Who will the key employees be within the organization and how will they manage incorporating the new responsibility of managing an intern into their workday/workweek?*

How long will the internship last? *Internships last different lengths, depending on the employers needs and location. Summer only internships have predetermined lengths that should commonly align with academic calendars while year-round, local internships may last until an intern graduates college, if their fit with the organization and their work is on-going. Determining a time-line and a plan for various activities and milestones will ensure not only the organization has a plan, but also the intern has a thorough understanding of the employer’s expectations.*

How will the intern be compensated? *An employer needs to determine prior to establishing an internship program if their interns will be paid or unpaid. If interns will be paid, having an internal range of what you plan to offer and budgeting for that additional compensation is important. If interns will be unpaid, the employer needs to understand the Department of Labor standards for providing unpaid internships and make sure that all of those standards are met and the organization qualifies for offering unpaid interns. (Employers need to think through not paying interns and the increased quality of candidates they will receive for offering paid internship vs. unpaid internships)*

Step 2: Write a Plan

Working with all employees who will be involved in the internship program is crucial for success of the internship program. Careful planning and discussion on program goals, expectations, and visualized outcomes will address concerns and needs of management and allow for all involved participants to fully understand the internship program goals.

The internship program plans and goals should be written out and have the ability to be measured by the organization at the completion of the internship. Decision-makers will need to see that the internship program is important for the organization as well as the value it brings, so therefore a structured internship will allow for goals and objectives to be measured and outcomes to be presented. Specific ideas, proposals and even logistical information should be included in creating the plan.

Some questions to assist organizations in formulating a plan are:

- *Who will be responsible for recruiting and hiring the intern(s)?*
- *Who will train the intern(s) and will they be cross-trained?*
- *Who will supervise/mentor the intern(s)?*
- *Is the internship structured around learning about all the parts of the organization or is it focused on completing a single project?*
- *What tasks and objectives will the intern(s) focus on completing? Are they related to a project or will they be assisting everyday aspects of business for the organization?*
- *What days/hours will the intern(s) work? Will they be part-time or full-time?*
- *Will the program only be offered in the summer or year-round?*
- *Where will the intern(s) work?*
- *What type of academic background and experience should the applicant's possess?*
- *Will extra activities be included as part of the internship program? (i.e. after-work activities, mid-week lunch and learns, etc.)*

Step 3: Recruit a Qualified Intern(s)

When recruiting an intern, employers need to create a program that serves the organization and students in the best way possible. Employers who create purposeful internship programs need to go through all the steps possible to hire interns that are a good fit for the organization.

Internal Needs Assessment

In order to develop an effective internship program, employers need to make sure there is enough “need” and “real” work for interns to do. Some good reasons to consider building an internship program are:

- Is your small business looking for assistance on a special project?
- Is your growing or large organization in need to find well-rounded, motivated, educated employees?
- Is your nonprofit needing assistance with providing programs to your community and you could offer a fabulous, real-world internship experience for a student?

While intern goals will need to be met, your internship program design is able to meet organizational need and expectations too. Without employer commitment an internship program will not succeed. Commitment relates to creating space for the intern(s) to work, establishing/identifying the intern supervisor/mentor, and the organization being willing to invest in time and money to make sure the intern and the supervisor/mentor are supported.

Internship Position Description Draft

Once an organization understands what they need from an intern, a job description needs to be created.

Intern Descriptions Should Include information pertaining to:

- Brief description of the organization & duties as lined out in the plan
- Knowledge, skills, and abilities required or preferred (list accordingly)
- Preferred class level (or courses completed), major, and/or experience
- Required GPA, if applicable
- If the internship is paid or unpaid, and the wage if set
- If International students are welcome to apply and will be hosted
- What documents are needed for the application process
- If the organization is willing to work with guidelines set forth by University for credit

Intern Recruitment

Be aware of your timeline and the University academic calendar so that the job description is written, posted, and you are receiving applicants the semester prior to needing an intern.

WKU uses an online recruitment database called Handshake. All employers are encouraged to establish an account and post opportunities to recruit WKU students. To set up an account on Handshake visit https://app.joinhandshake.com/login?requested_authentication_method=standard.

In addition to posting on handshake, employers are encouraged to develop relationships with the Internship Coordinator who can assist with advertisement of the internship, assistance with recruitment, as well as on-campus interview arrangement. Many internship employers feel that recruiting on campus and having face time with students is a crucial recruitment tool and has allowed them to develop personal connections with students, which in turn leads to hiring the right candidate for the position.

Ogden College of Science and Engineering has additional ways to create brand awareness and develop a connection with students and the college. OCSE has opportunities for companies to visit campus and participate in mock interviews, networking events, and the yearly Career Fair. If you are interested in learning more about these opportunities, please contact the Internship Coordinator by calling 270-745-2574.

Become informed about Intern Legalities

Just as all employees are, interns have rights and are protected by law. If you have questions, you can view the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). For information around hiring international students with visas, contact the WKU International Office at iem@wku.edu or (270)745-4857.

Hire your Intern!

Once you have received applicant resumes and have your candidates chosen, it is time to interview those candidates. Students are prepared to interview in person, via phone, or virtually. The WKU Career Services has interview rooms available for employers to reserve at no charge (contact EmployerRelations@wku.edu) or if you would like to interview in the Ogden College of Science and Engineering, you can also reserve a conference room by contacting the Internship Coordinator at 270-745-2574.

Once your intern has been chosen, please be sure to include the description of duties, preferred weekly schedule, and final pay information when making the intern offer. Now that you have hired your intern – *CONGRATS!* While it is the responsibility of the student to manage their work and internship requirements, the best practice we advise is to be involved and start the intern experience with training and goal setting.

Step 4: Manage the Intern

Employer Goal – Set Interns Up for Success!!

Typically, the defining days of an internship and how it will go for all parties involved starts the first few days. The first tasks of an intern should be doable, but should also signal what to expect in the future and who to expect tasks to be given from. The last thing any internship employer should allow to happen is for an intern to be bored or think “this job is super easy, what am I going to learn?” The single most important influence an employer can have on an intern is how organized the internship program is from the start. This lasting impression could influence their decision to come back, continue on in to the fall, or choose the organization for full-time, post-graduation work.

The quicker an intern understands what the organization does and how they operate, the quicker they can assume assigned responsibilities and become a productive employee for the organization. Some activities to consider doing during an intern’s experience are:

- Once the intern is on-boarded, work with them to set SMART goals or create objectives that will help set expectations as well as allow for future feedback
- Include a full facility tour and meeting employees as part of the on-boarding process
- Provide interns with company materials that you supply all new employees with – i.e. newsletters, annual reports, memos, etc.
- Assign employees to join the intern(s) for lunch during their first week or encourage the intern(s) eat in the organizations break room with other employees
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with or “check-ins” between the intern and their mentor for feedback
- Invite interns to observe and/or participate in professional meetings
- Allow and encourage interns to participate in discussions with company personnel
- Encourage interns to job shadow others at work in different departments, as it works for everyone’s schedule

By reviewing program goals, you will be able to make sure the nature of the program and the activities that you have created will offer a structured, meaningful internship experience!

Monitor Intern Progress...Don’t Micromanage

Supervise Mentor Meet Evaluate Encourage

Interns need a designated supervisor who will use all the skills necessary to be an effective internship supervisor: leadership, motivation, delegation, communication, development, training, and evaluation.

Interns need a mentor who can assist them with the transition from classroom to real-world work environment. Internships are an extension of the learning process – a mentor is someone who is able to provide guidance on bridging the academics and internship experience.

Regular intern meetings allow organizations to give and receive feedback on the interns experience. These meetings will allow interns to report on the status of projects, discuss and ask questions, learn more about how their work is contributing to the overall organization, discuss areas of growth and development, and understand what work lies ahead.

The value of constructive feedback to interns is invaluable. Feedback or evaluation of their work provides the supervisor or mentor an opportunity to coach, counsel, and reinforce positive attitudes and performance.

Encouragement from the intern's mentor regarding the work they are doing allows the intern to truly see that their work matters for the organization. A portfolio of the accomplished work will allow for the intern to see all they have accomplished at the end of the internship as well as will provide them with the information needed for internship course credit.

Step 5: Conduct Exit Interview/Presentation

As the internship comes to a close and the workload lessens, organizations must take the last few weeks to conduct exit interviews and reveal insights from their intern(s) on the strengths and weaknesses of the internship. Exit Interviews can be performed as a face to face presentation from the intern on what they learned followed up by a sit down exit interview with their direct supervisor or they can be offered as a worksheet/online form that the student fills out prior to their last day. All combination of options provide great feedback to the organization!

A few critical questions that all employers should include in their exit interview process are:

- How would you describe the company culture?
- What type of changes would you recommend for our internship program in the future?
- How did the internship activities match your expectations? Did your work help you achieve your learning goals?
- What do you see as the next step in your professions and how can we assist you in getting there?

A proper “goodbye” is important when it is the intern's final day. The exit interview is a great opportunity to tie up any loose ends and provides the organization not only with insight, but allows everyone to exit with good feelings about the experience.