How to Start an Internship Program

Well-executed internship programs bring in fresh perspectives, create a pipeline for new hires and provide mentorship opportunities for existing employees, all while accomplishing key objectives. Here’s how to get your program started out right.

What to Know About Internships

Internships differ from traditional roles in key ways. Although internships can range in duration, pay, and description, all internships should include:

- **A learning experience** with a real-world opportunity to apply classroom knowledge. Rather than replace the work a regular employee would routinely perform, students make substantive contributions to operations or complete projects.

- **Direct supervision by a professional(s)** with relevant expertise who provides productive feedback, guidance, and the resources and equipment necessary to successfully complete the assignment.

- **Clearly defined learning objectives or goals** that support the student’s academic program and the university’s requirements.

- **A position description** with clear responsibilities and required/desired qualifications.

Additional guidelines:

- **10-20 hours a week** during the academic term, **up to 40** during the summer.
- Duration about **10 weeks**, with defined start and end dates.
- **Interns should be paid** regardless of whether they earn academic credit for the demonstrated learning associated with their internship. Pay rate amount depends on industry.
How to Get Started

STEP 1: Establish

Identify and define:

- **Goals.** What are your overall goals for your internship program?
- **Support.** How much support will your internship program need from various teams or individuals within your organization?
- **Work.** Identify a meaningful project or role, important to your organization, that can reasonably be done by an intern.
- **Supervision.** Find a manager willing to devote time to support intern learning. They should be prepared to:
  - Help with onboarding, facilitate training, and meet with intern to establish learning goals.
  - Perform weekly project update check-ins.
  - Hold mid-internship performance meetings.
  - Complete a final performance evaluation.
- **Logistics.** Figure out your intern workspace, needed equipment, pay rate, information access, and other details.

STEP 2: Engage

Develop:

- **Hiring timeline.** 8-12 weeks is ideal to post and interview candidates. Put milestone dates and key players in place.
- **Position description.** Include:
  - What interns can expect to learn.
  - Approximate start and end dates.
  - Number of hours per week desired.
  - Location of internship site.
  - Compensation.
- **Recruiting plan.** Work with your relationship manager to reach students with target skills and interests.
- **Onboarding plan.** Include organization introductions, task-specific trainings, and written expectations.
- **A high-impact experience.** Plan how to expose interns to different teams, tasks, meetings, leaders, etc. A culminating presentation ends the internship on a high note and creates a valuable record of interns’ contributions.

More Questions?

For more information and a detailed guide, reach out to your Relationship Manager or email HireU@utah.edu.