

# How to hire an intern in 2023



Like many college students, Michelle decided the summer before her senior year was a perfect time to hold an internship. Eager to get “real world” experience to bolster her resume, she interviewed with several companies before deciding where to intern. The small business impressed her with a detailed outline of things she would learn during her time there and how her efforts would directly contribute to the organization’s success.

While at first a little leery that perhaps she should have chosen somewhere with greater name recognition, Michelle’s fears dissipated as staff members took her under their wings. The internship experience confirmed her commitment to pursuing a career in marketing. She returned to campus in the fall with nothing but good things to say about her time there, which differed from many classmates who complained about being glorified gofers during their internships.

Interns and employers alike benefit from thoughtfully constructed internships. Interns receive the opportunity to put their classroom knowledge to use and expand their understanding of their chosen industry. They also build their network and increase their professionalism, both of which can help in the job market. Employers bolster their talent pipeline. They get a first-hand look at someone whom the company may want to present with a job offer down the line. Interns also may infuse the workplace with energy and new ideas, not to mention some much-needed extra help.

Creating a positive outcome, however, involves more than simply offering a desk to any college student expressing interest. Here, we look at actions to take to develop a successful internship program.

## Put in plenty of forethought

When your company has a job opening for a new employee, human resources doesn’t just “wing it,” right? The

same should hold true when you hire interns. Issues to decide well before coming up with a recruiting strategy include:

### **What do you want the student intern to do?**

Come up with an actual job description and list of job duties. Defining the position enables you to envision how the person will fit into the office, and spelling things out will help applicants decide if this internship opportunity matches what they want.

### **Who will oversee the intern's work?**

An already taxed staff may not have the time to supervise learning experiences and offer constructive feedback. Leaving an intern helpless or bored does little for either of you.

### **What is the best time to host an internship?**

Many college students and recent graduates look for summer internships. However, if this season does not fit well with your situation — perhaps because regular employees are on vacation and unable to supervise — figure out a different time.

### **What are current safety protocols?**

Some companies continue to operate remotely or through hybrid arrangements. While internships are still possible, they may require a different approach than in the past. Examine what might need to be done to make internships work well in your specific post-pandemic environment.

### **Paid internships vs. unpaid internships**

Good reasons exist for paying interns. For starters, you will attract greater interest because compensated internships are more desirable. You also create a more equitable situation. Some students cannot afford to be unpaid interns because they depend on summer earnings to finance their education. And, if you are expecting interns to do meaningful work, paying for their contributions to your company makes business sense. Nobody wants the reputation of being a cheapskate, especially if you hope talented interns may someday become full-time employees.



Frankly, labor laws may not give you a choice regarding whether or not to pay. For your situation, examine the question “Who mainly benefits from the internship?” If the intern gains the most, compensation is not legally necessary. However, if the internship is to the employer’s advantage, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) considers the intern an employee. At for-profit establishments, this means he or she is entitled to minimum wage and overtime pay. (The rule does not apply to public sector and nonprofit organizations.)

To help label the relationship, the U.S. Department of Labor created a seven-point [Primary Beneficiary Test](#). Employers (ideally in conjunction with professional legal advice) can use this assessment tool for guidance on proper classification. Note that some states have their own requirements that companies should take into consideration, too.

Whether a paid or unpaid intern, some students seek college credit for their internship experience. In this case, work closely with the individual educational institution. Specific guidelines often determine which internships are eligible for academic credit.

## Finding potential interns

With a firm grasp of who you are looking for and what the person will do for your company, get the word out about your internship opportunity. Great places to consider include:

- Your organization’s website and social media channels
- Local colleges
- Colleges with programs in the skill set you seek
- Collegiate job fairs
- Job boards and databases, such as [Internships.com](#), Indeed, etc.

- Word of mouth from past interns
- Staff recommendations
- Professional/industry associations

## **The hiring process and onboarding**

Treat selection of interns as you would finding qualified applicants for traditional employment. Ask for a cover letter and resume. Do interviews. Some companies request letters of recommendation for added input.

After making your selection(s), create an internship agreement. Plenty of online templates exist for this purpose. Things you'll typically see in this document:

- Name and title of intern
- Description of duties
- Department in which intern will be working
- Location of internship
- Name of supervisor with contact information
- Start and end date of internship
- Amount and frequency of compensation (if any)

It also is a good idea to clearly state that this internship does not come with a promise or guarantee of later employment. While employers often do extend full-time employment offers to former interns, clear up any misconceptions that simply holding an internship means such a job opportunity is forthcoming.

Even though an intern is not a permanent part of your staff, it pays to thoroughly onboard the person. Doing so will help the student understand your company culture and the responsibilities that come with being a professional.

Provide interns a copy of the employee handbook. Require that they sign off that they have read and understood it. This document will give them insight into common matters such as dress code and how to report an absence. It also informs them of company policies such as zero tolerance for bullying or drug use.

Within the course of their internship, students may come into contact with sensitive or proprietary information. Make sure they understand the role they play in maintaining confidentiality. Likewise, instill the importance of protecting company databases and tech equipment from security breaches.

Finally, make certain everyone on staff knows how to treat interns. Your team should not view them as personal assistants or someone on whom to dump unwanted chores. Likewise, remind them that interns talk to others about their time at the company. Crude remarks and other types of improper behavior reflect poorly on the organization and will not be tolerated. The last thing any business wants is for an intern program to be a source of negative publicity.