

## Building Resumes and Confidence Through an Internship Program



Developing an internship program at your center is a mutually beneficial way to connect with potential employees.

*By Aly Olson*

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**B**eginning a new program can be a bit intimidating, but with the right tools, train of thought and structure, starting your very own internship program could be exactly what your center needs.

Consider your center's mission and culture and its short- and long-term goals. Is your organization ready to welcome students onsite, not just to volunteer within lessons, but to offer a mutually beneficial experience and partnership?

Posting internship listings online with the app Handshake or on Facebook can be a great way to get started. Colleges and universities use Handshake to store student information such as résumés, cover letters and university transcripts. Students build online profiles using their own information and list their academic interests. Employers can review these profiles and post jobs or internships for free.

However, face-to-face meet-and-greets at career, internship and volunteer fairs is a more intentional way to start building meaningful connections and exposure on campus. Connecting to campuses for internships will also bring more awareness to your organization. Some professors require mandatory volunteer hours, nonprofit-focused projects and even support from student-led groups. Check out your local university's nonprofit student organization, such as the University of Notre Dame's Student Committee for Non-Profit Organizations (SCNO), to find out how your center can best reach students interested in internships.

### Structuring for Success

Take your time to develop your internship program. Start building a plan for your interviews. Discuss your student's expectations and goals for the internship and, in response, your expectations and goals for them. Create an orientation checklist that includes:

- what training needs to be completed
- review of policies and procedures
- complete paperwork, i.e., availability forms for scheduling and internship agreement
- any webinars or HIPAA review videos you'd like students to complete. (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 [HIPAA] is a federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge.)
- structured times to learn about each team member's role



Orientations are not just part of the onboarding process, but they truly set the tone of your program. Most importantly, they introduce incoming students to your team. These staff introductions could be a part of your orientation. During internship orientations at Reins of Life, Inc., students meet via Zoom with different staff members to discuss their roles and responsibilities, as well as different programs that are offered and certifications needed. This is a great way to introduce your staff to incoming interns and to divide program explanations and nonprofit duties into digestible segments.

Your internship program can be as flexible as you choose. Some of the areas to consider are duration, the types of college majors accepted and weekly onsite hour limits. For instance, do you want the internship to extend over a quarter, semester or academic year? These criteria can be defined by your center, or you can keep those requirements open and adjust as needed to meet the university's criteria. The commonality of both routes is connecting passion to purpose.

Outside of working with participants, horses and one-off projects, you can add a student-selected focus project to your internship timeline. English majors could interview participants and their families and write articles for your upcoming newsletter. Marketing majors could help with your social media presence. Social work majors could use their fresh eyes to focus on the accessibility of your organization, both the accessibility of the onsite environment, as well as the convenience and ease of interacting with your website. Outside of learning to create measurable objectives, writing lesson plans and setting goals, an internship or legacy project a student can work on throughout their internship and then present prior to their exit interview will truly help connect passion to purpose. Some of the projects interns have worked on for Reins of Life include:

- developing volunteer training videos

- conducting donor database software research
- creating customizable activity boards and schedules
- improving recycling programs
- enhancing website accessibility
- doing outreach for veteran programming
- planning sensory trail activities
- working on interactive murals

## Increasing Engagement

To keep students motivated and inspired, continue to improve your internship program. One great way to solicit relevant feedback is to conduct exit interviews. These interviews are a great opportunity to hear ideas directly from students who have taken part in your

program. Monthly Reining-In meetings were created at Reins of Life, Inc., exactly through this route. Students wanted to connect more with fellow interns who were on different schedules or worked at a different facility. Reining-In meetings give students an opportunity to talk about their strengths and a safe place to discuss areas they'd like to improve upon, to brainstorm solutions to specific

issues or problems and develop or elaborate on ideas for a legacy project. These monthly meetings take place in-person or via Zoom as schedules allow.

By implementing an internship program, you are hosting pre-professionals who may be employed at organizations your center is partnering with or would like to partner with. Stay in touch through a short email or letter and add past interns to your subscriber mailing list. Personal relationships and staying connected are vital to growing a center's programs and expanding the reach of organizations to better serve your communities.

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