



**UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN MAINE**

# Designing and Implementing an Internship Program

## **Career & Employment Hub**

[usm.maine.edu/careerhub](https://usm.maine.edu/careerhub)  
231 Luther Bonney, Portland Campus  
85 Bedford St., Portland, ME

# USM

| Date                                   | Event   | Stakeholders   | Notes  |
|--|---|--|--|
| 7-10 months before start date          | Secure internship position within Company departments | Internal Internship Program Coordinator              | Identify number of positions and the projects interns will work on, write internship description, assign supervisors   |
| 6-9 months before start date           | Recruitment   | USM, Company recruiting team                         | Recruitment will involve a mix of on campus and online efforts. May include open house, job shadow, and onsite interview events                                  |
| 3-5 months before start date           | Screening, interviews, and hiring                     | Recruiting team and host departments                 | All applicants will need to submit a cover letter and resume. They will also go through an initial screening, followed by an in-person interview prior to hiring |
| 1-3 months before start date           | Interns set up with payroll and general onboarding    | Finance, HR, IT                                      | Ongoing HR onboarding process  |
| 1-2 months before start date           | Meetings with supervisors                             | Internal Internship Program Coordinator              | Internal meeting with departments to discuss program structure, goals, and projects  |
| <b>Start Date</b>                      |   | Interns, Supervisors, Internship Program Coordinator | Onboarding process should be organized for intern(s)   |
| <b>10-12 week Internship Program</b>   | New Employee Orientation                              |  | Welcome from sr. leadership. Includes a welcome packet, swag bags, and icebreaker activities   |
|  | Team Building Activity                                |  | Should be done in the first two weeks of the program to establish camaraderie among the group  |
|  | Community Service/Volunteer                           |  | <b>Optional Activity</b>   |
|  | Social Activity                                       |  |  |
|  | End of Program Celebration                            |  |  |
| <b>Within one month after end date</b> | Internal debrief                                      | All departments involved                             | Debrief program  |
| <b>1-2 months after end date</b>       | External debrief                                      | Lead department, external partners (may include USM) | Debrief program  |

Internship Timeline adapted with permission from an employer partner.

# 1. What is an Internship?

An internship is a professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical, project-based work related to a student's field of study or career interest. Internships offer students the opportunity for career exploration, professional development, and skill building. It offers the employer the opportunity to bring new ideas and energy into the workplace, develop talent, and builds a pipeline for potential full-time employees.



## Elements of a Quality Internship:

- 3 months to 2 years; typical experience lasts 3-6 months.
- Full-time or part-time, paid or unpaid.
- For academic credit or non-credit.
- Structured "Learning Agenda".
- Balances learning goals and the work needs of the organization.
- Promotes academic, career and/or personal development.

## How Internships Benefit Employers:

- **High return; small investment:** Internship wages range \$14-\$18 an hour while students gain work experience.
- **Develops a recruitment pipeline.**
- **Great way to find the right fit with low commitment.**
- **Support USM students and your workforce:** 75% of USM graduates stay in Maine! ■

## 2. Creating an Internship Program

Being thoughtful and intentional as you design your internship opportunity will result in a more successful and satisfying experience for all involved. Consult the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) resources on internship best practices and USM's Employer Relationship Managers as you are conceptualizing your opportunity.

[www.nacweb.org](http://www.nacweb.org)

[usm.maine.edu/careerhub](http://usm.maine.edu/careerhub)

### Discuss and Plan the Logistics

There are logistics that are required when bringing on interns. Be as specific as possible in defining the expectations and desired outcomes of the internship position.

#### Consider the following:

- Will you pay the intern, is it for academic credit, or both?
- Do you have adequate workspace?
- Who will supervise the intern(s)?
- Where will their workstation be located?
- Will you provide parking, relocation, or living arrangements?
- How many interns can your organization afford and support?
- Which departments/teams are involved?
- Is there capacity to take on and supervise more team members?
- How will the intern contribute?
- Is there a specific project your organization needs help with?

While these questions may not seem as important as job descriptions and recruitment strategies, they make the difference in the overall intern experience.



## 2. Creating an Internship Program

### Develop a Program and Job Description

It's important to develop an internship program that clearly explains your organizational goals, and the role and responsibilities of the intern.

#### **Decide the qualifications of a candidate.**

Know the specific standards you're looking for, such as major or matriculation level, and decide the qualifications of an intern that will help align your program with your overall organizational strategy and goals.

#### **Assign a supervisor for the intern(s).**

Be sure to assign a supervisor from the department in which the intern will work. This person will be responsible for onboarding, guiding the intern as needed, and off-boarding the intern at the conclusion of the program. This person doesn't need to be a supervisor currently, but the supervisor should be selected based on a desire to teach or train.

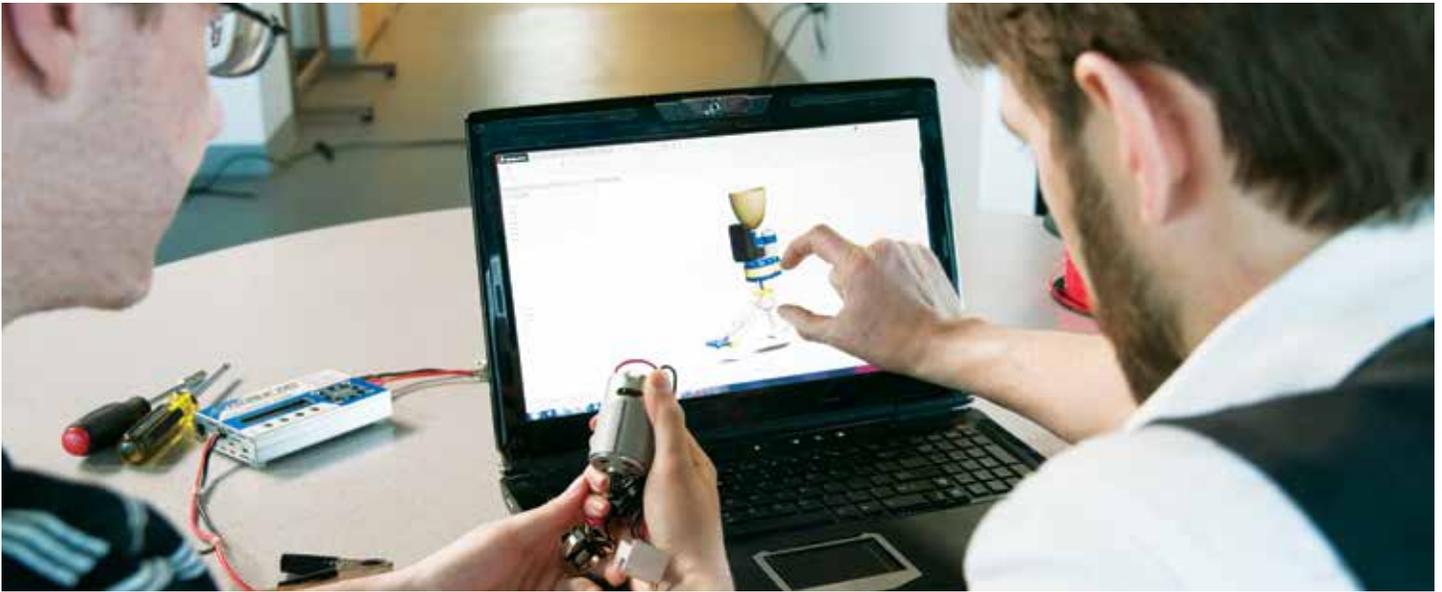
#### **Engage interns holistically.**

Word of mouth can be an organization's best recruitment tool! Keep in mind that your interns are walking advertisements for your company. If they have a positive experience working for you, they're likely to tell their friends, family, and coworkers. Offer interns opportunities to volunteer, socialize, and learn within your organization. More engagement from you makes the internship memorable and unique.



## 3. Recruit, Recruit, Recruit!

You've planned and strategized; now, it's time to recruit students for your program! Recruiting and hiring an intern requires planning, like all recruitment strategies. Below are some helpful tips for recruiting interns.



### Get out there Early

This cannot be overemphasized. The longer you accept applications, the better your chances are of finding the best person for the job. You can attract and hire the best candidates when you begin your search three to four months before you need an intern to start.

### USM as a Recruiting Source

- Promote internship opportunities through USM's Career & Employment Hub
- Post your internship for free on the USM Career Connections job board
- Consult with an Employer Relationship Manager for additional engagement opportunities
- Connect through the classroom with departments and faculty
- Join Spring and Fall Job & Internship Fairs

*Recruit, Recruit, Recruit!*

### 3. Recruit, Recruit, Recruit!

## Potential Interns are Potential Employees

During the interview, keep in mind the following questions:

- Is the candidate truly motivated, or does the person just want a job?
- Do they understand your organization's culture?
- Does the individual have the experience you need?

## Understand the Legal Implications

Interns are subject to legal protections and regulations the same as other employees. Protect yourself and your intern by knowing the laws. What work can or cannot be assigned by you? This is especially important if your company employs international students who need special qualifications to work in the United States.

**Consult legal counsel or the intern's institutional office of international education if you think you might run into problems. ■**

See U.S. Dept. of Labor Fact Sheet #71:  
[www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm](http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm)

## Internship Job Description Checklist

- Position Title
- Department
- Schedule
- Reports To...
- Rate of Pay
- Duration
- Application Instructions
- Application Deadline
- Job Statement
- Company Statement
- Duties & Responsibilities
- Job Requirements
- Job Preferences

## 4. Starting Your Program & Onboarding Interns

An intern should have a planned onboarding process. First impressions are lasting; make this a good one! The first days on the job are imperative to the success of the experience.

### Onboarding & Other Next Steps

#### **Orient your intern to the workplace.**

When giving interns an overview of your organization, some companies present and/or distribute information about the company's history, vision, and services. Explain who does what in relation to the intern's specific duties. Be sure to introduce the intern to coworkers and give them a complete tour of the facility. Making your intern comfortable in the office is invaluable.

#### **Give your intern the resources they need to do the job.**

Provide the new hire/employee handbook, show the intern their desk, point out the supply room or other logistical needs. Introduce them to the essential staff and tech support personnel related to the work they'll be doing. Your resources will vary, but many can be introduced during your tour.

#### **Provide the intern with adequate supervision.**

For some students, an internship may be their

first experience in a professional environment. A supervisor will be able to offer structure that will be invaluable to their experience. It's helpful for interns to have outlined goals and outcomes supported by a strategy and a quality supervisor.

#### **Give lots of feedback.**

Interns want to know if their work is measuring up to your expectations. Be it praise or concern, interns need to receive feedback no matter their level of experience. Periodically, take time to examine what your intern has produced and make suggestions as needed.

#### **Evaluate progress.**

Evaluate the goals a few weeks after the internship begins. They can be formal, written evaluations every three weeks or be as informal as having occasional lunches with the internship coordinator and/or the intern's mentor. Best practices include having the intern evaluate the experience and the company, as well as themselves. Evaluations will be helpful later if you decide to interview

## 4. Starting Your Programs & Onboarding Interns

a former intern for full-time work or if you wish to publicize the program's success.

### **Continue to make the case.**

Maintaining, sustaining, and growing a program requires hard evidence that there is a return on investment.

### **Best practices include:**

- Adopt an off-boarding process of formal exit interviews.
- Review the quality of your internship program and areas where it can improve.
- Track qualitative measures and metrics, such as conversion rate from intern to full-time employee, repeat requests for interns from departments/teams, and an increase in the number of intern applicants.

### **Keep your focus on the future.**

By creating an internship program, your organization has the opportunity to interact with its future workforce; this is a competitive advantage when recruiting the best talent. Your new workforce of interns will be trained for your workplace and loyal to your company which reduces new hire training time, recruiting costs, and turnover rates. You will build an ideal reputation with students, colleges, and the community. With these advantages, you may find that you cannot afford to not have an internship program. ■

## Ten Common Concerns of Interns

1. Interns want real work.
2. Interns want to know your expectations.
3. Interns need feedback.
4. Interns want to be included.
5. Interns need to understand.
6. Interns want a mentor.
7. Interns need a teacher and guidance.
8. Interns want to feel like part of the team.
9. Interns need the right supplies for the job.
10. Interns have expenses, too.

## 5. Orienting & Supporting Intern Hires

Develop a thorough orientation and training plan to be implemented when the interns begin work. Research shows that employers who take adequate time at the beginning of the internship to orient the student reap productivity and effectiveness more quickly than those who don't. Invest supervisory time to establish an important bond with interns and set a crucial tone for the internship experience.



### Prior to the First Day

- Set up an organized work area for the intern.
- Set up phone, voicemail, computer, email, and internet access and/or other resources necessary for them to accomplish the tasks you have stipulated in the internship position description.
- Outline work expectations for the duration of the internship.
- Prepare forms to be signed, including a confidentiality agreement, if necessary.

### Explain the Mission of the Organization

- How did the organization start? Why?
- What is unique about your product or service?
- Who benefits from your product or service?
- What are your organization's current objectives?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?

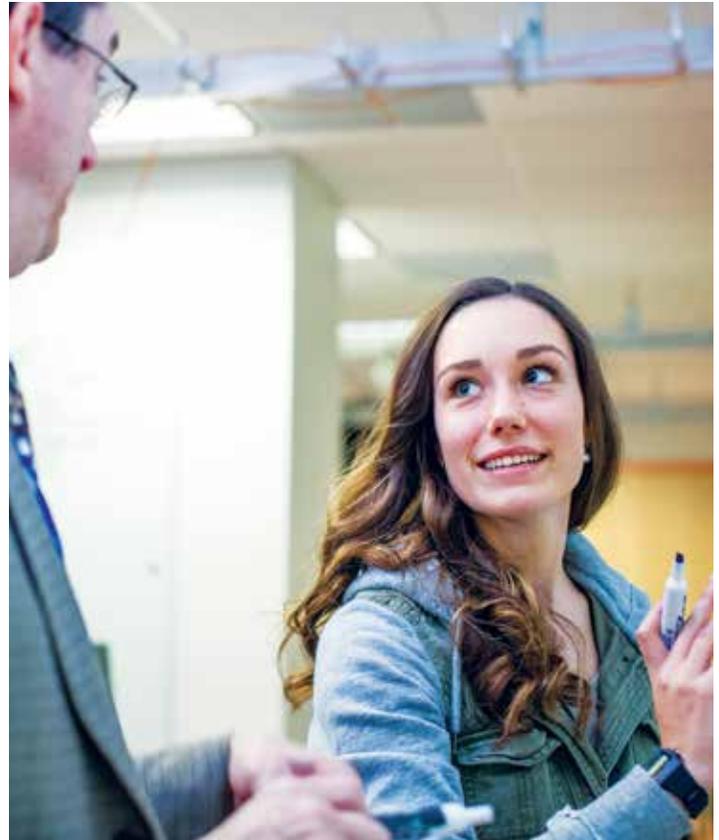
## 5. Orienting & Supporting Intern Hires

### Explain the Organization Structure

- Who reports to whom?
- Who is the intern's direct report?
- What is the intern's department responsible for? How are decisions made?
- Which personnel can answer questions?

### Outline Organizational Rules, Policies, Decorum, and Expectations

- How will they learn industry-specific jargon and abbreviations?
- What are the specific work standards and procedures?
- How should interns process requests?
- How do communication systems work?
- What are the approved forms for correspondence?
- What safety regulations must they follow?
- Is there a procedure for signing off completed work?
- What forms or reports need completion?
- What local, state, and/or federal guidelines or laws apply to their work?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues?
- What is acceptable dress/appearance?



### Monitor the Intern's Understanding and Adjustments of Expectations

- Make yourself visibly available to the intern.
- Encourage non-supervisory staff to casually check-in with the intern.
- Offer accolades for good work and feedback for areas needing growth.
- Encourage the intern to ask questions. ■



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