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# INTERN PLACEMENT AND REFERRAL SERVICE GUIDE

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This guide was prepared to introduce cities, potential interns, and Oregon college and university internship placement coordinators to the League's Intern Placement and Referral Service. It also includes information regarding the development and organization of internship programs in the public sector. Although it is provided as a basic reference for developing successful internship programs, more information about sources can be found in the bibliography.



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# INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION AND BENEFITS OF AN INTERNSHIP

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## What is an internship?

An internship is a cooperative educational process that is mutually beneficial to both the host and the intern. An internship is meant to be an authentic work experience where students learn while applying knowledge and skills from an academic setting to a “real-world” work setting. It is a temporary work placement, aimed at providing college students with work experiences relevant to their field of study.

Here in Oregon, there is an extensive base of students in higher learning institutions across the state. Cities have the opportunity to expose these students to the benefits and challenges of working in the public sector, while meeting specific city and project needs with motivated interns.

There are numerous formats and arrangements the city might use to manage an internship. Internships can vary in formality, duration, and duties. Internships may focus on the opportunity to gain experience in a specific area or department, but the intern should also learn about the broad functions of local government. By doing so, an internship program could become part of the recruitment strategy of the city or department.

## Benefits of internships to an employer

- Provides the labor and skill needed to complete a special project or task
- Provides the opportunity for staff to gain supervision experience
- Reduces recruitment cost for future positions
- Increases name recognition of the city or department at colleges and universities
- Allows employers to gain insight on current topics at the collegiate level
- Allows the assessment of the capacities and capabilities of a potential employee
- Brings in fresh perspectives and highly motivated workers
- Increases access to minority candidates
- Succession planning: provides exposure to local government service for the next generation of the professional workforce

## Benefits of internships to an intern

- Opportunity to apply knowledge gained from the academic setting
- Ability to observe various roles and jobs in the public sector
- Opportunity to gain valuable experience that provides evidence of skills and abilities
- Increased confidence in work produced
- Making professional networking contacts
- Potential to earn school credit for work completed
- Ability to gain industry knowledge and “real-world” experience in local government/public service

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# USING THE INTERN PLACEMENT AND REFERRAL SERVICE

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The League of Oregon Cities has developed a web service to connect cities to all of Oregon's colleges and universities via our Intern Placement and Referral Service. Here, cities and other select agencies can post internship opportunities which will be instantly distributed to the internship coordinators at institutions throughout the state. In addition, students wishing to find local government placements can search for opportunities and post their resumes.

While internships are open to students from all majors, the League selected a handful of academic programs that would be most useful to cities. When posting a job on the web site, please pick the academic fields that will be most pertinent to your projects. Below is a list of academic programs that correspond with city needs and functions.

## Academic Programs

Art/Graphic & Visual Design	Management
Civil Engineering	Mathematics
Computer & Information Systems	Public Safety/Police Services
Communication	Other Business Fields
Earth/Environmental Sciences	Other Engineering
Economics	Planning
Finance	Public Policy/Administration
Fire Protection	Social Sciences
Hospitality & Tourism	Translation Services
Human Resources	

## **Web site instructions (Cities)**

1. Go to [www.orcities.org](http://www.orcities.org) and click on the Internships button on the left menu.
2. For user privileges, click on Register in the upper right hand corner and fill in the pertinent information. The next time you visit the site, go to the Login link on the upper right side of the screen, then log into the web site using the unique user name and password that you set up.
3. Your registration will be sent to Member Services for verification within 24 hours for full employer privileges. If there is a problem, contact Member Services at 503-588-6550.
4. After you are given employer privileges, you can begin searching resumes and posting internship positions. You can post information about a position by either free-typing in the text box, copying and pasting text, or uploading an existing document. Clicking Update at the bottom of the page will post the position.
5. If you need to modify a posting, go to View My Postings and click Edit. If the position has been filled, or you are no longer offering an internship, please go to View My Postings and click Delete next to the title of the internship.
6. We also recommend that you build a profile for your organization under My Profile. Just as in the Post New Job section, you may either upload information about your organization or use the text box on the page.

## **Web site instructions (Students)**

1. Follow steps 1 and 2 above.
2. Once you are logged in, you should build your profile. Here, you can upload your resume using the Browse function. If you prefer, you can free-type your qualifications in the text box, or copy and paste from a word processing document.
3. You can also specify the dates you are available, and select your preferred internship locations by including them in the Assigned box.
4. When you browse for jobs, you can click Save to Your Folder at the bottom of each listing if you are interested in that position. In order to visit your saved listings, click on My Listings on the main Internships page.

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# PREPARATION, MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND COMPENSATION

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An internship program takes a fair amount of staff time to plan, implement and supervise. It is critical to the success of the program that management understands and accepts the commitments that are required. This section outlines some tips for managers about hosting an intern as well as information about compensation.

## **We sure could use some good help around here...**

You are a good candidate for hosting an intern if you answer yes to any of the following questions:

- Are there projects or assignments that current staff members could do if time were available that would result in a higher net value to operations?
- Do any staff members need supervisory experience?
- Has a unique project come up?
- Is there a potential need for a new hire or a replacement hire?

## **Managing an intern**

It is helpful to select a direct supervisor for each intern. This person will assign projects, answer questions, provide on-the-job training, and offer formal or informal performance reviews. The supervisor should be available to the intern through scheduled meetings or an “open-door” policy. It is also important to remember that interns are not merely additional clerical staff, so specific projects and assignments should be developed for the intern. If possible, design your project so that the intern can finish it, or complete a feature of a larger project. It is also valuable to encourage your intern to learn how other departments interact with yours through working as a member of a team or helping out briefly on another project.

## **Determining compensation**

There are a number of different factors to consider regarding the compensation for an intern. Several notes to keep in mind when considering different compensation methods are:

- The quality of an intern’s experience is not diminished simply because an internship is unpaid. However, the quality and number of available candidates for your project may be reduced because financial need prevents some highly qualified students from pursuing unpaid opportunities.
- In for-profit organizations, it is common for employers to offer a stipend or hourly wage. The advantage of a stipend is that you can avoid adding short-term workers to the payroll. However, be sure to determine and satisfy any federal and state income tax requirements related to paying interns.

- In the case of unpaid internships, it is typical for interns to work part-time so they can earn money through another job.

## **Incentives and other tips for hosting**

Finding out in the interview process why people choose to intern will assist in determining what professional incentives to offer. The following are a few ideas that are also general tips for hosting an intern:

- Establish a time for the supervisor to sit down and discuss trends or topics in the given job or about public service in general.
- Take the intern to lunch with several co-workers so that they can observe how to act in a social-professional atmosphere.
- Set up several job shadows throughout the internship so the intern can learn about other positions within the municipality.
- Have a meeting or lunch with other professionals in the job fields that are of interest to the intern.
- Create an internship handbook or folder with pertinent information such as descriptions of projects and important contacts. The intern can add information as needed.
- Complete all the requirements and be an active participant if the intern is earning credit for the internship. Particularly if the position is unpaid, earning academic credit is often a large motivator for the intern.

## **Managing your intern: developing a workplan**

The workplan is built with the intern during their first week of employment. This could include information about the project (summary and objectives), expected deliverables, as well as a timeline. It is important that everyone has mutual understanding of what the job is, and what the responsibilities of each party are. A workplan is a fluid document; things such as dates, deliverables, or even sub-projects may change within the duration of the internship. This is also a good time to schedule any special training, such as equipment usage.

This process might take a few hours to discuss at the beginning of an intern's employment, but will provide guidance to the intern when they have questions or when their supervisor is out of contact. It also gives the intern and supervisor the opportunity to get to know how each other operates and thinks.

## **A few legal guidelines**

Student internships should provide the intern with an opportunity to gain practical experience related to their academic coursework and career goals. The primary purpose of the program should be educational; if this is not the case, then the position may not be considered an internship and the employer must pay no less than minimum wage.

Although the required termination and unemployment compensation procedures are less stringent than those required for regular employees, the same laws and standards that govern the hiring of full-time employees apply to hiring interns. Likewise, it is generally a good idea to provide even unpaid interns coverage under your worker's compensation policy in order to limit liability.

Your organization is not required to pay interns who qualify as "learners" or "trainees" according to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Based on the requirements of the FLSA, the U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six factors for determining trainee status:

- Interns cannot replace regular employees.
- Interns are not guaranteed a job with your organization following the internship.
- Both parties are aware that the intern is not entitled to earn a wage.
- Interns must receive training.
- Interns must get "hands-on" experience with equipment or processes used in your particular industry.
- The skills learned on the job must be considered transferable.

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## OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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