Internships 101 for Employers

Welcome from Parker Dewey!

As the largest network of highly motivated college students and recent graduates who are excited to complete short-term, professional assignments, we know interns!

The information in Internships 101 for Employers will help you create a new internship program, modernize an existing internship program, and learn best practices for working with college students and recent graduates. Our mission is to provide meaningful opportunities for Career Launchers to add to their resumes, while helping organizations get work done. If you're passionate about this too, please join our email newsletter HireLearnings and follow us on social!

When you need help managing your workload, hiring an intern can be a low-risk and affordable way to get extra help with the fundamental tasks in your organization. But creating a program to hire, train, and manage interns can be time consuming and confusing. What's the point of hiring an intern if it takes you more work setting up than they will be able to give you?

Stop stressing and bookmark this page because it's everything you need to create an effective internship program. This page will give you best practices on planning an internship, hiring the best internship candidates, bringing college students and recent graduates up to speed, managing interns and giving them feedback, plus everything else you need to start getting work done and building a talent pipeline from successful interns.

Internships 101 for Employers is divided into 4 main sections:

- Everything you need to know to start an internship program
- Finding, hiring, and on-boarding interns
- Working with and managing interns
- How to optimize your internship program to build your talent pipeline

Everything you need to know to start an internship program

Preparing for an Internship Program

Do I need an intern?

The three most popular reasons to hire an intern or start an internship program are:
1. you have more work than your staff can handle, but don't necessarily need full time help;
2. you want to develop future entry level employees; or
3. you want to develop the leadership and management of current employees.
- Often all three reasons are important for starting an internship program at your

How long is an internship?

A typical summer internship is 3 months long, with 10-20 hours of work each week. When considering hiring an intern, you need to consider how much work you'll be able to give. If you have too much work, you should scale up and hire multiple interns. Don't have enough projects to fill this time? Consider a Micro-Internship. Unlike a traditional internship, Micro-Internships typically range from 5 to 40 hours of work and provide you with on-demand flexibility.

What projects can interns do?

Every college student has a unique background, so before you look to fill an internship position, you need to determine its scope. An internship can range from complete focus on one extended project to helping out with each area of your business. However, when an intern is spread too thin between multiple departments, they might not have the depth to make meaningful contributions in every area. Thus you need to determine what assignments will give you and your intern the best experience before thinking about hiring. For more ideas, check out our list of 18 Projects You Shouldn't Do (but an intern can)!

How do you pay interns?

One decision you need to make about your internship is whether or not it will be paid. We firmly believe all internships should be paid, and the US Department of Labor firm agrees. If you are a for-profit company and you do not pay your intern, you must adhere to the guidelines listed by the Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division fact sheet #71.

To determine your intern's wage, you should consider the value you'll receive from their work, the level of expertise and education you expect from your intern, and the wages of comparable positions in your organization or others in your industry. If you're having trouble justifying an hourly wage, Micro-Internships allow you to pay per project and eliminate the need for HR forms and legal agreements -- Parker Dewey handles it!

For more information on creating an internship program, view our Internship Program Templates.

Finding, hiring, and on-boarding interns

How do I find an intern?

There are many ways to recruit interns to your program. Most universities host career fairs throughout the school year which attract students looking for full-time, part-time, internships and freelance projects. Developing relationships with universities' career centers and counselors can also expose more students to your company. On Parker Dewey, your Micro-Internship opportunities specifically reach current college students from U.S. based schools and recent graduates looking to launch their career.

When should I start looking for an inter?

The time of year can impact many aspects of your internship program. For summer internships, you should make a hiring decision up to 6 weeks out due to heavy competition and to afford the student time to find short-term housing if needed. Many universities offer summer intern housing just for out of town students. Covering relocation or temporary housing costs can help attract interns to your position and make your position more accessible for students from less privileged backgrounds. Another alternative to attract a diverse selection of qualified interns while reducing costs is to host remote internships. Like full-time remote employees, you'll need to ensure your interns have access to internet and set up times to check in virtually or by phone to build the relationship.

Summer is not the only time for interns! For internships taking place during the academic year, you will need to understand availability around class schedules. If you need someone at the same time every day, you may be better suited to look for a college graduate instead of a current student. Find out why Lynn Carroll says year-round Internship programs are a smart move!

How to interview an intern:

Unlike a full time position, internships are low risk, so fewer team members need to be involved in the hiring process. Typically, interns speak to a team member they will be working closely with and meet with the hiring manager. Depending on location and school schedules, internship interviews are more likely to take place online or by phone.

How to onboard an intern:

When welcoming your intern or interns, the first thing you need to is prepare an environment in which they can work. If your intern works onsite, you need to give them somewhere to sit and whatever tools they will need to work with your team. If they are working remotely you need to confirm with them that they have the capability to communicate and work with you over the internet or phone.

Some companies treat interns like any other new hire - on the plus side, if you already have a defined on-boarding program you can save time while ensuring they get the basics of company processes. On the other hand, interns are unlikely to have the same benefits and process/training requirements. You may consider instead setting up training on key systems and processes they will assist in, with a one on one meeting with company leaders who can educate them on history, competitive positioning, and vision.

Onboarding a Micro-Intern typically skips over company vision and systems training and instead focuses on the background knowledge needed to complete the assignment. It's helpful to also explain If you have multiple interns, consider setting up experiences or interactions between them and leaders in the company--such as a breakfast or Ask Me Anything style webinar-- it's a great way for them to get an overview about how the company operates and get some face time.

Working with and managing interns

Keeping your intern on track

The first week of your internship program should be your most hands-on time period, but each week you should make time to check in and ask questions. Having scheduled weekly meetings with interns can help give them structure, stay on track with their projects, and ensure a minimum amount of facetime.

What is an Internship Plan? Do I need one?

An Internship Plan is a written agreement between the student and the internship supervisor to define expectations for the experience. By no later than the first day of the internship, the Internship Plan should be signed and dated by both the intern and the supervisor. The agreement should include the following:

1. Defined knowledge and/or skills to be developed by the student during the internship.
2. Defined educational goals and deliverables to be achieved by the student during the internship.
3. Supervisory structure for student (e.g. supervised by a graduate student or staff member).
4. Progress monitoring and feedback process to ensure the internship is proceeding as planned.
5. Defined time frame for the experience.
6. Expected hours/week the internship will accommodate the academic commitments and schedule of the student.

Should an intern report to multiple supervisors?

Depending on the size of your organization, exposing your interns to coworkers in other departments can improve your program for you and your intern. Working on projects in various fields can expose interns to different aspects of your business which may interest them. It allows the intern to feel more connected to members of your organization, and gain more contacts. It also helps ensure that your intern always has something to do, and never has to sit idly waiting for you to direct or instruct them. If they don't understand, the best thing is to schedule a meeting with the people the work is impacting. Have them explain their day, their needs, and their roadblocks.

Giving Feedback to Interns

The Internship Plan that you create with your intern provides you with a set of topics to evaluate your intern's performance, and for your intern to evaluate their experience. You can consult this plan during your check in meetings to discuss what your intern feels they've learned and how much progress they've made toward achieving their goals. Along with these measures, you should discuss with your intern how their projects impact the company, how they feel about the projects they've worked on, and if they have any thoughts on how to improve certain processes.

Half way through the internship, provide an evaluation. This should serve 2 purposes, to understand how you could better manage the intern, and to ensure the intern knows what they need to do to end their time successfully. Students earning academic credit are likely to have midpoint and end of term evaluation forms provided by and required by their academic departments.

At the end of the internship, you and your intern should conduct an exit interview. In this interview you should give your intern a final evaluation of their work at your company, and offer them a chance to do the same. You can use this time to gain insight from your intern on your company's culture, and your leadership style. If your internship could lead to a full time or ongoing position, this is a good time to discuss or offer this opportunity. After this interview make sure to record your thoughts on your intern's performance and work for use in future recommendations.

How to optimize your internship program to build your pipeline

Building an internship program can be highly valuable for your organization, but doing it right takes time. When you need support now with the benefits of engaging up and coming talent, consider a Micro-Internship instead. For further reading, download our ebook, Beyond Interns, Temps, and Freelancers: How to Engage Students and Improve Entry-Level Hiring Outcomes.