

# INTERNSHIPS 101:

*A practical, resourceful guide to setting up internship programs for your association*

Do you need assistance with your daily work load?  
Could you use someone who has a comprehensive educational background?  
Would you like to be a mentor to a college student?  
You can accomplish all these and more by joining the hundreds of Washington organizations that have sponsored college interns.

## Questions an Association Should Ask About a University . . .

- Do they respond quickly to requests?
- How well established is the program?
- Have they sent you complete, quality information?
- Visit their offices. How organized are they?
- How do they disseminate information to the student?
- Will they offer to come and speak to you personally about setting up a program?
- Are they clear about what your responsibilities are as the sponsor of an intern?
- Are they clear about what they want the student to learn?

By Karen Reid  
and Michelle Ferrier

Since associations are the third largest industry in Washington, they provide a large, mostly untapped training ground in "real-world" experience for students. Practical experience is becoming an integral part of a student's academic career. By taking advantage of this trend in "experiential learning," an association can find an excellent source of motivated workers.

### Defining Internships

Internships are working experiences for which students have intentional learning goals and often receive college credit. These programs vary not only in their names (field experience, practicum, experiential learning) but also in their structure and requirements.

Internships may be paid or non-paid. Although the student's primary concern is to learn while gaining valuable experience, Kaye Sutterer of the Washington Center, a non-profit organization that places student interns in Washington, D.C., points out that even a modest stipend for expenses would be very beneficial to students with limited funds.

Some institutions require "learning contracts" between the on-site supervisor, the intern and a faculty member. These define the expectations of all parties involved. Such upfront communications are helpful in ensuring a successful experience for both the intern and the association.

Internships may be for a few hours a week, or a full work week; they may last a semester, quarter, summer or longer. Basically, internship programs vary as they strive to meet the needs of the student, the sponsoring organization and the college.

Since associations have varied activities and focused subject areas, they provide learning opportunities for students in different academic majors. An association might consider a student intern whose major is directly related to his or her subject area. The objective of other students may be to apply certain skills, such as writing, in a practical manner. In some instances, both goals may be met in one position.

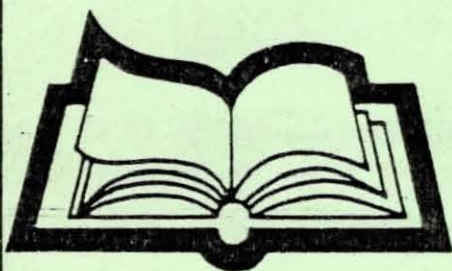
Ronald Kovener, CAE, vice-president of the Healthcare Financial Management Association, says they have had 10 interns hired for specific research projects. "It is stimulating to the staff to have young, new

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## Advice from Student Interns . . .

- Don't give clerical work.
- Make sure the student gets credit for the work he or she does (i.e., samples they can take to future job interviews).
- Treat the intern as a professional.
- Give the intern a chance to make mistakes.
- Set up guidelines and goals for the intern—before hiring.
- Even if you're not paying a stipend, budget to cover the intern's parking and other internship-related expenses.
- Give the intern a sense of what he or she is doing in relation to the others in the organization.
- Make yourself available for plenty of questions, especially during the first couple of weeks.



## For More Information . . .

There are several publications an association contemplating an internship program should find helpful.

The *National Directory of Internships* provides information on how other organizations have established intern programs. It also may be used to publicize internship opportunities via a listing in the *Directory*. The book may be purchased from NSIEE for \$19.25 (prepaid) which includes first class postage and handling: NSIEE, 122 St. Mary's St., Raleigh, N.C. 27605-1809. To be listed in the *Directory*, send NSIEE a letter of inquiry.

*A Guide to Environmental Internships: How Environmental Organizations Can Utilize Internships Effectively* can easily be applied to the association community. It's also published by NSIEE, \$7, prepaid.

*Experienced Hand—A Student Manual for Making the Most of an Internship* is aimed primarily at students but can also help sponsoring organizations gain a greater understanding of the internship experience. Associations may wish to make it available for review by their interns. The publication can be purchased for \$6.95 through Carroll Press, P.O. Box 8113, Cranston, R.I. 02920. □

## Interns

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Early discussion of the student's and association's needs leads the way for an effective internship. Preparing a job description for the student is highly recommended as it clarifies the tasks to be accomplished and isolates the needed skills.

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ideas and the interns' enthusiasm adds good spirit to the office."

Helen Bensimon, director of the division of information services for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, says the major benefit to hiring an intern is the relief on the staff workload. "They have made it possible for us to produce research projects that no one else had the time to do." She explained that those associations unable to pay a stipend to the student will be under a great deal of competition. "What we can't give them in money, we try to give them in professional guidance," Bensimon says.

Employers are looking beyond the academic record of a student to find experience. An association can give students the opportunity to make or firm up their career decisions. Internships help solve the Catch 22 of the collegiate graduate: "You can't get a job without experience, and you can't get experience without a job."

Jim Davis, assistant director of Experiential Learning Programs at the University of Maryland, College Park, notes that experiential learning helps students test their majors, opens doors for career opportunities and enables students to interact with people in their intended career area. Davis comments, "If you don't have experiential learning going on in higher education, students are not going to learn as well or be as well prepared when they go into the field."

Students have been attracted to associations because of the specific needs and the small staff size of many associations. "They were willing to give me a lot of responsibility," says Julie Malecki, an intern for the National Kidney Foundation. "It gave me direction in how I wanted to apply what I learned in school."

Phyllis Jones, an intern for the Epilepsy Foundation for the National Capitol Area, says associations are a wonderful training ground. She explained that the small staff, which operated on a first-name basis, gave

her the feeling of an extended family. Jones believes the role of the association is a teaching one, where the student works with the supervisor closely.

## Assessing Needs

Before recruiting student interns, an association should assess its needs to determine if an internship would be worthwhile. An intern program should be designed to fulfill the needs of both the organization and student. Since the student is receiving credit for the internship, it must be a valuable learning experience.

Sutterer of the Washington Center explains that students should be given substantive work that allows them to get an overview of the organization. Internships ideally combine teamwork with independent work. She notes that an effective way is to include projects in internships that students can claim ownership of rather than having the students only assist others in their tasks.

Helen Bensimon stresses that an association must feel committed to the internship idea. "The intern is providing help. The association needs to provide professional guidance and instruction in return," she says. Kovener agrees, "Make sure you carve out time to assure that the individual has a meaningful educational experience. Work with them so the intern knows what's going on in the association."

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## Recruiting Interns

Some associations have highly structured, on-going internship programs. Others may simply recruit a student for a semester to work on a given project. Depending on the organization's needs and the extent of those needs, there are various sources available on internship programs and avenues for recruiting students. Try also to start the search for interns early; many students set up their schedules months before the semester begins.

At the university level, there are offices designed to handle internship opportunities. These may be university-wide or departmental in nature, depending upon the individual universities. As mentioned earlier, these offices have various names, so check campus information for general internship offices.



Another method of locating student interns is by contacting the appropriate department of a college. Some departments house their own internship offices for specific majors.

There are associations for everything, and associations for interns are no exception. The National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE) based in Raleigh, N.C. is an association of individuals, educational institutions, and community and government leaders supportive of the experiential learning concept in education. Their National Directory of Internships provides information on how other organizations have designed their programs.

The Washington Center is a private, non-profit organization that places, supervises and evaluates students from around the country in Washington-based internships. For information on their program and to list an internship opening, contact the Center at 514 10th Street N.W., Lincoln Building—Suite 600, Washington, DC 20004, 202/289-8680.

Don't underestimate the power of word of mouth. Other potential sources are the association members themselves. Perhaps they know of interested students, or their alma mater sponsors an internship program in Washington. Just passing the word among one's network of friends and co-workers can be a very successful approach.

Once an organization has developed a working relationship with sources of interns and has shown its environment to be conducive to a positive learning experience, it becomes much easier to locate needed interns for the future.

### Setting up Internships

Early discussion of the student's and association's needs leads the way for an effective internship. Preparing a job description for the student is highly recommended as it clarifies

the tasks to be accomplished and isolates the needed skills.

In communicating one's internship needs, it is important to not only explain the nature of the work but also the nature of the organization. As most association executives have learned, associations are a mystery to many people—this includes students. Therefore, to attract qualified internship candidates, it is important to include background on the association.

Hiring an intern should be similar to hiring an employee. Interview the interns, test them on skills essential for the job, review work samples and use all the other interview procedures followed to hire a new staff person. Aside from providing essential information, such a process offers the intern the bonus of practicing job-search skills.

Once on the job, the student needs orientation and on-going supervision. One intern summed it up by saying, "You don't have to spoon-feed the interns; just tell them what utensils to use and how."

Internships can be very rewarding for the association. The students provide an enthusiastic workforce for today, as well as a pool of future full-, part-time and summer workers. Lois Kay, director of career development for the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, sums up the internship experience: "The interns have the knowledge and skills to help you achieve more and at the same time, you give them what they need most at this point in their professional development—experience." □

*Karen Reid, director of membership for the Employee Relocation Council, serves on the GWSAE Communications Committee. Michelle Ferrier, a GWSAE student intern from the University of Maryland, assisted in writing the article.*

### Who to Contact...

**American University**  
Cooperative Education Office, Career Center  
Barbara Taylor, Director of Cooperative Education Program  
885-1803/1804

**Catholic University**  
Call specific departments for information  
Main number: 635-5000

**University of the District of Columbia**  
Educational Field Services  
Jerelyn Smith, Internship Coordinator  
282-3307

**George Mason University**  
Career Services  
Vicki Robinson, Assistant Director of

Cooperative Education  
323-2536

**Georgetown University**  
Career Planning and Placement Office  
Pat Bradley, Counselor for Internships  
625-4077

**George Washington University**  
Holliday Wagner, Assistant Director of Experiential Programs  
676-8687

**Howard University**  
Career Planning and Placement Office  
Gerald R. Davis, Assistant Director  
636-7513

**University of Maryland, College Park**  
Experiential Learning  
Jim Davis, Assistant Director for Internships and Volunteer Services  
454-4767

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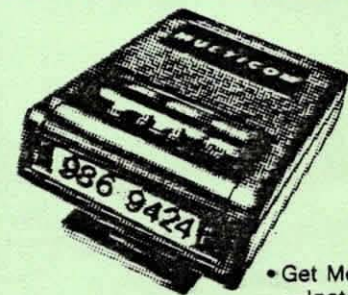
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