**Internship Onboarding Guide**

***Note:***  *The contents of this onboarding guide are intended to provide best practices for creating effective internship experiences. While these practices have been proven beneficial across various contexts, they are not one-size-fits-all solutions. We encourage employers to adapt and modify the guidelines to suit the specific size, culture, and unique needs of their organization. The effectiveness of these practices may vary based on individual circumstances, and it is essential to assess and tailor them accordingly to ensure the best outcomes for your intern, team, and organization.*

# Introduction

Welcoming interns to your organization is an exciting opportunity for the interns and the team. This onboarding guide aims to equip employers with the strategies and tools to effectively onboard student interns.

The most critical factor to an intern’s success is offering a structured and supportive onboarding process that helps to enrich the intern’s learning experience and sets the stage for quicker acclimation. A well-planned onboarding can also assist with increased retention and the potential for future employment. To get started, review these five key outcomes of a successful onboarding process:

1. **Sets Clear Expectations:** Provides interns with a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and organizational culture.
2. **Fosters Engagement:** Engaged interns are more likely to contribute positively and feel a sense of belonging.
3. **Enhances Learning:** Structured onboarding facilitates effective learning and skill development.
4. **Improves Performance:** Interns who receive proper guidance are often more productive and produce higher quality work.
5. **Encourages Feedback:** A supportive onboarding process allows for open communication, enabling interns to ask questions and provide feedback.

**Instructions:** Review the following best practices and key actions for each of the following steps: pre-arrival preparation, day one essentials, first few weeks and after onboarding. Utilize the supplemental Onboarding Checklist for Supervisors to create your structured and supportive internship onboarding experience.

# Pre-Arrival Preparation

Pre-arrival preparation is crucial for creating a structured onboarding experience by laying a solid foundation of key elements necessary to ensure success for the organization and the intern. Consider the following best practices and key actions below:

**Set Up Work Environment**

* A well-prepared workspace helps the intern feel valued and equipped to start their role effectively. Assign a specific desk or area that fosters productivity and minimizes distractions. Ensure all necessary equipment—such as a computer, phone, and office supplies—is set up and functional. Additionally, verify that the intern has access to relevant software and tools, such as collaboration platforms, databases, or specialized applications. Providing a comfortable and fully equipped environment allows the intern to focus on their tasks without unnecessary delays or frustrations.

**Define Goals and Projects**

* Clearly defined goals and projects create a roadmap for the intern’s success and development. Start by assessing the intern’s skills, interests, and career aspirations to align their responsibilities with their strengths. Outline specific tasks or projects they will work on, including deadlines and expected outcomes. This approach not only provides the intern with a sense of purpose and direction but also enhances their engagement by allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the team’s objectives.

**Assign a Mentor**

* A mentor acts as a critical resource for the intern, offering guidance, support, and insights into the company culture and processes. Choose a team member who has experience and a willingness to help others. The mentor should be available for regular check-ins, provide feedback on projects, and assist the intern in developing professional skills. This relationship fosters a supportive environment, making it easier for the intern to acclimate to their new role and feel comfortable asking questions.

**Prepare Onboarding Materials**

* A comprehensive welcome packet equips the intern with essential information about the organization. Include a company overview that highlights its mission, vision, and values, alongside cultural norms and expectations. Clearly outline key policies, such as attendance, communication protocols, and dress code. Additionally, provide a detailed schedule for the first week, outlining meetings, training sessions, and check-ins. This organized approach helps the intern feel informed and prepared as they embark on their new journey.

**Plan Orientation**

* A structured orientation session is essential for onboarding interns effectively. This session should cover the company’s history, mission, values, and organizational structure. Include introductions to key team members and departments to establish connections. Additionally, use this time to review important policies, procedures, and tools that the intern will need. A well-planned orientation not only sets a positive tone for the internship but also ensures the intern has a solid foundation to build upon throughout their experience.

**Pre-Start Communication**

* A personalized welcome email sets a positive tone before the intern even starts. In this email, express enthusiasm for their arrival and outline important details for their first day, such as the schedule, dress code, and who to meet upon arrival. Provide any necessary logistical information, such as parking or building access instructions. This thoughtful communication helps the intern feel valued and reduces any anxiety they may have about starting a new role, ensuring they arrive prepared and eager to begin.

# Day One Essentials

Preparing for the first day is essential for setting a positive tone, helping the intern feel comfortable and confident in their new environment, and establishing clear expectations that facilitate a smooth transition into their role. Consider the following best practices and key actions below:

**Welcome Meeting**

* This meeting serves as a crucial first step in integrating the intern into the company culture. During the meeting, highlight the organization's mission, vision, and core values, emphasizing how these principles guide daily operations. Additionally, introduce key team members and stakeholders, encouraging a supportive atmosphere where the intern can feel comfortable reaching out for assistance. This helps foster relationships and provides a sense of belonging from the outset.

**Office Tour**

* An office tour familiarizes the intern with the physical workspace, making them feel more at home. Highlight essential areas such as workstations, meeting rooms, break areas, and restrooms. Point out any important features like the kitchen, supply rooms, or wellness spaces. This not only eases any initial anxiety but also encourages exploration and interaction with the environment, helping the intern navigate their new surroundings with confidence.

**Review Company Policies**

* Clearly outlining company policies sets expectations and helps interns understand the workplace culture. Discuss the dress code to ensure they align with organizational norms. Explain communication methods, including preferred channels (email, messaging apps, in-person) and response times, to promote effective collaboration. Additionally, review safety procedures, including emergency exits and health protocols, ensuring interns feel secure and informed while on the job.

**Set Up Accounts and Tools**

* Providing the intern with access to essential tools is critical for their ability to perform tasks efficiently. This includes setting up their company email, accounts for project management software (like Asana or Trello), and any other necessary applications. Offer a brief training session on how to use these tools effectively, as this empowers the intern to communicate, collaborate, and manage their projects from day one.

**Meet with Mentor**

* Introducing the intern to their mentor establishes a key support system for their development. The mentor can guide the intern through their tasks, answer questions, and provide insights into the organization's culture and processes. Encourage the mentor to share their own experiences and offer advice on navigating the internship successfully. This relationship can significantly enhance the intern's learning experience and boost their confidence in their new role.

# First Few Weeks

Preparing for the first few weeks is vital for ensuring ongoing support and guidance, reinforcement for learning objectives, and there is a sense of belonging, ultimately driving the intern's engagement and productivity within the team.

**Regular Check-Ins**

* Regular check-ins are vital for maintaining open communication and ensuring that the intern feels supported throughout their experience. These one-on-one meetings should be structured yet informal, providing a comfortable space for the intern to discuss their progress, challenges, and any questions they may have. Use this time to review ongoing projects, celebrate successes, and address any areas of concern. This consistent feedback loop helps build trust, encourages engagement, and allows for timely adjustments to tasks or responsibilities as needed.

**Set Learning Objectives**

* Helping interns set personal learning objectives fosters a sense of ownership and direction in their internship. Encourage them to reflect on what skills they wish to develop or experiences they want to gain during their time with the organization. Collaborate with them to create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that align with both their interests and the team's needs. This process not only enhances their learning experience but also provides a clear framework for assessing their progress and achievements throughout the internship.

**Encourage Networking**

* Encouraging interns to network across the organization enriches their experience and broadens their understanding of the company. Take the initiative to introduce interns to colleagues in different departments, facilitating informal coffee chats or team lunches. Highlight the roles and contributions of various team members to illustrate how different functions work together. This exposure not only helps interns build professional relationships but also fosters a sense of belonging and integration within the organization.

**Provide Specific, Actionable Feedback**

* Providing specific, actionable feedback is essential for the intern's growth and development. Regularly share observations about their performance, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Use concrete examples to illustrate your points and offer suggestions on how they can enhance their skills or approach tasks differently. Encourage open dialogue, allowing the intern to ask questions and seek clarification on the feedback provided. This constructive criticism helps interns learn from their experiences, fosters continuous improvement, and prepares them for future roles.

# After Onboarding

Preparing for what happens after onboarding is important because it ensures ongoing support and development, reinforces the skills and knowledge gained during the initial phase, and helps maintain engagement and motivation as the intern transitions into their role within the organization.

**Conduct Regular Check-Ins**

* Employers should conduct regular check-ins after the onboarding process to maintain ongoing support and engagement, ensuring that interns continue to feel valued and connected to the organization. These meetings provide an opportunity to assess the intern's progress, address any challenges they may be facing, and provide constructive feedback that promotes growth and development. Additionally, regular check-ins help reinforce learning objectives, encourage open communication, and allow for adjustments to tasks or responsibilities as needed, ultimately leading to a more successful and impactful internship experience.

**Stay Connected**

* Encourage ongoing communication and networking to build a strong relationship between the intern and the organization. Invite them to company events, webinars, or professional development sessions. By fostering a culture of ongoing communication, you help the intern feel valued and connected, which can lead to positive referrals and potential future collaborations.

**Have Career Conversations**

* Having career conversations about future opportunities throughout the internship experience reinforces the organization’s commitment to the intern's development. Discussing the potential for future employment or additional internship roles allows the intern to understand the pathways available to them within the organization. Highlight any relevant job openings, upcoming internship programs, or projects where they might contribute in the future. This not only motivates the intern but also helps the organization retain talent and build a pipeline of skilled candidates who are already familiar with the company culture and processes.

# 4 Supervisor Tips for Success

Consider these supervisor tips to help provide a supportive and empowering environment that not only enhances the intern's learning experience but also boosts engagement, confidence, and overall productivity within the team.

1. **Be Approachable:** Create an environment where interns feel comfortable asking questions and seeking guidance.
2. **Encourage Initiative:** Motivate interns to take ownership of their projects and contribute ideas.
3. **Provide Recognition:** Acknowledge and celebrate accomplishments to boost morale and engagement.
4. **Be Patient:** Remember that interns are still learning; patience and encouragement are key.