

The Intern Connection

Internships Made Easy

Basic Internship Guidelines: Simple Keys to Success

If you are considering implementing an internship program in your business or organization, this guide is for you! Making the decision to host an intern is an important first step, but there are many steps to follow.. In an effort to instruct businesses on how to host high school and college interns in a meaningful way, the San Rafael Chamber Education Committee created the following guidelines for you to consider while structuring your organization's internship program.

1. Why An Internship Is Important For My Business

- Interns are a highly visible way of “giving back” to the community where your business is located.
- Students have many talents and traits that benefit employers including enthusiasm, dedication to learning and an eagerness to work and be recognized for doing a good job.
- Internships allow students to investigate career opportunities and discover more about their interests and abilities. You may just find that perfect candidate for your next hire.

2. Pre-Planning: Thinking about your internship needs in advance is necessary for a successful internship program. Internships should be designed to give students an opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in an actual work situation. Things to do prior to interviewing an intern candidate include:

- Survey the current workload of your staff.
- Based on the workload survey results, create an ongoing list of (intern appropriate) projects your current staff does not currently have bandwidth for or that you can never seem to get started.
- Determine availability of staff support for intern based on the project(s) you may assign.
- Determine available workstation or work area space for intern.
- Determine any financial resources needed for assigned work/projects.

3. Meaningful Assignments: Design a position that has a goal. A good internship program will ensure the assignment of appropriately challenging projects and tasks. An internship is really a partnership between the employer, the student, and their school. Work assignments are the key element in the planning process. Here are some tips for creating a successful work assignment:

- Review your project list from step 2 above and then review job descriptions of your staff to determine what types of work can be expanded or augmented (taking into consideration your staff resources, etc.).

- Develop your intern assignment from this information and create a basic position description for the intern that you will discuss during the intern interview.
- Interns should have a “go-to” person. Assign a supervisor/manager or mentor to be available to provide guidance.
- Develop projects that will challenge students. Don't underestimate their abilities.
- Remember that students learn quickly and want to contribute meaningful work to your organization.
- Ensure that infrastructure is in place to support the intern(s). Sufficient workspace (desk, computer workstation, access to phone/fax, company email if necessary, etc.).

4. The Intern Interview. Once you have received resumes from student candidates, interview them in-person at your organization so that they can meet potential co-workers and see the actual work environment.

- Present an overview of your business, your goals and how you measure overall success. Don't assume that your intern candidate knows exactly what your business does or the professional history of you and your company.
- Be sure to provide interns with any parking and/or dress code information. Once interns start, they should review necessary policies (i.e., work hours, missing work, harassment, safety, etc.).
- Provide the intern with your standard employee orientation to your company so that s/he will learn about policies, benefits, the facility, etc.
- Be prepared to discuss "learning objectives" with your interns. Many interns will want to develop clear objectives for the learning they want to achieve while working in an experiential learning position.
- Try to elicit information from students about their favorite school subjects, interests and career goals to develop a good match between the student and your work assignment.
- Ask if they have experience with Macs or PCs, Google docs, Excel, Social Media, etc. to determine their technical capability. Some interns may be better suited for non-technical projects like brochure design, customer support, community outreach, etc.

5. Effective Supervision: Providing quality supervision is an essential element in establishing a successful experiential learning opportunity. An investment in time is required - especially on the front-end - to plan for and implement necessary intern training. It is also recommended that the intern supervisor schedule regular (weekly) check-in meetings to stay up-to-date with the intern's progress. Consider the following points:

- Acquaint interns to their workspace environment by introducing them to co-workers. Interns should become familiar with your organization's communication process and chain of accountability.
- Be flexible when it comes to scheduling your intern to work with you, especially during the school year. You might find that coming in for a few hours a day throughout the week works best. Work it out with the intern and be flexible with them.

- Documentation is very important for effective learning to take place. It is strongly encouraged that an employer and intern create mutually agreed upon learning objectives. Well documented learning objectives provide clear direction and targeted goals for the intern. This ensures both parties are clear about the experience and it reduces the possibility of misunderstanding and disappointment.
- It is also a good idea to document other aspects of your internship program. This may include your internship program mission, internship job descriptions, eligibility and application requirements, compensation structures, supervisory roles, letters of recommendations and supervisor/intern evaluations.
- Ensure interns feel welcome. Just as you would for a new full-time employee, it is important that interns be provided with a warm introduction to your organization. Not only are interns new to your organization, but in many cases they are new to the professional world of work.
- Include interns in the daily life of the workplace. Interns want to be included, too. When possible, invite interns to quietly tag along to a staff or a project meeting to increase the intern's knowledge of your organization's big picture.

6. Evaluation: An internship can only be a true learning experience if constructive feedback is provided by you. Conduct an exit interview with your intern when his/her assignment is over. An effective evaluation will focus on the interns' learning objectives that were identified at the start of the internship. Supervisors should take time to evaluate both positive accomplishments and weaknesses. If an intern were unable to meet his/her learning objectives, suggestions for improvement should be given.

MARIN COUNTY SCHOOL TO CAREER PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Marin County School to Career Partnership has been coordinating internships for high school students around the county since 1997. Internships are structured opportunities for students to understand the relevance between classroom learning and the world of work, while participating as productive employees in a company or an organization.

These work-based opportunities allow students to explore areas of personal and career interest, to acquire the skills necessary to be successful employees and to formulate goals and plans for their futures. If your organization would like to provide an internship opportunity through the Marin County Schools to Career Partnership program, please follow the steps below.

STEPS FOR REQUESTING HIGH SCHOOL INTERNS THROUGH THIS PROGRAM

1. Please read the entire [Employer Guide to Internships](#). The packet contains important information of which you should be aware.
2. Complete the online form entitled [Employer Request for Interns](#). Please complete a separate form for each available position specifying how many interns could be accommodated in that category. Click on the “submit” button at the bottom of the page and your form will be sent to the School to Career Partnership office.
3. A School to Career Liaison will contact you to review the internship opportunity. The Liaison will then match a student with your business/organization during the summer program, or during fall or spring semester.
- 4.. When a match is arranged, the student will contact you to set up an interview time. At this point, the Liaison has screened the student, but it is up to you to determine if s/he is a good match for your business.
5. The student will bring an *Internship Agreement* form to the interview. Please complete this during your interview. It is the student’s responsibility to return this form to the Liaison before the internship commences.
6. During the internship, the student will keep track of his/her hours on a timesheet provided by the Liaison. S/he will ask the host to initial this timesheet at the end of the internship (students typically receive 3 high school credits for their internship). The student will also ask the host to do a final [evaluation](#) of the student and, if applicable, write a letter of recommendation.