

Internship Overview

An important element that distinguishes an internship from a short-term/temporary job or volunteer work is that an intentional “learning agenda” is structured into the experience. Internships promote academic, career and/or personal development.

Learning activities common to most internships include learning objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation and assessment. An effort is made to establish a reasonable balance between the intern’s learning goals and the specific work an agency needs done.

For the State of Iowa, it is important to note that only those enrolled in school (high school or college) and pursuing a degree are eligible to apply for an internship. Additionally, internship appointments expire upon attainment of the degree [\[11 IAC-57.6\(1\)\]](#).

How Do Internships Benefit Employers?

- Students bring new perspectives to old problems.
- Visibility of your agency is increased on campuses and in schools.
- They provide quality candidates for temporary or seasonal positions and projects.
- Internships are a great way to recruit and evaluate potential employees.

Things to Think About Before Creating Your Internship Plan

Is this a paid or unpaid internship? If paid, how much will you pay the intern?

Intern wages vary widely. Be sure yours are competitive in order to capture the best candidates. (See Appendix A for Pros and Cons of Paid vs. Unpaid Internships). You will want to make sure to research the market you are in to have a good understanding how much interns are being paid in your area. Currently the pay range for an intern at the State of Iowa is \$7.25 - \$23.96. According to Indeed, the average intern wage in the state of Iowa was \$16.30 as of December 2023. When deciding on pay, you will also want to take into consider the field of the internship. IT, accounting, and engineering, for example, may require a much higher salary than a human resources or marketing internship. You’ll also want to factor in the potential starting salary if the intern were to be hired for a full-time position upon graduation. The internship should not be higher than the job class starting wage.

Where will the intern be located?

Will they work in-person, remotely, or hybrid (should be upfront about this in the job description as it can affect who would be able to meet those requirements and therefore be eligible to apply). Do you have adequate workspace for them? Will you help make parking arrangements (if needed)?

What sort of academic background and experience do you want in an intern?

Decide on standards for quality beforehand — it'll help you narrow down the choices and find the best candidates. Do you need a specific degree or field of study? Do you want them to have experience with a specific program or software?

Who will have the primary responsibility for the intern?

Will that person be a mentor or merely a supervisor? The assignment of a mentor or supervisor is a key part of the plan and should be selected because they enjoy teaching or training and they have the resources to do it. If the person you select has never mentored an intern before, you will want to provide some basic training in mentoring and some guidance to ensure their success, which ultimately affects your intern's success.

What will the intern be doing?

Be as specific as possible. Interns, like others in the process of learning, need structure so they don't become lost, confused or bored. Additionally, offer interns meaningful and challenging work or projects that align with their skills and interests. The work the intern does should contribute to the agency's objectives and provide a valuable learning experience for interns. Depending on the design of the internship some may require more structure than others.

Do you want to plan an internship program beyond the work your interns will be doing?

Will there be special training programs/opportunities, performance reviews, lunches with key leaders, social events? Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your agency. If they have a good experience working for you, they're likely to tell their friends and teachers. A bad internship, by contrast, can only hurt your chances of attracting the best students.

After spending time and determining the answers to the previous questions, you should now be ready to move forward with designing an internship program and hiring an intern.

Steps for designing an internship program:

1. Set goals

- a. What do we want to achieve from the internship?
 - i. Do you want someone for a specific project(s)? Is there a need for general support within your agency/division? How about giving the intern an idea of everything your agency does?
 - ii. Define the purpose and the goals of the internship program (what do you aim to achieve by offering the internship and what will the intern gain?).

2. Write a plan

- a. Carefully plan and write out your internship program and goals
- b. Draft a job description that clearly explains the duties and expectations of the internship.

3. Post the internship on NEOGOV (the State's applicant Tracking System)

- a. When creating the job posting, make sure it encompasses the main duties and expectations for the internship. It does not need to include every detail of what the intern will be doing. It just needs to provide enough information to give them an idea of what the internship entails and

allow them to determine if it is a good fit. It should align with their career/professional development goals.

- b. If you have multiple intern vacancies for the same internship, they can be included on one requisition.

4. Recruit an Intern(s)

- a. How will you find those ideal candidates to fill your internship position(s)? The number-one tip from those who have established programs is to get out there early! Begin searching at least three to four months before you need a student to begin. Starting early has other advantages: the longer you accept applications, the better your chance of finding the best person for the job. Additionally, the sooner you select the intern, the longer you have to form a good working relationship with them.
- b. Develop relationships with local recruitment resources. Promote yourself with school counselors and academic advisors in high schools and with the career or internship centers at colleges and universities, attend internship and job fairs (these should be relevant to the type of degree program you are looking for), place ads in school newspapers and websites, and send material to student organizations.
- c. Remember to choose your interns just as carefully as you'd choose permanent employees. After all, they might be permanent employees someday. You're making an investment of time and money in this person.

5. Manage the interns

- a. The beginning days of the internship program are often its defining days. When you give them their first tasks, you're signaling what can be expected in the future. If you give them nothing or very little to do, it sends a message that this job will be easy — and boring. Interns don't want that; of course, neither do employers. The organization of your internship program will probably be the single most important influence on an intern's impression of your agency, and thus the chances that they will come back. So how do you "plan for success?"
 - i. First, orient your intern(s) to their new workplace
 - 1. Give them a tour.
 - 2. Introduce them to co-workers.
 - 3. Give them a history/run down on your agency.
 - 4. Explain who does what, how the intern fits in, and what they will be doing.
 - ii. Give the intern the resources they need to do the job
 - 1. Give them a desk (or a designated area to work) — show them where the supplies are.
 - 2. Make sure their department access is correct.
 - 3. Make sure they have a computer and printer/scanner access if needed.
 - 4. Make sure they get a badge and parking pass if needed.
 - 5. Ensure they have access to any other programs they may be using while completing the internship.
 - iii. Keep an eye on the intern
 - 1. Don't micro-manage, but know what is going on with their daily tasks — watch for signs they are bored or confused.

2. Give them lots of feedback
 - a. Establish a system for providing regular feedback to interns on their performance. Encourage open communication and constructive feedback to help them grow.
3. Evaluate the intern's progress periodically
 - a. Also, have them evaluate you and their experience at your agency.
 - b. Qualitative measures should be adopted to help evaluate their progress. Some common measures include the number of interns that become full-time employees; repeat requests for interns from managers; and growing numbers of intern applicants.

6. Completion of the Internship

- a. As part of the creation of the internship, a completion date should already have been chosen.
- b. Conduct formal evaluations at the end of the internship period to assess interns' progress and provide them with feedback and recommendations.
- c. Consider the possibility of offering permanent positions to outstanding interns if your agency has open positions available.
- d. Conduct exit interviews with interns to gather insights on their overall experience and suggestions for program improvement.
- e. Regularly assess the effectiveness of your internship program through feedback from interns and supervisors. Make improvements based on this feedback to enhance future programs.
- f. Have a way to keep track of interns for future outreach. This could be a spreadsheet or done using the Talent Pipelines in Attract. Record things such as their year in school/anticipated graduation date, the intern's major, any notes on how they performed in their internship.

Iowa Code/Admin Rules related to internships:

- Internship appointments expire upon attainment of the degree [[11 IAC-57.6\(1\)](#)].
- Persons with internship status have no rights of appeal, transfer, demotion, promotion, reinstatement, or other rights of position. They are not entitled to vacation, sick leave, or other benefits of state employment, nor is credit given for future vacation accrual purposes [[11 IAC-57.6\(2\)](#)].
- All internship vacancies, paid and unpaid, must be requisitioned in the state's applicant tracking system. There can be multiple vacancies with the same pay status listed on one requisition. If the internship is for a paid position, the agency is encouraged to post the vacancy for open recruitment.
- By successfully completing an internship of at least 480 hours, students may apply for future "promotional" vacancies for which they meet the minimum qualifications.
 - This allows the student to forgo competing with non-state employee applicants for the job.
 - This option is available for one year post graduation of the diploma or degree program for which the internship was successfully completed. After that, future applications are subject to whatever employment status (i.e. probationary, permanent, non-employee) the person has at the time.
 - All hours an intern works (both paid and unpaid interns), will need to be entered into Workday for tracking purposes. Please reference the [Intern Job Aid](#) which explains how Interns record their hours in Workday.

Eligibility to Appear on Promotional Lists

- To be eligible for this benefit, the following conditions must exist:
 - The intern must be in Workday.
 - The intern must have successfully completed an internship of at least 480 hours during the duration of the internship, with hours tracked in Workday.
 - The successful completion will be based on the termination reason entered into Workday once the internship is complete and the intern terminated. Please reference the [Intern Job Aid](#), for additional information regarding this.
 - When an employee wishes to be placed on a promotional list for a posting, the agency's HRA will need to work with the DAS employment specialist to get them added.

For any additional questions or assistance with internships, please reach out to Executive Branch Recruiting Coordinator [Abbie Olson](#).

Appendix A – Paid versus Unpaid Internships

Pros of Paid Internships:

1. **Attract High-Quality Candidates:**
 - Paid internships are more likely to attract motivated and talented individuals, increasing the quality of the internship pool.
2. **Better Retention:**
 - Paid interns are more likely to complete the internship since they are financially motivated to do so.
3. **Professionalism and Commitment:**
 - Paid interns may exhibit a higher level of professionalism and commitment to their work, as they see it as a genuine job opportunity.
4. **Diversity and Inclusion:**
 - Paying interns can help promote diversity and inclusion by making opportunities accessible to a wider range of candidates who may not afford an unpaid internship.
5. **Positive Public Image:**
 - Offering paid internships demonstrates that your agency values and invests in young talent, enhancing its reputation.

Cons of Paid Internships:

1. **Budget Constraints:**
 - The primary drawback is the cost of paying interns, which can strain limited budgets.
2. **Resource Allocation:**
 - Agencies must allocate resources for intern salaries, potentially diverting funds from other important projects or programs.

Pros of Unpaid Internships:

1. **Cost Savings:**
 - Unpaid internships are more cost-effective for the agency, allowing it to allocate resources to other areas.
2. **Flexibility:**
 - Unpaid internships may provide more flexibility in terms of the number of interns an agency can accommodate.
3. **Volunteer Workforce:**
 - Some interns may be willing to work for free, motivated by a desire to gain experience.

Cons of Unpaid Internships:

1. **Limited Talent Pool:**
 - Unpaid internships may deter highly qualified candidates who cannot afford to work without compensation.
2. **Quality and Commitment:**
 - Unpaid interns may be less committed, less likely to complete the program, and may not take their responsibilities as seriously.
3. **Diversity and Inclusion:**
 - Unpaid internships can perpetuate inequality by favoring candidates who can afford to work without pay.