How to Start an Internship Program for YouthBuild Students

What Is an Internship?
An internship is a structured learning experience that exposes YouthBuild students to occupations in their area of interest and provides them with opportunities to practice the work readiness and occupational skills that they have learned in YouthBuild. Internships can be paid, unpaid, or partially subsidized by the YouthBuild program.

Why It’s Important to Students:
• internships provide an opportunity for hands-on work experience with professionals in a given field and a chance to transfer and refine the skills learned in the program;
• internships provide exposure to all aspects of an industry or career path of interest;
• there is a unique opportunity to create professional networking contacts that may result in future employment opportunities; and
• job experience expands the confidence of interns and broadens their range of experiences.

Why It’s Important to Employers:
• interns are a potential pool of qualified candidates for paid positions;
• employers get the opportunity to evaluate how potential new hires fit in with company culture;
• interns free up other staff to do more advanced or higher priority work; and
• employers report greater retention of newly hired employees who started as student interns.

Getting Started - Critical Steps
A good internship program requires a careful planning process involving both the DOL YouthBuild program and the potential employer. The plan outlines project scope, activities, responsibilities and expectations.

Step 1: Ensure that your students can demonstrate work readiness through facets such as attendance, punctuality, and conflict resolution, developed through high-quality training and structured evaluation of work readiness skills and competencies.
• SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Necessary Skills) provides a set of nationally recognized competencies necessary for work. This is a great tool for selecting, designing, or evaluating work readiness curricula and for help in outlining student evaluations. Extensive information on SCANS can be found on the DOL/ETA website at www.doleta.gov.
Many programs customize curricula for their program. CSC Lebanon YouthBuild uses a training curriculum that includes modules designed by their YouthBuild staff and components from the “Workin’ It Out” program.

There are a number of work readiness training and assessment programs available for purchase, including the National Work Readiness Credential and WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system. In some cases, the employer may be willing to help cover the cost of such skills training and assessment programs!

Step 2: Research employers in the area that might make good partners and think about employers that would be a good “match” for your students:
- collaborate with your local One-Stop Career Center;
- check local college job boards where employers post internship opportunities;
- look for employers that are familiar with the YouthBuild approach;
- check the High School Interns website for internship postings; and
- use Employer Advisory Boards (if in place) to assist with identifying and developing internship sites.

Step 3: Develop materials to help with outreach and initial discussion with potential employers. For example, Mile High Youth Corps/Year One YouthBuild in Denver uses a brochure to help recruit and educate prospective employers.

Step 4: Develop a partnership agreement with the employer. This is a written contract between the employer and intern that defines expectations, learning goals, schedules, and responsibilities. American YouthWorks Casa Verde Builders in Austin, Texas, has developed an Internship MOU.

Step 5: Help prepare internship-site supervisors, who will work directly with interns, with a detailed orientation on:
- the overall YouthBuild program, staffing and student profiles, and the basics of youth development;
- a copy of the YouthBuild program’s policies and expectations and a clear idea of the purpose of the internship;
- who they should contact at the YouthBuild program to address challenges or to call for questions or support;
- strategies for providing ongoing student feedback to facilitate learning; and
- any mentors or supportive relationships in place to support the student.

NOTE: Confidential information that is part of the student’s case management file should not be shared as part of this process.

Step 6: Help the employer design and manage a process of structured progress reports to ensure the young person’s success and the employer’s satisfaction. The Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and provides guidance for in-depth on-the-job goal setting and assessment.
Step 7: Make sure everyone involved knows the government rules for intern wages. See the fact sheet link Internship Programs under the Fair Labor Standards Act that DOL puts out for specific information.

Step 8: Have a post-internship meeting with both the student and the employer to learn what worked, what didn’t work, and how to strengthen future internship opportunities.

For More Information

Internships are one activity in a larger strategy to support the post-program success of YouthBuild students. The success of the internship depends on how rigorous you are in your training and expectations of students, as well as your planning and your employer preparation. For more information on post-program strategies and for additional sample documents on internships, please visit the DOL YouthBuild Community of Practice, go to the Resource Room and then click on the Tip Sheet link.