

Intern Program Checklist

Edition: May 2013

Please note: This is a sample checklist and is intended for study and educational purposes. It uses an arts organization as an example. Users may adapt this instrument to their own needs but it is not recommended to use "as-is" given the unique needs of each organization and position.

An effective intern program balances support to key staff and volunteers with meaningful skills-based learning experience for interns.

Why a focus on learning? Because “employers get into trouble when they view unpaid internships as a way to accomplish work tasks rather than as educational programs aimed at assisting students.”¹ This “trouble” includes possible violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and state labor laws.

Interns are not un-paid or barely-paid staff and should not be seen as a substitute to a paid staff member. They are generally at the beginning of their careers, have limited skills and experience, and are still learning. By definition, they will only be in your organization for a short period.

Internships that last at least one and preferable two semesters are more beneficial for the staff and the interns than those lasting only a few weeks. Over time, interns build knowledge and competencies and are able to complete more complex tasks. If turnover is constant, valuable staff time is spent training and recruiting. As a result, the intern program becomes counter-productive. Interns, too, can engage in more challenging tasks during a longer internship, make more meaningful contacts to impact on their careers, and have a generally richer experience.

To ensure that interns stay more than a few weeks, tasks must include projects that include a learning experience in addition to support tasks. For example, if an intern does nothing but photocopy and stuff envelopes, the learning experience is limited and the intern will leave for a more rewarding experience. If an internship includes higher level of skills, such as:

- Learning and using new software
- Writing or editing copy
- Assisting with event performance planning

...the experience is more valuable and the intern has a reason to stay. If what you really need is someone to photocopy and stuff envelopes, an internship program may not be the right way to go. Developing a group of task-oriented volunteers such as seniors in your community, a retired person who comes in once or twice per month, or paid part-time or temporary staff may be a better approach.

	Task	Who Initiates?
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Assign a staff member who is responsible for running the internship program	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Develop a program budget, including stipends for interns (strongly recommended)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Internship program leader works with staff to create a list of internship positions that are most needed in your organization	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Assign each internship position to a staff member/volunteer in the department where he/she will be based.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Draft position descriptions for each internship.	

¹ O'Donnell, Laurie E. "Is Your Unpaid Intern Legit?" *HR Magazine*, April 2013: 78.

<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Develop basic criteria for your internships. Example for development interns of an arts organization include:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. Strong attention to detail	Notes:
<input type="checkbox"/>	B. Clear and persuasive communicator	
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. Understanding of development and a stated career interest	
<input type="checkbox"/>	D. Mature and motivated	
<input type="checkbox"/>	E. Strong writing skills	
<input type="checkbox"/>	F. Previous relevant internships	
<input type="checkbox"/>	G. Interest in the arts	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Create an area on your organization's website where internships are listed and add details about the program, including position descriptions, details of hours, timeframe and stipend.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Build a list of sites and contacts for reaching out to find interns. Examples include: www.nyfa.org (arts orgs); www.idealists.org (all orgs); and http://www.playbill.com/jobs/ (theater orgs). Include colleges in your area. Be creative and reach out to community-based organizations, school and college professors, your board of directors, etc., to build a broad and comprehensive list.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. List and circulate internship positions using position summaries as per #5 above. Set a deadline of approximately 2 weeks. Include information on how to apply – recommend that candidates apply via e-mail by sending a cover letter and resume.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Send a one-sentence acknowledgement to all applicants stating that the application has been received and resumes are currently being reviewed.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Add applications to a tracking spreadsheet (see additional template).	
<input type="checkbox"/>	12. When the deadline for applications has passed and a sufficient number of resumes have been received, review and disregard any that do not meet the criteria. Pass the remaining resumes to the assigned staff member in each department, with a date by which a shortlist for interviewees must be completed.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Develop interview protocols and instruments (see Hiring Process Series of videos and templates for ideas).	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Train staff on use of protocols and instruments.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15. Schedule and attend interviews with assigned staff members.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Make final recommendations of interns.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	17. Develop a brief manual of internship program protocols for staff and interns as a guide to accepted practices at organization.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	18. Offer internship positions and confirm schedule and terms.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	19. Consider ongoing activities that will add to the intern's engagement and learning experience.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Bi-weekly check-in and assessment with interns and staff.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Schedule regular career-development activities for interns, including guest speakers and field trips.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Program assessment after the first semester.	