

Your Handbook to Making a Lasting and Valuable Internship Program



.....

JUSTWORKS.



Your Handbook to Making a Lasting and Valuable Internship Program

So you're ready to create an internship program.

Bringing on interns is an exciting prospect for any company. It offers the opportunity to build a collaborative, potentially long-lasting professional relationship, and mentor an up-and-coming employee. You may even pick up some savvy social media skills from your digitally enlightened counterparts.

But maintaining a long-lasting program should take thought and intention. A bad internship experience could impact the rest of that intern's career trajectory, or it could make your company look unprofessional.

We've compiled a guide to help you through the internship program process, from start to finish. In this guide, you'll get advice on how to source interns, create a quality program that benefits all parties involved, and improve that program over time.

Best of all, we've added some ready-made tools to your box, like offer letters and a survey to measure success — all of which will help you build a stronger and more robust internship program as the years go on.

Table of Contents

Section 1 | BEFORE

- Preparing for Your Internship Program 5
- How to Prioritize Diversity in Your Next Internship Program 6
- 5 Ways to Build a Diverse Internship Program 7
- Sample Job Offer Letter 10

Section 2 | DURING

- Keeping Up the Program’s Momentum 15
- How to Make Internships Successful for Both Parties 16
- 6 Tips for Making a Successful Internship Program 17

Section 3 | AFTER

- Ensuring Success 21
- Sample Survey to Measure Success 22

Section 1

Before

- ✓ **Preparing for Your Internship Program**
- ✓ **How to Prioritize Diversity in Your Next Internship Program**
- ✓ **5 Ways to Build a Diverse Internship Program**
- ✓ **Sample Job Offer Letter**

Before



Preparing for Your Internship Program

Creating an internship program seems easy enough, right?

Well, that depends on the quality and caliber of the internship program you want to run. Although it might be tempting to throw together an intern description and post it on the Internet, creating a long-lasting internship program requires forethought and strategy.

Before you even kick off your internship program, we'll walk you through how to prioritize diversity in your next internship program to help your company flourish. We also include a job offer letter, so you have one less task to deal with.

How to Prioritize Diversity in Your Next Internship Program

You've read the stats, and perhaps you already know why a diverse workforce is important. It [lifts employee creativity](#), [ushers in productivity](#), and better represents the wide array of people who use your product or services.

But how should your team approach the intern hiring process so as not to select people only from similar backgrounds and experiences?

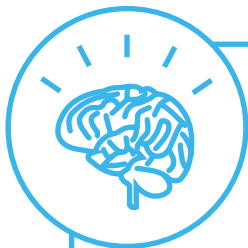
As luck would have it, sourcing interns is a wonderful way to encourage diversity in the workplace. However, hiring diverse interns should never be a short-term solution for a long-term initiative.

It may sound a little hokey, but hiring interns is an exciting time. It's the perfect opportunity to bring a fresh perspective into the office, teach people about the knowledge you've accumulated, and learn from their existing knowledge as well.

But how can your team not only approach people only from similar backgrounds and experiences?

As [PowerToFly CEO Milena Berry put it](#), "Diversity [is] not a Band-Aid. It's a lifestyle choice. If you want to lose weight you don't go on a diet, you change your lifestyle."

Below, you'll find five solid tips to start you off to turn the intern hiring process into an inclusive and beneficial process for your new interns, employees, and company at large.



Hiring interns is an exciting time. It's the perfect opportunity to bring a fresh perspective into the office, teach people about the knowledge you've accumulated, and learn from their existing knowledge as well.

5 Ways to Build a Diverse Internship Program

1 Consider Paying Your Interns

If you run a for-profit company, paying your interns is one of the most effective and meaningful steps you can take to bring on diverse candidates.

Why? One answer is the same compelling reason to offer your employees a competitive compensation and a benefits package. With a paid internship, you'll cast a wider net for talent, which can help bring more diverse candidates into the fold.

Perhaps most importantly, with a few exceptions, not paying your interns has the potential of putting your company at risk.

As [Nancy J. Leppink said during her tenure with the Department of Labor](#), “If you’re a for-profit employer or you want to pursue an internship with a for-profit employer, there aren’t going to be many circumstances where you can have an internship and not be paid and still be in compliance with the law.” Interns in the for-profit private sector will most often be viewed as “employees” under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and typically must be paid at least the minimum wage and overtime pay for hours worked over forty in a workweek.

The U.S. Department of Labor uses a [six-factor test](#) to determine whether an intern is a trainee or an employee under the FLSA. But take note: federal courts do not necessarily rely on this test and states may have tests of their own. So before implementing an internship program, consider consulting with counsel on benefits considerations and state law requirements.

Interns in the for-profit private sector will most often be viewed as “employees” under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and typically must be paid at least the minimum wage.

And make sure to weigh all facts and circumstances of each internship program before claiming that an intern is not an employee under the FLSA or applicable state law. As we’ve written about in the past, [interns have sued and won against companies who didn’t pay them wages](#) during their internship.

Long story short, paying your interns is good for diversity initiatives and your company’s future.

2 Lean On Recommendations After You've Built Out Your Pipeline

Does your coworker have a glowing recommendation for, say, one of their best friends' children? Go ahead and look into it — after all, a certain ratio of referrals can be great for your company. But don't let close-knit recommendations be your only sourcing tool.

A study of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York stated that most referrals take place between people “with [similar characteristics in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity](#), education, and staff level.”

That means if you want to look for more diverse interns, it's important to look outside of your normal comfort zone. The good news is, once you start bringing in more diverse interns, your recommendation pipeline will also become more inclusive of all genders and ethnicities.

Karina Nagin — a woman dubbed the “Intern Whisperer” who has extensive experience hiring and sourcing large internship programs — had that very experience at the Clinton Foundation. “We get a lot of our interns through recommendations [from past interns],” said Karina. “This is one reason why it's worth investing in interns and training them.”

3 Don't Only Seek Prestige

You might be looking at an intern who comes from an Ivy League school and has already done internships abroad or with other prestigious companies.

Although picking someone with relevant office experience and an impressive creed might be tempting, Karina suggests looking for candidates who come from a completely different background as well.

Doing so puts you in the position to give someone an opportunity who might not have otherwise had it. And you might be surprised by the results.

Karina recalled one standout intern who was a first generation student from CUNY and had worked in the restaurant industry as a server before accepting the internship.

“That skillset of working in a service industry — knowing how to multitask, interpersonal skills — it's so much less entitled and more driven.”

- Karina

“That skillset of working in a service industry — knowing how to multitask, interpersonal skills — it's so much less entitled and more driven.”

He did such an impressive job, in fact, that Karina hired him afterwards.

4 Search Beyond the Expected Spots

One obvious place to search for interns would be schools — either high schools or colleges in the area. But as mentioned above, prestigious schools aren't the only places you want to set your eyes on.

You can go even further to cast a wide net. Look into extracurriculars, clubs, or athletic societies for intern talent as well — like [Girls Who Code](#) or [Americorps](#).

5 Focus on Values Over Culture

Whether for interns or long-term employees, this advice always rings true: hiring for a values fit as opposed to a cultural fit will benefit your company in myriad ways.

If your company has already established long-held values, this will help tremendously in choosing people who will work well with your team, regardless of whether you like the same football teams or grew up in the same neighborhoods.

For example, Justworks has established since nearly the beginning that our values are COGIS — Compassion, Openness, Grit, Integrity, and Simplicity. And we have an [interview process that integrates those values](#) into the final decision.

Related eBook: [Hiring for Company Culture: Why Values-Based Interviewing Matters](#)

If your company still hasn't established set values, you can [check out Justworks' guide here](#) on how to establish them and begin hiring a stronger and more diverse teams, from the interns up.

Sample Job Offer Letter

INSTRUCTIONS:

Use this template as a “mix and match” for provisions that apply. For example, if your intern is full-time, she may be eligible for the benefits provision.

Once finished, [remove the blue text](#), insert the applicable information and print on your company’s letterhead. We recommend reviewing your offer letter with a lawyer to ensure compliance with all applicable laws.

Note: If your intern is unpaid, she should instead be presented with an unpaid internship offer letter, also known as a learning contract.

[On Company's Letterhead]

[MM/DD/YYYY]

[Employee First and Last Name]

[Employee Address]

SALUTATION/JOB TITLE/SALARY

It's best to attach a job description to the offer letter as well if it's not in the body of the offer letter.

Dear [Employee Name]:

We are pleased to offer you a [Full-Time/Part-Time] position with [Company Name] (the "Company") as [Job Title].

You will report directly to [Job Title], currently [First and Last Name], or another individual designated by the Company's [Job Title]. If you decide to join our team, you will be paid [a salary of \$[Amount] per year/on an hourly basis at the rate of \$[Amount] per hour[, plus all applicable overtime as required by law], to be paid [Monthly/Semi-Monthly/Bi-Weekly/Weekly] in accordance with the Company's standard payroll practices. You should note that the Company may modify job titles, compensation, and benefits from time to time as it deems necessary.

EXPECTED START DATE

If you accept this offer, your first day of employment will be [Start Date] ("Start Date").

SIGNING BONUS

Are you offering a signing bonus? Include it here.

We are also pleased to offer you a signing bonus of \$[Amount] that will be paid at the end of your [First/Alternative Number] month of employment. [Should you choose to leave the Company at your own accord within [Three/Alternative Number] months of employment, you will be responsible for reimbursing the Company for the prorated amount of the signing bonus.]

DISCRETIONARY BONUSSES

If you have a policy on bonuses, insert it here.

BENEFITS

If this offer is accepted and you begin employment with the Company, you will be eligible to participate in any benefit plans and programs in effect from time to time, including [vacation/Paid Time Off (PTO),] [group medical and life insurance,] [disability benefits,] [Other Offered Benefits], and other fringe benefits as are made available to other similarly situated employees of the Company, in accordance with and subject to the eligibility and other provisions of such plans and programs.

AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT

At-will employment varies from state to state. Research your state laws before adding this provision.

The Company is excited for you to join and looks forward to a productive and beneficial relationship. However, you should be aware that your employment with the Company constitutes at-will employment and is specified for no period of time. You are free to resign at any time, for any or no reason. Similarly, the Company is free to conclude its employment relationship with you at any time, with or without cause or notice. We request that, in the event of resignation, you give the company at least [Two] weeks notice.

CONDITIONS

You will be required, as a condition of your employment with the Company, to (i) sign the Company's [List Other Agreement(s) to be Executed Before Commencing Work], and (ii) satisfactorily complete a background check[, for which the required notice and consent forms are enclosed with this letter]. As required by federal immigration laws, your employment will be contingent upon your providing legal proof of your identity and authorization to work in the United States.

While you render services to the Company, you will not engage in any other employment, consulting or other business activity (whether full-time or part-time) that would create a conflict of interest with the Company. By signing this letter, you confirm to the Company that you have no contractual commitments or other legal obligations that would prohibit you from performing your duties for the Company.

TAX MATTERS

All forms of compensation referred to in this letter are subject to reduction to reflect applicable withholding and payroll taxes and other deductions required by law. You are encouraged to obtain your own tax advice regarding your compensation from the Company.

COMPANY POLICIES

As a Company employee, you will be subject to all applicable employment and other policies of the Company, as outlined in [Name of Employment Handbook] and elsewhere, which may change over time.

CLOSE/SIGNATURE

We hope that you will accept this offer. To accept the Company's offer, please sign and date this letter [and [List Other Agreement(s) That Need to be Executed as a Condition of Employment] and return [It/Them] to me. This offer of employment will terminate if it is not accepted, signed, and returned by [MM/DD/YY].

We look forward to your favorable reply and to working with you.

Sincerely,

[First and Last Name of Authorized Representative of Company]
[Title]

Agreed to and accepted:

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Section 2

During

- ✓ **Keeping Up the Program's Momentum**
- ✓ **How to Make Internships Successful for Both Parties**
- ✓ **6 Tips for Making a Successful Internship Program**

During



Keeping Up the Program's Momentum

Now that you've spent some time thinking about your internship program and who will fit it best, this is your moment — to create a memorable and productive experience for both you and your new interns.

There are a lot of questions you're probably asking yourself: Where will interns be of best use in your office? How can you make a program that challenges them but doesn't overwhelm you? And, perhaps most importantly, how can you make a program that benefits all parties involved?

This section will dive into six tips for making a successful internship program, along with professional advice from one of the forefront leaders of internship programs in the U.S.

How to Make Internships Successful for Both Parties

So you've laid the foundation for an internship program and you're ready to go. But how will you make a program that is both beneficial to you and the interns you bring on?

According to [Karina Nagin](#), who spent years coordinating internships at the Clinton Global Initiative, it starts with knowing that offering a quality internship experience will take some investment.

"Interns take time and planning and thoughtfulness. However, as long as you do it right, it can be a huge benefit," she said.

Those benefits can translate into hiring talented and hardworking team members after an internship, to having strong business connections with them years down the road. In fact, a study found that [60% of paid interns received a job offer](#) after their internship.

Karina is currently the Executive Director at [Mission: Restore](#), a nonprofit that provides surgical care to patients in developing nations. She has been dubbed the "Intern Whisperer" for her expertise in creating successful internship experiences.

Read on to learn some of Karina's tips on how to make an internship mutually beneficial for both parties, and get started on your best internship program yet.



60% of paid interns received a job offer after their internship.

6 Tips for Making a Successful Internship Program

1 Think About the Internship in Mutually Beneficial Terms

When your company is hiring for an internship position, it's easy to think about having someone to assist with projects or make your day-to-day a little easier. But both you and the intern will mutually benefit — and perhaps even create productive future relationships — if you frame the internship with both parties' benefits in mind.

“That’s the mindset that’s important to start with,” said Karina, who explained an internship that exposes interns to a new work environment and is a learning opportunity is also beneficial to the organization. “If you set up that dynamic, you’re starting off on the right foot.”

2 Establish Expectations During the First Interview

When interviewing an intern for a new position, a common reflex is to ascertain an intern’s skillsets and eagerness to succeed. But Karina says it’s important to take a step back and see first whether the internship will be a match in both directions.

“It’s less about grilling them and asking trick questions. Instead, set up the interview as a conversation and let them know off the bat if it’s a fit,” she said.

Ask yourself, will the internship be administrative? Will there be really tight deadlines, or high expectations on deliverables? Let the interviewee know whether you expect them to work independently or if there’s not a lot of hierarchy in the company. Startup internships will likely be different than internships with a long-established company.

“A lot of the time, interns don’t know what they’re looking for,” said Karina, “so it’s important to find the right match.”

It’s important to take a step back and see first whether the internship will be a match in both directions.

3 Set Up Your Intern For Success With a Smooth Onboarding Process

Setting up an intern for success does take time and effort — but it’s worth it in the long run. According to Karina, this is the part people often skip over because they’re really busy.

“Often times for interns, this could be their first time in an office environment.” Like you would for any of your employees, invest time in interns to help them understand the organizations and operations, along with norms and expectations.

Although these concepts may seem simple to you, they may be brand new to your intern. Here is a short list of company day-to-day knowledge you can help your intern understand:

- ✓ Making and syncing calendar invites
- ✓ Setting up email on Outlook or Gmail
- ✓ Basic email etiquette
- ✓ Basic meeting etiquette
- ✓ Using phone conference lines
- ✓ Learning conference room names
- ✓ Setting up a schedule
- ✓ Creating expectations around hours

Best of all, all this knowledge can be shared in a half hour or hour-long meeting, so your interns aren’t intimidated by office etiquette.

Also, says Karina, be sure to create expectations around office hours and work schedules in general. “Interns might be part time or flexible. Set up a really clear concept of what their schedule is, or who to call if you’re not going to be in on those hours.”

That way, misunderstandings won’t turn into something more frustrating or derailing.

4 Outline Projects with Tangible End Goals

Whether you have one intern or 20, it’s important for each person to understand how their business internship is contributing to the company’s bigger picture.

Try to sit down and create a plan together, by outlining specific projects and deliverables throughout the course of the internship.

“It’s really helpful for the self-esteem of the interns because they can see the concrete projects they’re contributing to the organization,” said Karina.

Maybe you’ll decide on one project an intern is in charge of researching, or discuss which general area an intern will be responsible for. For example, a social media intern may be in charge of posting to account twice a week, where they can take ownership and have new ideas.

“It’s important to clarify the difference between contributing [to something] or having the freedom over a [certain domain],” said Karina. When you’re clear about expectations and set an intern up for success, “you get a higher quality product and more investment from the intern,” she said.

5 Loop Interns Into Regular Meetings

The best way to expose interns to different parts of the company is through employees on other teams.

“Sometimes we get so sick of sitting in meetings, we forget how cool it is to be an intern and included in that,” said Karina.

A surprising amount of people don’t even consider looping their interns in on day-to-day meetings. It’s also a golden opportunity for interns to spend time around senior leadership.

This tip sounds basic, but a surprising amount of people don’t even consider looping their interns in on day-to-day meetings. It’s also a golden opportunity for interns to spend time around senior leadership.

“We forget how excited they are when they’re included,” she said. “It’s an easy way to make [the internship] educational, and it’s a really easy lift for the organization.”

Your intern can take notes or just sit in — but she’ll surely be soaking up new information and learning secondhand how to make a good presentation or keep a meeting on schedule.

6 Create a Work Plan With Regular Check-Ins

“Set it and forget it” is a careless approach to working with interns — especially when this is the first real work experience for many of them.

“The biggest danger is people bring on interns and don’t invest in them for success and give them busy work,” said Karina. “It’s been my experience that when you’re hiring smart and creative people, they learn quickly, but really need that feedback.”

The solution is quite simple: put some time on your calendar early on to check in on progress and give feedback. Depending on how often your intern is in the office, that could be a weekly check-in or midway through the internship to check out progress on a project.

“A scheduled feedback process [...] is a good opportunity to course correct anything that might be going off the rails,” said Karina. “Usually the interns are responsive to it and grateful for that.”

Section 3

After

- ✓ **Ensuring Success**
- ✓ **Sample Survey to Measure Success**

After

Ensuring Success

Creating a successful internship takes hard work, and it's something you'll continue to improve upon as the years progress. This section offers a survey to measure success so that you can repeat the strengths of your program and improve upon the weaknesses.

Sample Survey to Measure Success

Although the program is over, this is where you'll get some of your most valuable feedback for the next time around. Your interns will know that you care enough to dive deep on how their experience was, and you'll have constructive information to work with going forward.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We were happy to have you as an intern at [Company Name]!

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much would you recommend your [Company Name] internship experience to a friend?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would not recommend

Absolutely recommend

Did you feel equipped to perform your internship well?

Was your manager supportive? Did they provide clear expectations?

How would you describe the culture?

What was the best part of your internship?

What could have been improved upon?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

JUSTWORKS.



Conclusion

Implementing an internship program will have various benefits from your team – from intergenerational exchange to mentorship opportunities to lifelong business contacts.

Unfortunately, hiring interns can also be a risky process for your company. Without the proper procedures, hiring interns can open your business up to government investigations or labor lawsuits.

Justworks can assist your company with administering payroll and payroll related tax filings for your interns. We can also provide access to benefits and insurance, as well as HR support, such as guidance and best practices for onboarding.

You can learn more about Justworks' services for businesses by calling us at 888-534-1711 or emailing us at experts@justworks.com

Please note that we are not lawyers and the content in this document is not legal advice.