

✓ More Than A Box On A Resume

Tips for creating a successful internship program

Many parks and recreation agencies take the time to prepare students for the industry through internships. For those organizations looking to hire an intern, the following will provide some tips in forming a plan to make the experience positive and beneficial for both parties.

Internships are a great way to provide a young professional an opportunity to experience the field as well as a realistic understanding of the day-to-day operations of a parks and recreation department. Conversely, an intern provides a department the ability to bring on an additional staff member to assist in leading programming, working on specific projects, or assisting throughout the department.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Once you have decided to bring an intern into the organization, make sure you create the most successful experience possible. As outlined by Doug and Polly White from Entrepreneur.com (<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/300092>), as an employer, there are six ways to create a successful internship for both you and the student:



WHETHER OR NOT YOU PLAN TO HIRE THIS INTERN ONCE THE EXPERIENCE IS OVER, HELP THE PERSON PLAN AND PREPARE FOR OTHER POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES.

1 Define a clear project that can be completed during the internship.

The project, which must be relevant to the field and the department, should have a specific starting and ending point. The intern should gain a real understanding of what it is like to work in the field, in the department, and in a workplace setting.

2 Identify measurements for success.

Develop goals that are clearly defined and achievable with effort. Treat the intern as you would an employee.

3 Spend time helping the intern succeed.

Create training opportunities and supervise the intern just like any other staff member. Invest in him or her to create a positive experience.

4 Provide broader exposure to the business.

This will allow the intern to decide if this line of work is of interest; expose the person to other areas of the workplace to gain a full understanding of how the business operates. Take time to explain the core values of the organization and the strategies to deliver to the customer.

5 Prepare the intern for success beyond the organization.

Whether or not you plan to hire this intern once the experience is over, help the person plan and prepare for other potential opportunities. Assist with creating and updating a resume and show the intern how to add the experience gained through the internship. If the experience is positive for the organization, offer to serve as a reference or to write a letter of recommendation. Speak with the intern to determine if the experience was positive and if he or she enjoyed working in the field. The intern may decide that this industry is not the right fit, but as an employer, you should provide whatever assistance you can.

6 Give candid feedback.

Identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. Feedback is typically the

most valuable thing an intern can take away from the experience. Whether a performance appraisal is required by the learning institution, provide one as feedback, as this is important for individual and professional growth.

HIRING AND SELECTING AN INTERN

The following suggestions will guide you in hiring and selecting an intern. They will also help to find the right fit for an organization.

1 Treat the internship experience as you would any employment.

Take the necessary time to prepare for the internship. As an agency, speak with local colleges and universities to gain an understanding of the requirements for their students. Use this information to benefit not only your organization but the student and the institution.

2 Design an internship that focuses on a specific program or an area that has been identified as a need in the organization.

Are you looking to develop a new program? Do you want to expand a current program? Do you have a department in need of assistance? For example, an organization with an aquatic department may look to create an aquatic-specific internship. Some students in the field may already have a passion and background in the aquatic industry. In many instances, you will find potential interns who already have exposure to lifeguarding, teaching swim lessons, certification as a lifeguard instructor, a swim or dive team coaching background, and possibly current management and operational experience. The aquatic field is only one of many areas within a department that can create and provide a unique internship opportunity.

3 Take the time to develop a plan to hire the right intern.

Create a job/intern announcement the same as if you were looking to hire an employee to fill a role in the organization. Be specific on the expectations of the position, the experience needed to fill the position, and the roles and responsibilities of the internship. Set an application deadline, and be sure to advertise the opportunity through all available resources (i.e., website, social media, local and national park and recreation associations, colleges and universities, etc.).

4 Conduct an interview and selection process to determine the best fit for the organization and the best fit for the potential intern.

Treat the process the same as in hiring a new employee.

Once the internship is complete, take time to internally review the internship process and experience. Ask yourself and other staff members involved what can be done to improve future internship experiences, not only for the intern but for the organization. Be sure to receive feedback from the intern on the positive and negatives of the experience. Use the information to improve upon and prepare for the next internship. **PRB**

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