

Why do you want an intern? A brainstorming exercise.

Before creating an internship description and recruiting an intern, it may be useful to take a moment to clarify what you want to accomplish and whether a student will help you with your goals.

Student interns are here to learn and grow, not to fill staffing gaps. While they can bring fresh ideas and energy, their contributions often require close supervision, which may offset productivity gains.

Interns should not be assigned mission-critical work. Instead, supervisors should focus on providing structured learning experiences and constructive feedback to support skill development. The goal is professional growth, not free labor, and a well-supported intern will still add value to the team.

Students enter an internship with a wide range of goals; see our [Intern Persona Tool](#) to understand the various types of interns and their goals. Students may also have implicit expectations that are harder to meet; for instance, that an internship will transition into a full-time job. Throughout the internship, preceptors and students should work to be explicit with hopes and expectations.

While an internship can be a valuable learning experience and a way to build connections, it's important to set realistic expectations for interns that full-time job offers are not guaranteed at the end of an internship.. Hiring decisions depend on many factors, including organizational needs, available funding, and long-term planning.

Ask yourself, “Why do I want an intern?”

If the answer is one or more of the following, you have a strong reason to hire a student:

- To create a pool of potential hires who already know your organization's work norms
- To pay forward the training you received as a young person
- To improve your staff's supervision, mentorship, and leadership skills
- To bring in talent with diverse backgrounds and fresh perspectives
- To make a long-term investment in your sector's future workforce

Determine whether you can legally hire an intern.

Review the legal guidelines for internships under the [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) to determine whether you are legally allowed to recruit an intern or if you must hire a paid employee. There are limited circumstances in which an intern may be unpaid. This is a good explainer:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/volunteers-and-interns>

Readiness Checklist for Hosting an Intern

- ☐ Is your organization committed to supporting student training and mentoring?
- ☐ Do you need an agreement with the academic institution? E.g. a Memorandum of Understanding, Certificate of Insurance
- ☐ What organizational policies or procedures do you need to follow?
 - ☐ Is board approval required before committing to a student intern?
 - ☐ Is there a standard internship application process?
 - ☐ What permissions/approvals are required for internships?
 - ☐ What onboarding and training are required for interns?
 - ☐ What financial policies/procedures are in place to support student intern payments?
- ☐ What funding or other form of compensation is available to support an intern?
- ☐ If this is an in-person internship, what does the intern need to do their work? E.g. a computer, desk space, or ID badge
- ☐ Does the intern supervisor have the capacity to meet with an intern consistently?
 - ☐ Is there a second preceptor/intern supervisor who can be available if the primary preceptor is sick or goes on vacation?
- ☐ Is the internship project you have in mind discrete (has a beginning and end), challenging and valuable, with well-defined parameters and successful outcomes?