



PMA FOUNDATION
FOR INDUSTRY TALENT

Guide to Building a Student Internship Program

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Preface

Welcome to the Internship Guide of the Produce Marketing Association's Foundation for Industry Talent (PMA FIT). With this guide, you will have everything you need to prepare for, hire and manage interns at your organization. Our goal is to improve the quality of internship programs so that you, the employer, as well as your student interns, gain the most from the experience. We want you to gain increased productivity and more capable future employees. We hope that the interns acquire valuable experience as well as build relationships within the industry that are key to their future career search.

This guide is the result of many hours of thorough research and development. We've made it as simple as possible for you to create the most effective internship program possible. We've summarized a wealth of information regarding best practices for all aspects of the internship planning process. As with any program, achieving success takes commitment on your part. We've given you the tools. It's up to you to recruit, train and manage interns effectively.

Legal Disclaimer

This Internship Guide provides information designed to help users develop and manage a successful internship program. Some of this includes legal information. Please keep in mind that this legal information is not the same as legal advice. Do not misconstrue this information as legal, or any other, professional advice. Consider consulting with professional advisors about your particular situation.

Overview

Few organizations have the tools and apply the right resources to manage internship programs effectively. These programs require significant time and effort to successfully recruit and manage interns. If you make the necessary commitment, you will enjoy the benefits.

To create a productive internship program, it is a matter of planning and execution. You must first develop your program's goals and expectations. There also needs to be a genuine commitment from the top of your organization to ensure adequate supervisory and financial resources. An internship program manager position is a key to ensuring success, as well.

There are many benefits that your organization will gain from having an internship program. Not only do student interns bring new ideas and the latest academic methodologies to the table, they also bring a sense of enthusiasm. Organizations gain time and productivity by having interns work on important projects that often are put on the "back burner". Having interns work on projects that would otherwise be done by full-time staff allows those employees to focus on more meaningful activities.

Use your internship program as a step in your interview process. Your organization will be better able to determine if the student intern will be a fit for hiring as a full-time employee after graduation. You gain the advantage of having screened, acclimated and trained these employees. Also, studies have shown that full-time employees who begin as interns remain employed with the organization longer.

Before you recruit your next intern, your organization should identify the purpose for your internship program. Are you hiring interns to complete project work or assignments that your staff currently does not have time for? Are you looking to increase your organization's productivity? Are you attempting to gain access to new technology and ideas that students bring from the classroom to your organization? Perhaps you would like to streamline the recruitment process and begin training your organization's future workforce. Whatever your reason(s), be assured that a well thought-out, well managed internship program will help you to achieve your goals.

Planning

The investment of time and effort to make your internship program a valued part of your business will be well worth your efforts. By planning your program you are ensuring its success. Determine the amount of workspace needed as well as your budget for recruitment and compensation.

It is also to your organization's benefit to appoint a program manager. An internship program manager will implement the plan and budget accordingly – from determining the job description and compensation for each internship to the recruitment, orientation and management of each intern. If this job is worked into one of your employee's existing set of responsibilities, it is important to allocate enough time so they can properly manage the internship program.

Compensating Interns

"You get what you pay for," is a fitting adage when deciding how to compensate your interns. The students who are able to be selective are looking for the best internship opportunities, including the ones that pay well. If you view your interns as potential future employees you will be building loyalty by compensating them appropriately for their internship.

Keep in mind that the US Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) applies to all companies that have at least two employees directly engaged in interstate commerce and annual sales of at least \$550,000. The FLSA restricts an employer's ability to use unpaid interns while not limiting an employer's ability to hire paid interns. State laws may vary on this subject so be sure to check your state's restrictions, as well.

From a legal standpoint, paying your interns can remove some of the grey areas associated with unpaid internship programs. It also gives you more flexibility when assigning work. If you decide to not pay your interns, then their work at your organization should be training-based rather than job-based. The US Dept of Labor has six criteria for determining this trainee status:

1. Interns cannot displace regular employees, but should work under the close supervision of one
2. Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship
3. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship
4. Interns must receive training, even if at the sacrifice of work priorities
5. Interns must gain relevant industry hands-on experience
6. Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the organization

It is recommended that all employers offer some form of compensation. When deciding how you will compensate your interns, here are a few things to consider:

- How, if at all, will the intern be paid - hourly, salary or stipend?
Some companies base their interns' earnings on entry-level position in the same field.
- Will the company assist with housing, parking, travel and other expenses?
You must remember that interns have expenses. While your company may or may not be in a position to pay the intern, you can help them by paying for their parking, taking them to lunch every so often or coming up with other creative ways to assist them.
- Will the company offer a scholarship to offset the intern's cost if the internship involves academic credit?
Interns can earn college credits for their work. This is awarded by their college or university, not by the employer. The intern will need to pay for these credits just as they do with any other credits they earn through classes, for example.

No matter what you offer as far as compensation goes, you should specify in writing the specific terms and conditions of internship so that there is no misunderstanding regarding the relationship. This should be signed by your intern as well as the appropriate person in your organization. Be sure to include "at-will employment" language which specifies that either party can terminate the relationship at any time, for any reason. Check federal as well as your state's regulations regarding this issue. These terms and conditions should also include the begin- and end-dates of the internship, compensation details, reporting relationships and primary tasks and responsibilities. A sample "internship agreement" can be found in Addendum A.

It is recommended that you cover your interns under your workers' and unemployment compensation policy. In the past, workers' compensation boards have established that student interns contribute enough to a company to make them employees. This does not mean that paid interns are eligible for unemployment compensation at the end of their internship. However, this could be the case if they will be graduating at the end of the internship or if you have made a promise of continued future employment that you later withdraw.

Some organizations choose to give their interns additional perks to show their enthusiasm for the potential future employee. Examples of this include allowing your interns to participate in company activities such as industry conferences, corporate picnic and golf outings, as well as offering bonuses and formalizing rewards and incentives.

At General Mills, a senior executive hosts a barbecue for M.B.A. interns, their families and managers at his home in the upscale Lakes neighborhood of Minneapolis. One law firm gives their interns social calendars that detailed the firm's events for the entire summer. This same firm also gives their interns BlackBerries to foster socialization amongst the interns.

Developing Detailed Job Descriptions

By providing the applicants with detailed job descriptions, you allow them to assess the work they may want to pursue. Job descriptions are also crucial in setting accurate expectations and in focusing recruitment efforts.

Outline the tasks and responsibilities of the internship through assessing the internal needs of the organization. Your internship program manager should work with the appropriate people in your organization to identify the current projects and workload where an intern might contribute while developing and learning.

Items to consider for your internship job descriptions include background information about your organization; a detailed description of the positions' tasks, responsibilities and assignments to be completed; preferred majors and coursework, as well as a listing of skills and eligibility requirements such as GPA; start and end dates for the internship; and typical working hours.

Creating Meaningful Work

Organizations face the common challenge of knowing how to best utilize student interns. It is a known fact that interns seek meaningful work assignments. They prefer to receive both short- and long-term assignments. You should assign quality work so your internship program is an experiential learning opportunity to the student. Students want to gain an understanding of how their coursework relates to the industry and profession that they have chosen. This requires your internship program manager to maintain a steady pipeline of project work.

Those who are interested in internship positions are generally bright, enthusiastic, career-minded students who want to apply what they have learned to real world projects. By giving interns meaningful work, you are making the most of this recruitment tool. You will best be able to assess their abilities if given real work. It just makes sense to make the best use of your interns.

An additional way to ensure students grow from their internship experience is to create opportunities for the interns to hear from and interact with a variety of personnel, including senior managers. Through having the intern work with a variety of individuals, they gain others' perspectives on your business and culture. Scheduled luncheons with a different senior manager each week, online chats with your company's executives and ride-alongs with different departments all facilitate this type of learning opportunity.

Recruiting Student Interns

You should think of your interns as an investment so choose wisely. A priority for your recruitment process should be to hire the most qualified students who are a strong match for your organization. Also, be sure to start the recruitment process as early as possible as the highly motivated top students are looking for opportunities early in the school year. A good rule of thumb is to start four months prior to when you would like your interns to begin work.

By utilizing all of the recruitment tools that the PMA FIT offers, your organization will certainly be able to find strong intern candidates. Be sure to take advantage of the following:

- **Career Fair** –
Participate in the career fair which is held during the Fresh Summit International Convention & Exposition. You will have the opportunity to meet and interview students not only for internships, but also full-time jobs.
- **Job Bank** –
Post your current job openings at PMA FIT's job bank, www.producejobsources.com. You can also search through resumes from quality candidates and receive customized alerts when new candidates post their resumes.
- **School Outreach Programs** –
Utilize the many upcoming school outreach programs that PMA FIT is planning. Assign your best young professionals to represent the industry and your business as PMA FIT school ambassadors. Ambassadors will be offered the opportunities of attending career fairs and speaking in classrooms at the school(s) of their choice where they will share their experiences with prospective recruits. Gain additional exposure to students by serving as a visiting professor. Industry experts can sign up to speak to college classes on topics such as food safety, transportation, technology, marketing and more. A searchable database listing our industry experts and their self-designated topics and geographic travel preferences can be accessed by educators to find suitable industry visiting professors.
- **School Outreach Materials** –
PMA FIT is developing a produce career package including a video, brochure, PowerPoint with script and poster that you can use in your own efforts or through the Foundation to promote produce as a career choice. Materials will be available upon request.
- **Intern Employer** –
Use this internship tool kit to help you build a strong internship program if you don't already have one. If you are looking for an intern, let us know or post it on the job bank at www.producejobsources.com. As we gather the names of students who are interested in internships, we distribute them to companies we know are looking for interns.

Above and beyond utilizing PMA FIT's wide range of recruitment tools, you should also get in contact with the schools on your own. Develop relationships with your target schools' career counselors, as well as key faculty members and advisors in the specific discipline(s) from which you are looking to recruit. These individuals work with undergrads and normally look forward to building relationships with organizations that have internship opportunities that may lead into future full-time opportunities. Consider inviting career center staff and appropriate faculty to visit their students while they intern at your company to observe the type of work going on as well as learn more about your organization.

A good strategy is to have a broad reach to potential interns through the schools' websites, newspapers and student organizations. Consider doing presentations to students in the classroom and at student organization meetings to build a presence on campus. Promote your organization at internship and job fairs, as well.

Consider involving your current interns in the process. Brainstorm with them about advertising ideas for their campuses, as well as what other companies are doing to get noticed. Ask your interns to develop a list of other students they think would be successful with your organization.

The selection process for choosing interns should be similar to that of hiring a full-time employee. Keep in mind when evaluating applicants that they inherently lack the experience that applicants for full-time positions possess. In other words, their resumes may be a poor reflection of their potential. When attempting to separate the most qualified applicants from the rest, look for:

- Proper formatting and organization of their resume
- Error-free presentation of all documents
- Writing ability and enthusiasm in their cover letter
- Follow-up with a phone call or other correspondence
- Anything that the student presents that shows how they stand out from the rest such as world travel, creativity, special talents, etc.

Interviews both on-campus and at your facility, if possible, should include questions that are appropriate for students. While they may not be able to answer questions based on experience in a job situation, they are able to apply what they've learned from their extracurricular activities.

Orientating Your Interns

Providing a formal orientation for your student interns is an important step to giving your interns the right start with your organization. This requires thorough preparation beginning with sending the student information about your organization prior to their starting their internship. This may include

working conditions, your organizational chart, working hours, mission of your organization, dress code and company policies.

Once your interns arrive to work, provide an orientation to acclimate them to your organization's practices and procedures. Be sure to also give them a tour of your facility, explain emergency procedures and provide opportunities to network. Other items to include in your orientation program are:

- An introduction to your staff with an explanation of the various roles within the organization
- Typical working hours including lunch breaks
- An introduction to the various pieces of office equipment and any special instructions
- Protocol on answering the telephone and in handling email correspondence
- The appropriate amount of personal telephone and internet use
- Etiquette at business meetings
- A few fun activities as they will be absorbing a lot of information during the orientation
- Their first work assignment so they are not sitting idle at the end of the orientation

An obvious yet sometimes overlooked part of having an intern work for you include providing them with the simplest of resources including a workspace, chair, office supplies, computer, email account, telephone and voice mail.

Training Your Interns

Another key component to a successful internship program is proper training and development. As you form your training program for your interns, go beyond "on-the-job-training". By including professional development activities as well as well-rounded cross-training, your interns can become greater assets faster. At Edward Jones, for example, interns are put through a cross-training experience by receiving training in finance, human resources, marketing, products and services, research, sales and service.

Interns need a clear sense of guidance and structure, which can reduce the anxiety of working in a new environment. Schedules, work plans and timelines all help to alleviate this anxiety. Be clear with your assignments, for instance:

- Identify the purpose and describe how the project fits into the big picture
- Explain the deliverables with specific expectations, outcomes and metrics
- Give the intern a deadline so they can budget their time
- Offer any additional direction about how to complete the assignment, including any resources available to do so

Supervising Your Interns and Your Internship Program

You need to provide supervisors who are available, can answer questions and will treat the student interns with professionalism and respect. Select your supervisors carefully making sure that they have the ability to communicate and relate to college students. Interns should be given performance measurement tools and consistent feedback needed to improve. Throughout their internship they should also be given ample opportunity to provide feedback to their supervisors.

Performance concerns about student interns arise just as they do with any full-time employees. Keep in mind that they may not have the business skills and experiences that your other employees possess. If your intern makes an oversight, simply pull them aside to explain how the situation should be handled in the future. Even with the most diligent recruiting and screening efforts, however, an intern could possibly fall short of expectations. In such a case, treat the situation the same way you would with your other employees in that situation.

Providing Mentors

It is a good idea to provide a mentor to each intern to provide guidance and answer general questions about the company and the industry. Make sure that the individuals tapped to be mentors truly like to teach, as well as have the time to devote. This will make the experience better for everyone.

The mentors and the student interns should have an open door policy as well as weekly meetings. Encourage the interns to create a list of questions they have from the past week. The mentor(s) should offer feedback and encouragement, as well as criticism and suggestions, on the interns' performance.

Mentors can include their intern(s) in their own meetings, on lunches with co-workers and through other various vehicles showing them the daily life of your workplace. You can also use your mentors as advisors to human resources and management of the suitability of the interns as future employees.

Offering Interns a Full-time Position

Organizations frequently extend full-time job offers to students after graduation. Be sure to set up a structured communication method to stay in touch with your student interns. This follow-up with the intern can be a key to successfully recruiting that individual into a full time position.

No matter if you plan on extending a full-time job offer or not, be sure to conduct an exit interview at the conclusion of each internship. Input from the intern on how to improve on the current program is invaluable.

Conclusion

Now you have the tools to produce and manage your internship programs effectively. By identifying the purpose for your internship program, you set the tone for all of the steps in the planning, recruiting and managing process. When you make the necessary commitment to the planning and execution of your program, you will reap the benefits. Those benefits include the new ideas, methodologies and enthusiasm that the students bring, increased productivity and an extra safeguard in your interview process.

We wish you the best as you venture out into a new or improved internship program. Please let us know if there is anything we can do along the way to support your success. We welcome your suggestions for improvements to this guide. Feel free to share your insights from your own experiences, too.

Addendum A

Sample Internship Agreement

This internship agreement is between _____ (“Intern”), and _____ (“Company”). The purpose of this agreement is to ensure that the internship experience is productive and beneficial to both parties, as well as to outline the obligations of the Intern.

This internship will begin upon _____ and will be completed upon _____. The Intern will report to _____. The internship will be paid at a rate of _____.

The internship may be terminated at any time by either party.

The Intern has reviewed the attached internship job description. The Intern feels confident that he/she will be able to fulfill the job duties described in the job description in a timely and professional manner.

The Intern agrees to maintain strict confidentiality of all Company information.

Intern's Signature

Date

Company Representative's Signature

Date