



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAYBOOK: Internships

Internships: Importance of Internships

Internships help keep your talent pool full of eager graduates and entry-level professionals – who not only understand instructions but also get your brand – to fill roles and succeed staff across your talent map.

- ▶ Structured internships with real work and mentorship attract students. Their positive experiences become your best advertisement, while they gain practical skills that bridge the theory-practice gap. It's a win-win scenario for the students and your firm.
- ▶ When possible, consider high school students as well as college students for internships. As early as sophomore year, college students are being offered multi-year internships and even full-time employment. To stay competitive, firms are engaging students sooner to raise awareness for their company name and establish their pipeline.
- ▶ Extend high-performing interns full-time positions (upon graduation) as soon as you know you would hire them full-time; do not wait, or they may accept another internship or job offer from another firm.
- ▶ Partner with local universities to offer internships as part of co-op programs or for academic credit. This ensures a steady flow of talented students into your internship program. Along those lines, never stop recruiting and networking with students, so that you maintain a steady presence on your local campus and your firm is a known entity to the students and faculty. Whenever you are exhibiting at an event, bring a sign that says "hiring interns" as a conversation starter.
- ▶ Students often take internships for the experience as well as the chance to provide clarity on career paths and specializations within civil engineering. This exploration helps them make informed decisions about their future career directions and areas of interest. Students in other engineering disciplines are still great candidates for an internship.



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Internships: Creating an Internship Program

Creating an effective internship program can provide a valuable pipeline for future talent, foster relationships with educational institutions and contribute to the development of the profession. If your firm is just beginning to offering internships or participate co-op programs, here are some easy steps to get you started:

- ▶ Establish clear objectives and goals for the intern role(s) upfront. If the objective is talent acquisition, ensure you build the right environment to achieve that goal from the beginning. If you need extra support for a specific project, ensure there is enough meaningful work suitable for an intern for the duration of their internship.
- ▶ Determine what specific outcomes you expect from the interns, such as completed projects, skills acquired, or contributions to ongoing projects. An effective internship program includes real work that makes an impact. Be sure to involve interns in real projects that allow them to apply their classroom knowledge to practical situations.
- ▶ Provide a comprehensive orientation/onboarding to introduce interns to company culture, policies, and expectations, just like any new hires to your firm. Assign mentors or supervisors to guide interns, provide feedback, and ensure they are gaining valuable experience. Your current staff and interns are your biggest recruitment tool; they will tell their friends!
- ▶ Ensure all staff, including interns, have opportunities for continuous learning and development. Offer training sessions, workshops, and seminars on relevant topics to enhance their technical and soft skills.
- ▶ Social events and team-building activities help interns integrate with full-time employees and build professional networks and help interns feel they a part of the team. Consider an intern-focused day or outing celebrating a new cohort of interns and highlighting publicly when interns are hired full-time.
- ▶ Implement a feedback system where interns receive constructive feedback on their performance and areas for improvement (see "Intern Interview Sample Questions"). Use the feedback to make necessary adjustments and improvements to enhance the experience for future interns.