

Building Internship Project Plans: A Guide and Worksheet to Developing a Long-Term Internship with Students

This guide is designed to walk internship supervisors through the process of building an effective and intentional internship experience that benefits both the student and the organization, knowing also that each of you bring expertise of your own! We hope this is simply a resource to supplement your existing practices based on input and higher education research.

First, you'll find a series of steps to brainstorm and consider in your process of developing a workplan. Then, the following pages include a fill-able worksheet based on these steps.

Please feel free to take what is helpful, adapt what you need, and leave whatever is not useful! We would also love to hear feedback about adaptations or any resources you use as well to continue the conversation about how to build effective internships together.

- 1) Consider the overarching goal of the internship as a whole. **What are the big picture goals that you'd like your intern and the internship to accomplish over the course of 3-4 years that would advance your mission and increase the capacity of your organization?** As you consider what might be a reasonable scope for the internship, consider projects and initiatives that a new staff member working one full day a week might be able to accomplish. Though it is great to consider projects that intersect with other initiatives at your organization, sometimes a project that is a bit more self-contained can also be a good fit. Below are some ideas to mix and match when developing internship goals for your student.
 - Conduct a specific project or deliverable (e.g. write a report, identify new grants, develop an infographic, update website, build data visualization dashboard, recruit volunteers)
 - Support a particular event(s) (e.g. annual fundraiser, community outreach event, signature organizational program, anniversary)
 - Take on an ongoing task or responsibility (e.g. developing content for social media channels each week, regular newsletter or communications, designing weekly curriculum)

- 2) **Now break down that goal into SMART (specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, time-bound) goals that align with the following benchmarks:**
 - Within one year (by May 2027):
 - Halfway through the internship year (by January 2027):
 - Within one month of starting the internship (November 2026):
 - Within two weeks of starting the internship (mid-October 2026):

- 3) Now that you've set the goals and given them timestamped checkpoints through the internship, **develop a list of tasks that an intern needs to take on in order to accomplish these goals.** It might be easiest to work backwards in timeline, starting with the conclusion of the internship.

- 4) **What professional development opportunities, training, or context is needed in order for your intern to complete these tasks, or would be a good opportunity to build their professional portfolio?** That could be a meeting with a staff member, assigning a student to do some research, engaging with a resource, attending a networking event or board meeting, or participating in an event.
- 5) **Then, distribute these tasks and training/professional development sessions across the calendar by month (roughly).** This “manage by calendar” is simply a guide, which will likely be adapted as you begin working together.
- 6) **What anticipated challenges or circumstances might impact this internship?** Consider any planned organizational transitions or changes (e.g. staff retirement or new hires, milestone events, construction or changes in location, expansions, funding changes). Input these into the monthly workplan and adjust accordingly, if needed.
- 7) **Share internship workplan with your intern and use it as a prompt for further refinement.** Give opportunities for feedback and ideas. Going over this workplan and the student’s Community Learning Agreement (CLA) together ensure that the internship is a good fit and fulfills both your goals (Community Impact Objectives) and the student’s Goals (Learning and Professional Competency Objectives). Use your regular check in’s as opportunities to re-evaluate progress and make any adjustments.

INTERNSHIP WORKPLAN

Internship Goals and Overview

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Internship Tasks by Calendar

YEAR ONE	
SMART Goals:	
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Month	Tasks and Training
Within first two weeks	*Onboarding*
October	
November	
December	
January	*Internship Mid-Year Checkpoint*
February	
March	
April	
May	*Internship End-of-Year Checkpoint*
To prep for Year Two:	

YEAR TWO
SMART Goals:
How does this next year advance in responsibility and leadership from the year prior?
<i>Manage by calendar to occur at the start of next year's internship (since the details are often challenging to discern at this point)</i>

YEAR THREE
SMART Goals:
How does this next year advance in responsibility and leadership from the year prior?

Manage by calendar to occur at the start of next year's internship (since the details are often challenging to discern at this point)