

# Questions to Ask Yourself Before Starting an Internship Program

The word “internships” is defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting.”

The evolution of how we work and learn has prompted organizations with an existing internship program to modify their approach. In fact, the plans for internship programs were reported in a 2021 NACE poll with 43% of employers planning a hybrid model, 38% planning an exclusively virtual model, and only 13% planning a fully in-person model.

The type of environment, the technology platforms, and the mentorship in which these learning and skill development opportunities are provided can help or hurt all parties involved. To set your organization and your future intern(s) up for success, ask yourself the following questions before starting an internship program.

## **Who are today’s interns?**

According to a 2021 Gallup study, 46% of the current full-time U.S. workforce consists of the millennial age group (born during 1981 and 1996) and the Gen Z age group (anyone born during 1997 and on). Considering that these populations represent your entire intern pool, familiarize yourself with the characteristics, needs, and expectations of current and incoming interns to make the most out of your internship program.

## **What resources does my organization have?**

Can your company support multiple interns, or can you hire only one? Does your company have the right technology to support a remote or hybrid model? Understand, realistically, how your organization can accommodate today’s interns and the way they learn, stay engaged, and contribute to your team.

## **What are my organization’s needs?**

Define your organization’s goals for the internship program and what you will need to provide for your intern(s) to succeed. Then, perform an internal assessment of your organization to determine the buy-in from every level of management. With the backing of your organization, you have a better chance of getting a positive return on investment, fulfilled resource requests, and a richer experience for your intern(s).

## **Do I have the time?**

Do you or your staff have the time to invest in the mentorship and management of a student? Internships are most likely the first exposure students have to the professional world. They need

training and guidance and meaningful projects to contribute to and learn from. Time and availability are essential resources for an inspiring, fulfilling, and rewarding internship.

### **What is legal?**

Understanding your state's requirements as it pertains to the employment of interns is recommended by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Each state has its own criteria of what an intern is defined as, and that can determine an intern's compensation, their right to certain employee benefits, and more. Consult with your organization's legal counsel, reach out to an attorney privy to employment law, or do thorough research to understand the legal requirements mandated by the Department of Labor (DOL) and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

By asking yourself these questions, you'll have a better idea of your readiness to start an internship program that can guide, foster, and strengthen talent for our future workforce.