

Creating Internship Opportunities — It's Easier Than You May Think



By Stephanie Lambert, manager of Student & Educator Services, BEC

You likely know that internships are a cost-effective workforce solution. You understand that interns bring creative and fresh perspectives into an organization and produce quality results. You appreciate that besides investing in your own workforce needs, offering internships demonstrates good corporate citizenship and shows commitment to the improvement of education and the community. But it's one thing to understand the benefits of an internship and another to figure out how to begin implementing one.

In partnership with the Business Education Compact (BEC), the SAO initiated "SEED: Seeding the Future Workforce." The purpose of this program is to provide at least a partial solution to members' workforce development requirements. Part of the BEC's comprehensive service is to guide companies in this journey. This article is all about clarifying the process, step-by-step.



This is a guide for those of you who aren't sure where to begin when thinking about internships. For those of you who know what you need an intern to help your organization with, simply log on to www.becpdx.org and fill out a project description form. The BEC will take it from there!

Step 1: Identifying Internship Opportunities

Discovering opportunities for prospective interns is not unlike assessing the needs for a new employee. To determine where an intern can offer value in your organization, here are some questions to ponder:

Do you have work or projects that are not being completed?

Student and educator interns offer a cost-effective workforce solution. They are motivated and skilled to lend a hand on projects that you wish you could get done, but for which you just don't have the time or extra manpower.

What specialized skills or education is necessary to accomplish the work or projects required?

This question will help determine what level of intern is needed for your organization: high school, college, graduate student or educator.

If internship is *role-based*, what ongoing tasks will the intern be working to complete? If the internship is *project-based*, are these projects of a sufficient length or are there enough smaller projects to bundle together?

This necessary information shapes the job or project description for your intern. Knowing what needs to be

done will lead to the development of clear goals and expectations for your intern while accomplishing important work for your organization.

Are you interested in providing the guidance and management necessary for an intern?

Interns, like any new employee, need a little extra supervision. Mark Lawler from ProSight stated in a recent SAO Article, *Internships Demystified: From One Who Knows*: "What is an extra 10 to 15 minutes out of your daily schedule when you look at the rewards back to the business as well as what you are doing for the community?"

Do you have someone on staff looking for managerial experience that he or she could apply to an intern?

Including an intern within your organization offers a meaningful opportunity for staff looking to gain managerial experience.

Are there any suggestions from current employees regarding internships?

Current employees may have ideas for internships that would make a positive contribution to the organization. Their input should be encouraged.



What types of roles or projects can interns accomplish?

Knowing what types of positions, roles and projects interns have accomplished in the past can serve as a guideline to uncover current internship opportunities. *Technology roles* include computer technician, software test engineer, Web-page designer, help-desk programmer, computer assembler and so on. *Business services roles* include marketing/ public relations assistant, research assistant, business analyst, administrative assistant, logistics assistant and so on. *Special projects* include training-module development, process-improvement planning, event planning, statistical regression analysis and so on.

Step 2: Defining Internship Requirements

Once you've determined that an intern is an appropriate fit for your organization, the next step is to develop a job or project description. The BEC is ready to assist you. The following questions will help define the specifics.

What is the overall purpose of the job or project?

In short, what will the intern be doing? How will he or she contribute to the success of your organization?

What are the essential functions of the job or project?

Essential functions are fundamental activities that help to serve the purpose of the job or project. In order to identify them, consider (1) the frequency with which a function is performed, (2) the amount of time spent on the function and (3) the consequences if the function is not performed.

What knowledge, skills and abilities are necessary to perform the job or project?

Divide them into requirements and preferences; the required skills and abilities should support the essential functions.

What level of intern and hourly pay rate is most appropriate?

Use the essential functions and required knowledge and skills to make this determination. Interns are available at high school, college, post-graduate and educator levels. The hourly wage rate should be based on the work to be done, the skills and level of the intern.

How much time is required for the assignment or project?

If the internship is a position, consider how many hours per week and how many weeks for the internship. If the internship is project-based, consider the project(s) and the time necessary to accomplish the goals.

Step 3: The BEC Finds a Fit

Once the job or project description is completed, the BEC begins the process of finding the intern that will best serve your needs.

BEC locates several candidates for your consideration.

Using a database of qualified candidates as well as connections with the high schools, community colleges and universities, the BEC will identify qualified candidates consistent with the job requirements and skill level.

BEC forwards candidate information to you.

You determine which intern candidates you'd like to interview and the BEC can help schedule those interviews.

BEC conducts employee orientation.

Once you've made an intern selection, the BEC schedules and conducts an employee orientation, providing information to the intern about workplace expectations in general and any specifics required for your organization. The intern is then ready to begin working for you!

Step 4: The Internship Begins

To ensure a rewarding, productive experience for both the intern and the organization, here are some suggestions:

Develop clear goals and expectations with your intern.

Agree upon the intern's learning objectives. In addition, explain how he or she will be evaluated, by whom and when. In addition, try to cover these activities on the first day:

- Review the company philosophy and mission.
- Explain the purpose and functions of your organization's product or service and the resulting benefits.
- Discuss the significance of the intern's contribution to the department.
- Explain the chain of command.
- Tour the facility.
- Introduce personnel from your department as well as others with whom the intern will be working.
- Discuss attendance and work schedule.

During this exciting time, and throughout the internship, the BEC acts as the employer of record. Every aspect of the intern's payroll is managed, saving valuable time better spent accomplishing your own organizational goals.



Getting Started

Internships offer a rewarding experience for both you and the student or educator you welcome into your organization. They offer a cost-effective workforce solution while improving education and our community. Several SAO member organizations, including WebTrends and Unicru, have taken the first steps into internships. Join us by contacting Stephanie Lambert (slambert@becpdx.org or at 503-646-0242 x23) to get started.

About the Business Education Compact

"Make learning real" sums up the BEC mission. For more than 20 years, the local nonprofit organization has been doing just that by connecting the classroom and workplace with hands-on, innovative learning experiences for students and teachers; by creating and leading working partnerships with business and education; and by advocating for quality education in Oregon. Learn more about the BEC at www.becpdx.org or call 503.646.0242 x23.

About the author

Stephanie Lambert is the manager of Student & Educator Services for the BEC, responsible for cultivating internship opportunities through the development of business partnerships. Lambert's path to the BEC included both business and education experience. After working in various roles for International Gaming Technology, Lambert pursued a teaching degree. She put her business and marketing background to use during her career as a marketing educator for Everett Public Schools where she developed internships and volunteer opportunities for her students with local businesses. Her passion to make learning real in her classroom led her to the BEC after relocating to the Portland area. Lambert can be reached at slambert@becpdx.org.