

Employer Toolkit

A Guide to Developing and
Implementing a High-Quality
Internship Program

February 2026



About this Toolkit

This toolkit was developed in partnership between the Strada Education Foundation and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) to equip employers with the tools needed to start or expand their own internship programs. The toolkit includes how-to guides, checklists, templates, and linked resources that can be adjusted and applied for organizations of all sizes and in all industries.

Many of the tools provided in this guide have been sourced from a variety of different states, institutions, and employer-facing organizations that are committed to helping connect more learners with work-based learning opportunities and helping employers strengthen their early talent pipelines.

If you are a Virginia-based employer who would like more in-depth help and support establishing your internship program, beyond what is represented in this guide, please visit vedp.org/internshipsva to contact your Regional Internship Manager.

ABOUT strada

Strada Education Foundation supports programs, policies, and organizations that strengthen connections between postsecondary education and opportunity in the U.S., with a focus on helping people who face the greatest challenges. They advance this mission through research, grantmaking, strategic investments, and public policy solutions. Strada's work is focused on change at large scale across five focus areas: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. Each of these focus areas represents an important dimension of the support, collaboration, and alignment needed to make education-to-employment pathways more accessible and affordable for all current and potential learners.

ABOUT VEDP

VEDP is the state economic development authority for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Created in 1995, VEDP collaborates with local, regional, and state partners to encourage the expansion and diversification of Virginia's economy. VEDP works to accomplish these objectives through a variety of activities, including marketing and lead generation; business retention, expansion, and attraction; trade development; business intelligence; competitive benchmarking; site development; performance-based incentives; and talent solutions.

1

The Business Case for Internships

The Strategic Advantage of Internships	2
Internship Value Chain	3
Enabling Conditions and Core Program Activities	4
Business Value of Internships	5
Stakeholder Alignment	6
Checklist for Developing Programs of Value	7

2

Internships in Virginia

InternshipsVA	9
Compensation Guidance	10
Handshake Partnership	11
Virginia Programs of Study	12
Housing for Interns	13
Regional Early Talent Initiatives	13
Company Spotlight: Branch	14
Company Spotlight: CoStar Group	15

3

Best Practices & Tools

Internship Job Description Template	17
Determining Internship Projects	18
Intern Schedule & Programming	19
Recruiting Best Practices	20
Structuring Interviews	21
Roles & Responsibilities	22
Mentor Guidance	23
Onboarding Checklist	24
Supervisor Feedback	25
Internship Surveys	26
Converting Interns to Full-time Employees	27

Contributing Resources & Materials	29
------------------------------------	----

1

The Business Case for Internships



The Strategic Advantage of Internships

Internships are a way to help your organization build a future-proof talent pipeline and should be a component of your overall talent strategy. Research continues to prove that internships aren't only about investing in your community they are also strategic investments with measurable outcomes for your business.¹

RECRUITMENT	RETENTION	ROI
 50–60% of eligible interns convert to full-time employees	 Interns who convert to employees are 1.5X more likely to be with the organization after 1 year	 80% of employers rank internships as their #1 talent source for return on investment

American Workforce Expectations: Demand for Quality Programs²

The American public, including workers, consumers, shareholders, and communities, broadly supports internship and apprenticeship programs. Polling shows that people view companies offering these opportunities more favorably and consider these roles to be valuable training experiences.



¹ NACE ["Unpaid Internships and the Need for Federal Action."](#)

² JUST Capital ["From Transactional to Transformational: Closing the Gap Between Worker Expectations and Experience for Internships and Apprenticeships."](#)

Internship Value Chain³

Conceptualized in 1985 by economist Michael Porter⁴, value chains can help business leaders understand how activities and conditions within their organizations can create value. A variation of a value chain can help employers visualize all of the conditions and activities organizations can influence to move an internship program from idea to reality, understanding where value is added at each point. The value chain includes:

- **Enabling conditions** that reflect the factors and environments that maximize program effectiveness and impact.
- **Core activities** that describe processes that create direct value for the business.
- **Business value** includes key measures that translate into meaningful benefits to the organization.

Internship Value Chain

Enabling Conditions

- **Address Business Problems:**
Address key strategic business needs
- **Secure Executive Sponsorship and Advocacy:**
Leadership buy-in and commitment to development of early talent
- **Create Cross-Functional Integration:**
Alignment and ongoing processes between HR departments, Finance, and business leaders to ensure success
- **Leverage External Partnerships:**
Developing relationships with education partners and leveraging publicly available funds

Core Program Activities

- **Address Business Problems**
Address key strategic business needs
- **Secure Executive Sponsorship and Advocacy**
Leadership buy-in and commitment to development of early talent
- **Create Cross-Functional Integration**
Alignment and ongoing processes between HR departments, Finance, and business leaders to ensure success
- **Leverage External Partnerships**
Developing relationships with education partners and leveraging publicly available funds

Business Value

- **Attraction & Conversion**
- **Readiness**
- **Retention & Engagement**
- **Workload & Capacity**
- **Leadership Development**
- **Innovation & Adaptability**
- **Employer Brand Value**
- **Community & Industry Development**

In the next few pages, this framework is used to organize and present themes from employer research on maximizing the value of internships, going into detail on common design principles and practices associated with effective internships.

What is an “effective” internship program?

We define “effective” programs as those deemed by the organization supporting the program as having positive value, support, and long-term sustainability within their organization. Effective internship programs have four key characteristics³:

Clear learning and performance outcomes

Consistent supervision and structured evaluation for interns

Clear lines of responsibility and governance

Create visibility with leadership and operations

³ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)

⁴ Michael Porter, *The Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, 1985

Enabling Conditions for Success⁵

There are four key factors to consider for business leaders looking to create optimal conditions for an effective internship program:

Address Business Problems	Secure Sponsorship and Advocacy	Create Cross-Functional Integration	Leverage External Partnerships
Misalignment of business needs to program design and outcomes is often cited as a common cause of program failure. Therefore, it is important for the business problems the program is addressing to be explicitly named upfront to ensure alignment and revisited over time as problems are solved and business needs change.	Executives set the tone, expectations and priorities for organizations. Their support, and their view of internships as a critical lever for talent and competitiveness, are key ingredients for thriving programs. Sponsorship keeps a program alive; advocacy makes it matter within the organization. Without sponsorship and advocacy, even well-designed programs can stall when conditions change.	Internship programs work best when they are embedded across the organization, ensuring that recruitment, onboarding, training, and operational teams are all working toward the same goals. This organization-wide integration appears to help internship programs shift from a project into a talent development system, becoming part of how the company does business.	No employer operates in isolation. Effective internship programs often depend on networks of education institutions, workforce intermediaries, and often, public programs that prepare, connect, and support interns before they ever walk through an employer's door. When done right, schools can serve as both pipeline partners and learning collaborators, but without alignment, partnerships can be a burden to sustainable programming.

Core Program Activities⁶

Research has identified four important activities employers can do in delivering impact through their internship programs.

Prepare and Support Managers	Allocate Resources	Collect Data and Measure Outcomes
Managers and supervisors are a critical link between program design and intern success. Employer who prepare managers:	When costs are fully scoped, aligned to strategy, and tied to measurable returns, programs become easier to defend and scale. Costs typically fall into three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intern Costs (wages, lodging, equipment, events, etc) ▪ Supervision Costs (manager wages & training, lost productivity) ▪ Program Administration (program team wages, vendors,, etc) 	Effective programs earn their keep by creating benefits for the business and solving real business programs. Consider practices that can enable effective measurement in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create feedback loops and quality assurance ▪ Integrate with HR Systems ▪ Learn, and act, from data

⁵ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)

⁶ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)

Business Value of Internships⁷

Effective internship programs rely on learning from results. Employers that track key metrics, intern performance, and qualitative experiences can strengthen their programs by gathering solid information and then acting on it. Measurement of the factors listed below can illustrate program performance and drive better decisions for future programming.

BUSINESS VALUE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	SELECTED RELATED METRIC/OUTCOME
Talent Attraction and Conversion	Internships are first and foremost a talent pipeline strategy. These programs make hiring more accurate, less costly, and less risky by exposing both candidate and employer to real working conditions before commitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intern to FTE conversion rate ▪ Critical role volume/vacancy ▪ Cost per hire (intern vs. external)
Increased Readiness	Converted interns typically arrive already trained in systems, tools, and culture. That acceleration reduces the hidden costs of onboarding and speeds contribution to core business functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time to productivity ▪ Reduced onboarding time/costs ▪ Intern skill acquisition
Retention and Engagement	Interns who join companies full-time typically stay longer, perform better, and show stronger attachment to company culture. The shared experiences built during internships can also translate into stronger peer networks and workplace satisfaction long after conversion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Retention rates at 6, 12+ months ▪ Reduction in early attrition ▪ Employee/intern engagement scores
Workload and Capacity	Interns can also generate real value through their work and productivity, contributing to the bottom line and creating capacity for current staff to complete their tasks more quickly, or focus on responsibilities that may have been put on the back burner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intern contributions to production goals, deliverables, etc ▪ Reduction in delays, backlogs
Internal Leadership Development	Supervising interns is also an investment in the company's current workforce. Managers gain structured opportunities to practice leadership, delegation, and feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Growth in internal manager skills ▪ Advancement among intern supervisors ▪ Intern satisfaction with managers
Increased Innovation and Adaptability	Many employers describe interns as catalysts for new thinking. Their questions and curiosity often reveal inefficiencies or opportunities that long-time employees cease to notice. This infusion of perspective helps organizations evolve, strengthening adaptability in rapidly changing markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intern-driven innovations adopted ▪ Manager-reported contribution of intern ideas
Improved Employer Brand Value	Employers are using internships to shape how students perceive their brands, their cultures, and their values, and they are very aware that the experience needs to be mutual. For some companies, this brand-building extends beyond recruitment. Even if an intern never applies for a full-time role, their positive experience becomes a form of reputational currency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intern Net Promoter Score (NPS) ▪ Customer satisfaction ratings ▪ External recognition/awards
Enhanced Community and Industry Development	Some companies also view internships as an essential contribution to sector health. These motivations reinforce the system-level benefits of internships: a more capable workforce, stronger industry networks, and shared capacity across employers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction in regional talent shortages ▪ Economic mobility indicators (wage growth, unemployment, etc)

⁷ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)

Stakeholder Alignment

Each stakeholder should be aware of the key role they play in helping to maximize internship program value:

Program Leaders

Take the lead on bringing key stakeholders into the development and support of your program, leveraging the Internship Value Chain and accompanying checklists as a guide to ensure core components are addressed.

Senior Managers and Hiring Managers

Identify business problems that a strong early talent pipeline can help to address. Work with program managers and cross-functional teams to identify metrics that will show impact on business value overtime. Support program effectiveness by allocating resources appropriately.

Executives

Ensure that your commitment to the program is clear and visible. Your sponsorship and advocacy for the program will help to create the organizational alignment and support that will be necessary for delivering business value over time.

Intermediaries & Education Partners

Understand the business problems that your programs are addressing and help your employer partners to think about the enabling conditions and core program activities that lead to business value. Help employers with designing skill development activities that will support their intended business outcomes. Surface external partnership opportunities that might help employer partners leverage publicly available funds.

Checklist for Developing Internship Programs of Value

On the next page, you will find a Checklist for Developing Internship Programs of Value to add to your toolbox. Leveraging the main elements of the Internship Value Chain, this checklist was designed for employers who are seeking to develop effective internship programs, helping them understand where the organization is today and to prioritize next actions.

The goal is to ensure the right components are in place, and position programs to provide the greatest value for businesses and learners.

⁸ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)

Checklist for Developing Internship Programs of Value

STATUS	TASK	INTERNSHIP VALUE CHAIN ELEMENT
ESTABLISH ENABLING CONNECTIONS		
	Define business problems the internship program must address to align with priorities and vision.	Address Business Problems
	Determine metrics that are aligned to intended program objectives that are most important to your business.	
	Elevate/identify an executive sponsor to champion internships at the enterprise level.	Secure Executive Sponsorship and Advocacy
	Ensure sponsorship is formalized and visible through recurring updates and involvement.	
	Encourage executives to mentor, visit, and share with interns.	
	Work with supervisors and managers to understand what they are looking for in interns' skills and capabilities – ensure those attributes are accurately reflected in position descriptions and job postings.	Create Cross-Functional Integration
	Determine availability of public resources to offset the costs of providing internships, and whether program eligibility requirements align to company talent needs.	Leverage External Partnerships
SET UP CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES		
	Define clear learning and performance objectives with each intern.	Deliver Effective Programs
	Implement a standard orientation and feedback process.	
	Assign dedicated staff to oversee the program, especially for consistency and logistics.	
	Gather participant and manager feedback after every cycle.	
	Provide training and resources for all supervising managers.	Prepare and Support Managers
	Collect manager feedback for continuous improvement.	
	Establish an internship budget line tied to workforce objectives, regardless of centralized vs. decentralized approach. Account for all WBL costs.	Allocate Funds and Resources
	Assign dedicated coordination staff or FTE fraction.	
	Assess supervisor capacity and project/work availability to set realistic program size.	
	Establish standardized expectations and checklists for interns and managers to ensure consistency across departments.	
	Conduct surveys or structured debriefs with interns, supervisors, and partners during and after each cycle.	
	Use findings to inform adjustments in program design, supervision, and communication.	

⁷ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. *Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers* (forthcoming)



Internships in Virginia



InternshipsVA

InternshipsVA, administered by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, helps employers design and launch high-quality, paid internships that not only build strong local talent pipelines but help keep talented college students in Virginia after graduation.

Our Available Assistance Includes:



Support from our Regional Internship Managers to create or expand internship programs with Virginia employers



Promotion of paid internship opportunities on Handshake, our InternshipsVA partner and the largest career network for early talent



Ongoing training and resources on various topics to support internship programs



Connections with higher education institutions for on-campus recruitment and other student engagement opportunities



Grant funding for 50% of an intern's wages to support employers with 150 or fewer Virginia employees

To learn more about each of these opportunities for assistance, visit vedp.org/internshipsva.

Sample Digital Ads



Compensation Guidance

Why Pay Interns?

Compensation is a critical component of a quality internship. Paid experiences create equal opportunities for all students to participate, especially those supporting themselves and their families. Unpaid internships often force students to choose between pursuing long-term career goals and ensuring short-term financial stability.

Interns should be assigned projects that deliver real business impact and be compensated for the value they provide to the company. Compensation fosters a sense of ownership for both the intern and the organization. Offering paid internships also increases interest in the role, expands the candidate pool, and improves the likelihood of finding the ideal candidate. Course credit should not be considered a substitute for pay.

What Laws Govern Pay in Virginia?

Federal

Both paid and unpaid internship programs are subject to applicable federal and state labor regulations including:

- The [Fair Labor Standards Act](#)
- The [IRS Worker Classification](#) rules for W2 employees vs 1099 independent contractors

Virginia⁹

The Virginia Worker's Compensation Commission considers an individual as an employee if:

- They are selected
- They can be dismissed
- They earn pay or wages
- Control is exercised over how the work is performed

Virginia minimum wage is \$12.77/ hour as of January 2026 with an anticipated annual increase calculated using the Consumer Price Index.

Interns working more than 40 hours/week must be compensated time and a half for hours worked in excess of 40, unless they qualify for an overtime exemption.

How Should Employers Budget for Interns?

According to research by the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), 90% of employers compensate their interns.¹⁰ Most employers source funding from their HR or business-line budgets, but many also blend with external sources of funding.

To get started with building your internship budget:

- Utilize the [Living Wage Calculator](#) to determine appropriate wages in your region.
- Consider internal budget capacity, particularly within business lines that have the greatest business need for intern projects.
- Assess what external sources of funding you may be eligible for such as the InternshipsVA matching grant program.

Sources of Funding to Pay Interns¹⁰:

- 26%: Internal HR only
- 22%: Internal department only
- 20%: Mix of internal/external
- 13%: Mix of internal
- 10%: Unpaid
- 7%: Third-party only

⁹ [Virginia Department of Labor and Industry](#) and [Virginia Workers Compensation Commission](#)

¹⁰ BHEF ["Expanding Internships: Harnessing Employer Insights to Boost Opportunity and Enhance Learning"](#)

Handshake

Handshake Partnership

The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) is partnering with Handshake, the largest career network for early talent. Combined with InternshipsVA's regional approach to employer engagement, Handshake will play a vital role in VEDP's strategy to connect Virginia's students and graduates with high-quality internships and careers in the Commonwealth.

VEDP's collaboration with Handshake is the first-of-its-kind partnership between the platform and a state. As a central hub for student and employer access, Handshake will provide VEDP with insight into internship outcomes and enable VEDP to measure impact, strengthen internship pipelines, and accelerate progress toward establishing Virginia as the Top State for Talent.

Handshake will provide notable benefits for companies as well:

Free and Accessible

Posting an internship opportunity on Handshake is **free** for all companies.

Strong Talent Pool

Handshake is used by **more than 70%** of Virginia's leading colleges and universities.

Broad Reach

By posting in Handshake, employers can reach **over 600,000** students in Virginia.

Promoting your Internship Posting on Handshake

To ensure your organization's internship opportunities are promoted to all undergraduate students at all of Virginia's higher education institutions, be sure to include the following statement in your internship posting:

"[Organization Name] is a proud participant in the InternshipsVA program. #InVA"

Including this sentence and hashtag in your internship posting will ensure you appear in VEDP's curated list of promoted internships.

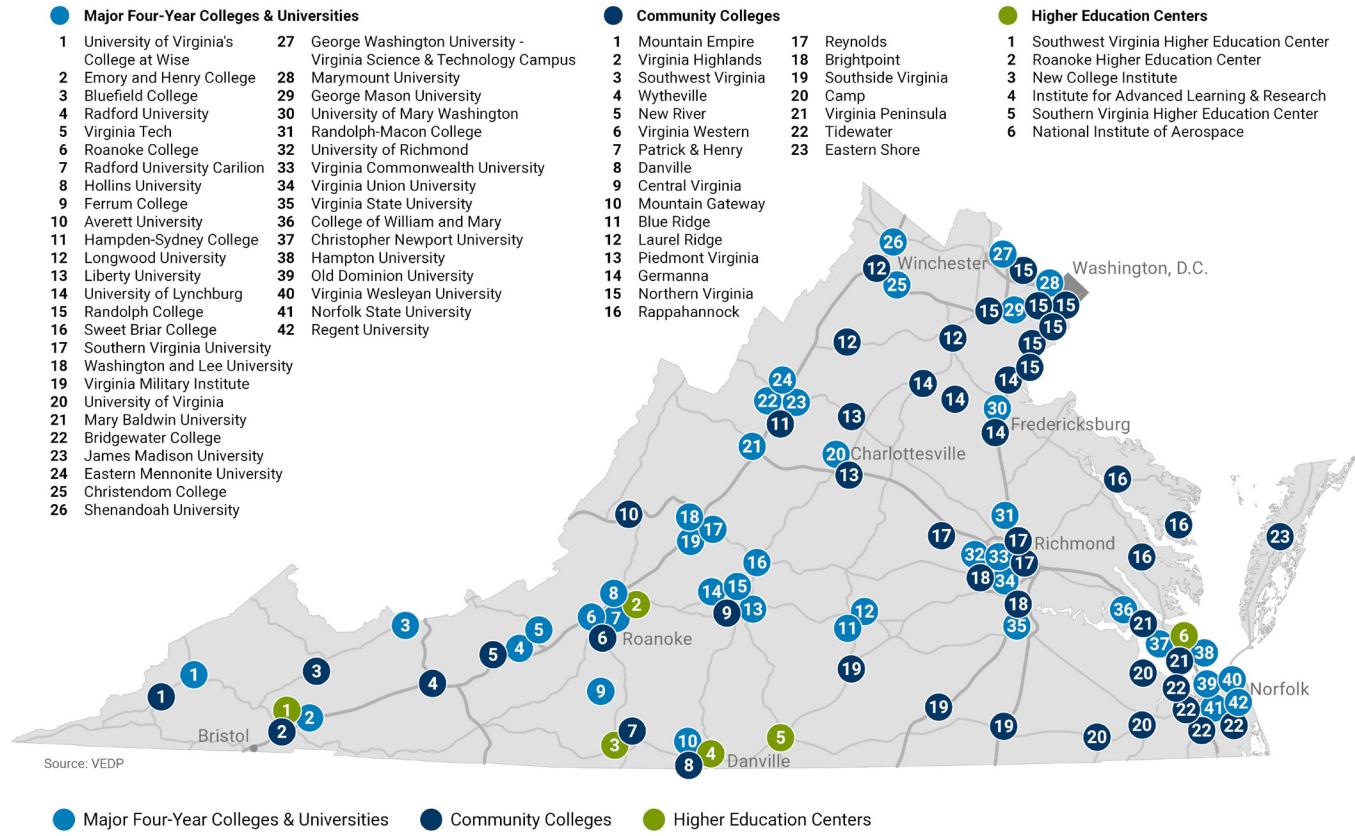
If your organization qualifies for the InternshipsVA matching grant, please note in your posting that you are seeking an intern currently enrolled at a Virginia higher education institution or intending to enroll in the upcoming semester. Interns must have a high school diploma and cannot have already completed their undergraduate degree. Employers are responsible for sourcing, selecting, onboarding, and hiring interns, either directly or through a staffing service of the employer's choice, as well as managing the interns. Interns hired as 1099 contractors do not qualify for the matching grant program.

Download the Employer Guide at vedp.org/internshipsva for guidance on posting internship opportunities in Handshake and the benefits of participating in the InternshipsVA brand.

Virginia Programs of Study

Virginia's higher education system, consistently ranked as one of the best in the country, is well established as an elite talent incubator. More than 70 higher education institutions span the Commonwealth, offering abundant opportunities for Virginia employers to collaborate with and recruit students.

#1 Top State for Business — Education 2025 **CNBC**



Virginia's colleges, universities, and community colleges offer a wide range of programs of study.

Virginia's 23 community colleges provide associate degrees, certificates, and workforce training in fields such as: Arts & Humanities, Business and Management, Health Sciences, Technology and Engineering, Skilled Trades, Public Service, and other specialized fields. All community colleges have guaranteed admissions agreements with more than 30 universities, making it easier for students to transition from associate degrees to bachelor's programs.

Virginia's public and private colleges and universities offer hundreds of undergraduate and graduate programs in fields such as: STEM, Health Professions, Business, Social Sciences and Humanities, Arts, and other specialized fields.

A full list of Virginia's higher education institutions including website links and profiles, is maintained on the [State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's website](#).

Housing for Interns

Short-term housing can be a significant challenge for college students pursuing internships away from where they live or attend school. Internships often last only a few months, making it difficult to secure affordable, flexible housing options in competitive rental markets. Many landlords require long leases, upfront deposits, or income levels students can't meet. As a result, students may face financial strain, long commutes, or even turning down valuable internship opportunities simply because they cannot find a workable place to stay.

Many higher education institutions in Virginia are working together to expand access to on-campus summer housing for students completing internships away from their home campuses. By opening residence halls to visiting interns from other colleges and universities, these institutions aim to reduce a major barrier to participation in high-quality, career-building experiences. This collaborative approach not only supports students who might otherwise struggle to secure short-term housing, but also helps employers attract a broader and more diverse pool of interns from programs across the state - strengthening talent pipelines and increasing equitable access to opportunities.

[**Summer Internship Housing**](#). More institutions will be added as housing arrangements are finalized.

Regional Early Talent Initiatives

Helping interns access community and professional networking opportunities can significantly increase an employer's ability to convert interns into committed full-time employees. When interns feel connected to the organization, to the region, and to other early-career professionals, they build stronger relationships and a deeper sense of belonging. These experiences foster loyalty, reinforce positive impressions of the workplace culture, and help interns envision themselves building a long-term future with the organization. Interns who develop roots in the community are also more likely to stay after graduation, reducing turnover and strengthening employers' talent pipelines.

To support this, employers can intentionally connect interns with local and regional chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, young-professional networks, and community partners that host events, mentorship programs, social activities, and leadership opportunities. These groups offer interns a chance to meet peers, explore the region, and build professional networks that extend beyond the internship.

To find available opportunities in your region, ask your local chamber of commerce or your economic development department about young professionals networks or other relevant initiatives in the region. Many regional chambers also maintain directories of affiliated groups and community partners, making it easy for employers to identify the most active networks and plug their interns into meaningful experiences.



Company Spotlight: Branch

Branch is a full-service commercial construction solutions partner, providing design-build, heavy/highway construction, building development, construction management, structures, general contracting services, specialty metal fabrication, and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing.



300
Employees



HQ
Roanoke

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Branch offers a 9-week summer rotational program that gives interns exposure to multiple areas of the industry, helping them discover what they enjoy and where they see themselves after graduation. This structure also allows the company to expand and maintain a consistent experience across all regional locations while incorporating Branch culture through web-based professional development sessions and in-person onboarding and offboarding.

WHY THEY INVEST

Branch's internship program allows the company to conduct a meaningful talent evaluation as interns work on active projects. This ensures that every intern who converts to a full-time employee is a proven hire with low turnover risk and an immediate ability to contribute. To support retention, offer letters are prepared before internships end. In 2025, Branch hosted 37 interns, extended return offers to 78% of them, and within three months, 62% had accepted.



I can confidently say that our leadership views our internship program as an essential strategic pipeline, and a non-negotiable investment, for the future of our company. In a highly competitive market like commercial construction, internships are the most strategic and cost-effective tool we have for easing hiring risk.

Beyond talent acquisition, the program actively strengthens our company by driving innovation. Interns bring fresh perspectives that challenge long-standing assumptions, keeping our operating practices modern and competitive. Furthering development, we task our existing and experienced workforce with mentorship responsibilities that build upon their coaching and management skills. Equally ensuring we are continuously developing our current workforce while actively developing our next generation of leaders from within. Our program is the best way to secure the high-quality, long-term talent needed to sustain our growth.

- **Kenna Smith**, Director of Talent Acquisition and Development, Branch



Company Spotlight: CoStar Group

CoStar Group is a global leader in commercial real estate information, analytics, online marketplaces and 3D digital twin technology. Included in the S&P 500 Index and the NASDAQ 100, CoStar Group is on a mission to digitize the world's real estate, empowering all people to discover properties, insights and connections that improve their businesses and lives.



8,300+
Employees



HQ
Arlington

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Each summer, CoStar welcomes approximately 90–100 interns across six departments—Technology, Research, Finance, Marketing, Homes.com Content, and Internal Communications—into five offices, including Richmond, VA. Interns work on meaningful projects, receive technical and professional training, and participate in networking events. Many interns transition into full-time roles after graduation, which is a key success metric.

WHY THEY INVEST

Internships are a cornerstone of CoStar's talent strategy. They allow the company to cultivate emerging professionals, bring fresh perspectives into teams, and strengthen the pipeline for future hires. CoStar's internship program thrives because of strong leadership support, robust training, and a culture that values continuous learning. Many interns return as full-time employees, and the high conversion rate contributes to the company's long-term growth and innovation.



Internships are more than a summer experience—they're an investment in the future of our industry and our company.

At CoStar, we see incredible value in developing early-career talent and creating pathways for them to thrive.

- **Anna Reed**, Director, Campus Programming, CoStar Group

3

**Best
Practices
& Tools**

Intern Job Description Template

Job descriptions offer an opportunity to highlight what skills are required for the intern's success, what skills they will have an opportunity to build, and why the organization is a great place to work. Crafting the job description gives you the opportunity to think about the types of projects you will want the intern to complete and what skills you are looking for in an ideal candidate.

VEDP's [Regional Internship Managers](#) are available to help you craft a compelling internship posting.

[Position Title]

Why [Organization]

[Insert 3-5 sentences that clearly explain your organization, its mission, purpose, why it's a great place to work, etc.]

Internship Purpose

[Insert 2-3 sentences outlining the overall internship purpose and tasks.]

Responsibilities

[Share a bulleted list of specific duties that the intern will complete. Projects outlined should add real value to the organization with measurable impact. Include language to allow for additional opportunities based on the candidates' interests, when possible.]

What You Will Learn

[Share a bulleted list of what the intern will learn, including the skills they can expect to build.]

What You'll Need to Get the Job Done

[List any required skills for the internship. Also list areas where you would like the applicant to have some interest, familiarity, or have completed coursework.]

Location and Schedule

[Share if the role is virtual, hybrid, or in-person. Provide address, if relevant. Share the start and end date of the internship, including any flexibility in changing those dates. Note if the role is full-time or part-time, including the anticipated hours / week.]

Compensation

[Share the compensation structure.]

Additional Information / Benefits / Why Students Should Apply

[Include any additional benefits available during the internship (ex. transportation reimbursements, meal subsidies, professional development, housing, paid holidays, etc.) as well as highlight any unique experiences the organization will make available to the intern. Clearly communicate the application process and deadline.]

Sample Internship Job Descriptions¹¹

- [Marketing](#)
- [Data Security](#)
- [Customer Experience](#)
- [IT](#)
- [Software Development](#)
- [AI Engineering](#)
- [Human Resources](#)

¹¹ Bamboo HR "Definitive Guide to Creating an Internship Program"

Determining Internship Projects

Internships should meet both the organization's needs and the student's goals, ensuring that the work provides meaningful value. The length of the internship should be determined by these needs.

Example internship experiences include:¹²

MICRO INTERNSHIPS	TRADITIONAL INTERNSHIPS	
<p>Short-term, project-based experiences that are typically connected to specific coursework.</p> <p>Micro-Internships can take place throughout the school year. They are typically 10-40 hours of work over a 1-4 week period.</p>	<p>Immersive experience that allows the student to get embedded into the organization with a structured program.</p> <p>Traditional internships usually take place over the summer for 8-12 weeks with the intern working full-time during this period.</p>	 <p>Food for Thought: The InternshipsVA matching grant program supports qualifying employers offering paid internships that are at least 120 hours and 8 weeks long.</p>
SEMESTER INTERNSHIPS	REMOTE INTERNSHIPS	
<p>Extension of a traditional experience, allowing the student and the business more time to learn from each other and accomplish goals.</p> <p>Can be positioned as a co-op experience that is full-time during the semester or a flexible experience with the student working part time during the semester.</p>	<p>Provides students and employers the opportunity to work together across geographies.</p> <p>Most internship types can be offered in a remote or hybrid format. However, employers should pay special attention to the intern experience in a remote setting, ensuring that they still have strong internal support networks.</p>	<p>Experiences can build on themselves. For example, a micro-internship can turn into a traditional experience. This is a great way to keep strong candidates engaged.</p>

Tools for Identifying Intern Projects

Knowing what you expect of the intern helps you choose the right internship experience for your team, establish a clear timeline, and determine what to emphasize in the job description.

- [Intern Work Plan Template¹³](#)

Use to map out projects, key tasks, deadlines, key partners, and additional notes to share with your intern.

- [Demonstrating Need Template¹⁴](#)

Use to think about tasks that could be delegated to an intern and identify estimated time for each.

Best Practice: At the beginning of the internship, connect with your intern to learn what skills and experiences they are hoping to gain so you can identify which of your projects might best help them meet those goals.

¹² The Intern Nebraska Program. ["Employer's Guidebook to Developing a Successful Internship Program"](#)

¹³ Work and Learn Indiana. ["The Indiana Employer's Guide to Internships"](#)

¹⁴ Parker Dewey. ["Demonstrating Need for an Intern"](#)

Intern Schedule & Programming

As you coordinate the schedule and programming for your internship, it will be important to consider the varying stages of intern development. Below you will find a guide outlining the stages of internship development¹⁵ with accompanying actions you can take at each stage. Please note that these stages are based on a 3-month internship and are broad estimates that can be adjusted as you learn about your intern(s).

TIMING	INTERN DEVELOPMENT	SUPPORTING ACTIONS
Week 1: Anticipation	As interns starts their internship, they feel excited and highly motivated, while at the same time nervous and self-doubting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onboard your intern and introduce their first project Take an interest in their learning goals Support their adjustment from classroom to workplace Make yourself available for questions
Weeks 2–4: Exploration	Interns will start learning new information and establish their workplace identity. They may feel overloaded with information and/or underutilized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support your intern in quickly learning the organization's operations and understanding the context of their work Provide clear guidance for tasks Encourage regular questions Set an expectation that their feeling is normal
Weeks 5–10: Contribution	Interns eventually feel more settled in their role, becoming more productive in their tasks and even in seeking out new projects on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create spaces for the intern to share new ideas Acknowledge and celebrate productivity on assigned tasks Support their participation in additional professional development opportunities (ex. networking, trainings, etc.)
Weeks 11–12: Culmination	At the end of the internship, interns will evaluate their performance and identify transferable skills. They may feel proud of their accomplishments or disappointment in having unmet goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an opportunity for the intern to present their work Encourage self-reflection Offer feedback on their contributions during the internship Share which skills they demonstrated with strength

Additional Programmatic Elements to Consider

Supervisor Cohort Meetings

- Supervisor meetings provide intern managers with opportunities for peer learning and allow them to share feedback with the program team for future improvements.

Intern Cohort Meetings

- Cohort meetings provide interns with opportunities to engage and learn from one another. They also give your program team a valuable chance to gather real-time feedback from interns.

Professional Development Events

- Professional development can include guest speakers, panel discussions, and training presentations. These activities are a great way to help interns expand their professional network.

Relationship Building Events

- Fun networking events that showcase your region such as sports outings or other activities are a great way to build relationships between participants and full-time staff.



Food for Thought:

When there are budget or capacity concerns about offering additional programmatic elements to your internship, consider partnering with other companies in your region or taking advantage of regionally-sponsored programming.

¹⁵ University of Portland: ["Internship Guide for Employers"](#)

Recruiting Best Practices¹⁶

Planning and promoting your internship program well before the intended start date is essential. This allows ample time to attract, interview, and select the right talent for your internship roles. See the general timeline below, but ideally, you should begin promoting your program as early as possible and take advantage of career events offered by local university partners whenever you can.



Online Posting

- The first step to promoting your internship posting will be through an online posting. **The preferred platform for InternshipsVA is Handshake** (reference page 11 for guidance on using Handshake). Updating your presence on other social media platforms like LinkedIn will help you reach a broad audience and legitimize your business.

Career Fairs

- Career Fairs are a great way to market your organization and internship to students and provide applicants with the opportunity to start the application process. Contact the Career Service Office at your preferred schools to learn about timing and costs.

Employer Presentations

- Presenting on-campus is an opportunity for your organization to provide greater insight into your organization and allow students to ask questions. This is a great way to build interest in your internship program before participating in the career fair or launching the application. Contact the Career Service Office at your preferred schools to learn about opportunities.

On Campus Interviews

- Career Services Offices can help you coordinate an on-campus interview day by providing space to conduct interviews and assisting in sourcing applicants who meet your internship qualifications.

¹⁶ Work and Learn Indiana. ["The Indiana Employer's Guide to Internships"](#) (Adapted)

Structuring Interviews

Interviewing candidates for internships is like hiring for any other role within your organization. Discussions should be focused on the skills, experiences, and interests that are important for success in the role.

BEST PRACTICE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Use behavioral and situational interview questions to allow candidates to speak to their skills and experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify required skills ▪ Identify ideal areas of interests ▪ Plan for about 3-5 questions in a 30-minute interview ▪ Ask the same questions of all candidates
<p>Evaluate candidates using an interview rubric to help reduce bias and evaluate candidates based on your preferred skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Populate preferred skills and experiences into rubric prior to starting interviews ▪ Ensure each reviewer uses this template to evaluate candidates ▪ Calibrate ratings across the hiring team to ensure there is a common understanding of the defined categories and how you're evaluating them
<p>If conducting an assessment or an interview assignment, (e.g., writing sample, problem set, etc) use a standard and objective evaluation rubric to evaluate those as well</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify if an assessment is necessary to help you best identify candidates with the skills you're seeking ▪ Align on the right assessment/assignment and the skills you want to see highlighted

For Your Toolbox

[Behavioral Interview Tips for Getting Started¹⁷](#)

[30 Behavioral Interview Questions¹⁸](#)

[Guide to Interview Score Sheet \(with template\)¹⁹](#)

[Interview Scorecard Template²⁰](#)

When Assessing Intern Candidates, Look For

- Genuine interest in the organization's mission and values and for the work described in the job description
- Alignment of the internship experience to the candidate's career goals
- Enthusiasm for growth opportunities, with an ability to name specific skills or experiences the candidate wants to gain
- Ability to reflect on and describe how they have learned or demonstrated skills
- Follow-up questions prepared for the interview team

¹⁷ US Chamber. ["Behavioral Interviewing: What it is and Tips for Getting Started"](#)

¹⁸ LinkedIn. ["30 Behavioral Interview Questions to Assess Soft Skills"](#)

¹⁹ Indeed. ["Guide to Interview Scoring Sheets \(with template and sample\)"](#)

²⁰ Bamboo HR. ["Interview Scorecard Template"](#)

Roles & Responsibilities

Delivering an impactful, high-quality internship experience requires collaboration across the organization. Below is a list of roles and responsibilities for your core stakeholder groups.

ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES
HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with hiring supervisor to develop intern job description ▪ Source applicants ▪ Oversee interview process ▪ Oversee onboarding paperwork ▪ Partner with hiring supervisor to identify mentors ▪ Be available to provide consultation as needed ▪ Support feedback conversations with supervisors and interns
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner with HR to develop intern job description ▪ Develop a project plan for the intern's project(s) ▪ Assign tasks and oversee the intern's work product(s) ▪ Identify opportunities for skill building and networking ▪ Serve as the intern's primary point of contact ▪ Schedule weekly check-in meetings with intern ▪ Create space to provide and receive feedback to/from the intern
Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Serve as an additional point of contact for questions intern may have ▪ Schedule at least 3 meetings with the intern during their internship ▪ Show interest in what the intern is experiencing ▪ Ask probing questions to understand with clarity ▪ Provide coaching to support the intern's career goals ▪ Make connections and answer questions to help the intern navigate the organization ▪ Identify opportunities for job shadowing and/or networking

Preparing your Team for Success: Important Considerations

Identify an Internship Coordinator

- Having a main point of contact to coordinate all aspects of the internship experience helps ensure program success. Support this person by freeing up their capacity, especially during peak program periods.

Equip Managers with Trainings

- Well-equipped managers are an essential component of program success. Provide all intern managers with tools and resources to ensure their success and schedule time before the program starts to review those resources and answer questions.

Acknowledge Stakeholder Participation

- Internship programs can also serve as a powerful tool for boosting internal employee engagement. Be sure to recognize all program contributors – managers, mentors, and partners – for their time and effort. Whether through annual reviews or other methods, this acknowledgment goes a long way in reinforcing their commitment.

Mentor Guidance

Mentors play a vital role in helping interns to make the most of their experience by creating a safe space to ask questions and navigate their internship journey. However, the mentor role can feel ambiguous, especially in organizations without an established mentorship program. To support your mentors, we've provided guidance that can serve as a starting point for training.

Asking BIG Questions²¹

One effective way to hold mentorship conversations is by asking open-ended and thought-provoking questions. These questions encourage interns to explore different perspectives and approaches to solving the issue at hand. This method differs from giving advice because the mentor is not telling the intern what to do but rather guiding the intern to think through the challenge and develop their own solution.

Powerful questions prompt the intern to think more deeply, often starting with “what,” “how,” or “tell me about.”

Starting questions with who, what, when, where, or how can help to build a shared understanding.

Avoid starting questions with “why” as doing so often puts people on the defense.

The most powerful questions are positively phrased, solution oriented, and specific.



WHY did you structure the meeting agenda to increase engagement of everyone in the room?



HOW are you thinking about structuring the meeting agenda to increase engagement of everyone in the room?



WHAT are one or two strategies you can incorporate into your meeting agenda to engage each functional team represented in the room and achieve cross-functional alignment?

For your Toolbox

[3 Ways Gen Z is Redefining Mentorship in the Workplace²²](#)

[Mentor Training through MENTOR Virginia²³](#)

[Early Career Mentorship: The Secret to Developing Top Talent²⁴](#)

²¹ Universal Coach Institute. [“The Art of Asking Powerful Coaching Questions”](#)

²² Forbes. [“3 Ways Gen Z is Redefining Mentorship in the 2025 Workplace”](#)

²³ MENTOR Virginia. [“Book a Training Course”](#)

²⁴ Ten Thousand Coffees (10KC). [“Early Career Mentorship: The Secret to Developing Top Talent”](#)

Onboarding Checklist

Interns are only at your organization for a short period of time, making onboarding an important task to help them quickly get up and running. Use the following checklist to prepare for your intern and ensure they are set up for success on their first day.

1-2 WEEKS BEFORE INTERNSHIP START DATE		
STATUS	TASK	SUPPORTING DETAILS
	Collaborate with relevant internal partners to finalize internship program schedule	Ensure onboarding buddies, mentors, and other relevant partners are aware of planned schedule and what will be required of them
	Work with IT to secure equipment, setup email address, and any other relevant technology access	Do this as far in advance as possible since tech access can take time and can negatively impact the onboarding experience if it is not set up in advance
	If relevant, coordinate with your operations team to secure a workspace and building access for your intern (e.g., building or parking pass)	Confirm where the intern can meet you on the first day before they get access
	Schedule time with HR to coordinate onboarding paperwork and any other HR-supported training or orientation	Incorporate these dates and times into first week schedule
	Compile documents that will help the intern get up to speed on their department, their project, and the organization as a whole	Save in a folder for your intern to access when they start
	Build a detailed onboarding schedule to share with your intern for at least their first week	Outline pre-planned meetings, onboarding tasks, standing team meetings, etc.
	Send a welcome letter to your intern	Confirm start date, share expectations for first day (e.g. what time to arrive, where to meet, what to wear, etc.), and share the first week's schedule
	Send a new hire announcement to the organization	Ensure that people are aware there is an intern, when they will be starting, and what they will be working on
DAY 1 OF INTERNSHIP		
	Block off time in the morning to help your intern get settled	Show them around the office, introduce them to colleagues, etc.
	Ensure your intern can access relevant technology	Coordinate time with tech team to support
	Block off time for 1:1 meeting with your intern	Discuss goals, expectations, review projects, review communication norms, and answer questions
	Schedule reoccurring 1:1 check-ins with your intern	Identify the best cadence that works for both of you to ensure you are creating space to answer their questions throughout the internship
	Consider taking your intern out to a welcome lunch	Consider inviting their mentor and/or people they will be working closely with throughout the internship

Supervisor Feedback

Giving and receiving growth-oriented feedback is a practice that supports both the intern and their supervisor's growth and development.

Best Practices



Ground feedback in **observable behaviors and measurable outcomes** to provide greater clarity for taking action.



Avoid using “but” and “however” in your delivery since the listener often hears those words as negating what came before. Try to use “and” instead.



Just in time feedback is a preferred practice as feedback is strongest when it is provided closely after the occurrence.

Feedback Template

SCENARIO	OBSERVATIONS	IMPLICATIONS	SUPPORT
		<p><i>What behaviors did you observe?</i></p>	<p><i>What went well? What could go better?</i></p> <p><i>What actions can they take? How can you support?</i></p>

Example Scenario

An intern recently gave a great presentation. They answered every question accurately while looking at the floor.

Share Observations

- “Thank you for presenting at yesterday’s team meeting. You did a great job answering everyone’s questions. I noticed when answering, you were often looking down at the ground.”

Name Implications

- “You clearly demonstrated your expertise in the subject and looking at the ground can lower your audience’s engagement in your responses.”

Provide Direction Support

- “Next time, I encourage you to make eye contact with at least one person in the room. As you practice this skill, I’m happy to be that person for you and am open to hearing how else I can be supportive.”

Internship Surveys

Continuous improvement is a core factor in long-term program sustainability for programs of all sizes. Evaluating your program regularly helps you remain nimble and adjust based on participant and stakeholder impact and it also positions you to track performance overtime.

DELIVERY	TIMING	
<p>Use a digital survey tool to gather survey responses to help with distribution, data analysis, and tracking changes over time.</p> <p>Consider Microsoft Forms, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, Google Forms or any existing internal survey tools your organization may already be using.</p>	<p>A mid-point survey allows you to make necessary adjustments during the program. An end of program survey gives you baseline data to make improvements for next year.</p> <p>Keep core survey questions consistent across audiences to enable comparison over time.</p>	 <p>Food for Thought: In addition to gathering feedback on program experience, it is important to schedule time for supervisors to provide feedback on their intern's overall performance. This is particularly important for programs that plan to extend full-time offers or invite interns to return for an extended internship.</p>
CONTENT	AUDIENCE	
<p>When crafting your survey questions, consider metrics of success that will be most important for you and your leadership team.</p> <p>Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a strong evaluative metric used by many companies to assess the internship experience.</p>	<p>In addition to surveying interns, you should also survey internship supervisors and mentors as key stakeholders for your program success.</p> <p>Don't forget to gather feedback from other key stakeholders, including cross-functional partners who play a critical role in the program's success.</p>	

Sample Mid-Point Survey Questions

- How satisfied are you with your current internship experience?
- To what extent is participating in the internship program helping you achieve your personal and professional growth goals?
- How would you rate the communication between you and your intern/supervisor?
- Do you feel that the frequency of meetings and interactions with your intern/supervisor is appropriate for your needs?
- What specific aspects of the internship program have been most beneficial to you? (open ended)
- What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in your internship experience? (open ended)

For your Toolbox

[Getting the Most Out of Intern Surveys²⁵](#)

[Sample Intern End of Program Evaluation²⁶](#)

[Sample Supervisor End of Program Evaluation²⁷](#)

[Toolkit with Sample Intern Survey Templates²⁸](#)

²⁵ NACE. ["Getting the Most Out of Intern Surveys"](#)

²⁶ Work and Learn Indiana. ["Final Internship Evaluation by Intern"](#)

²⁷ Work and Learn Indiana. ["Final Intern Evaluation by Intern Supervisor"](#)

²⁸ Bamboo HR. ["Intern Experience Survey Kit"](#)

Converting Interns to Full-time Employees

Strengthening your talent pipeline and identifying strong full-time employees is one of the most valuable outcomes of internship programs. To successfully extend full-time offers, collaborate with HR and business leaders to anticipate potential full-time openings that could be filled by converted interns. Below is general guidance on how to approach converting interns to full-time roles.

Best Practices



Use **manager and mentor evaluations** to determine whether to extend a full-time offer after graduation.



If possible, extend an offer **before the internship ends** so the intern has clarity when returning to campus.



If the intern is not graduating or you are unable to extend a full-time offer, make sure you **have a plan to maintain contact**. Consider offering a part-time role during the school year to keep them engaged.

Tips for Successfully Transitioning an Intern to a Full-Time Employee²⁹

EXPLAIN THE NEW ROLE

Take time to explain the role and outline expectations for success both before the intern signs the offer and after they begin the role.

Typically, the work they did as an intern will be different from what they do in a full-time role.

PROVIDE A MENTOR

Match the full-time employee with a mentor who is not their direct supervisor to answer questions as they navigate their new role.

This can be the same mentor they were paired with as an intern but does not have to be. Think carefully about the pairing to help ensure success.

PROVIDE TRAINING

Proper training and a new hire orientation will be important to help position the full-time employee for success in the role.

While the intern will be starting with baseline knowledge on the organization, it is important to give them time and space to properly onboard as a full-time employee.

INSTILL CONFIDENCE

Let the full-time employee take ownership of their work to help them build confidence and establish themselves within the organization.

Provide just in time feedback as they take on their first tasks to help make adjustments as needed and maintain lines of open communication and a culture of feedback.

²⁹ Nebraska Department of Economic Development. ["Employer's Guide to Developing a Successful Internship Program"](#)

Contributing Materials

Resources & Contributing Materials

¹ NACE ["Unpaid Internships and the Need for Federal Action."](#)

² JUST Capital ["From Transactional to Transformational: Closing the Gap Between Worker Expectations and Experience for Internships and Apprenticeships"](#)

³ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers (forthcoming)

⁴ Michael Porter, *The Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, 1985

⁵ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers (forthcoming)

⁶ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers (forthcoming)

⁷ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers (forthcoming)

⁸ Strada Education Foundation & UpSkill America. Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice from Employers (forthcoming)

⁹ [Virginia Department of Labor and Industry](#) and [Virginia Workers Compensation Commission](#)

¹⁰ BHEF ["Expanding Internships: Harnessing Employer Insights to Boost Opportunity and Enhance Learning"](#)

¹¹ Bamboo HR ["Definitive Guide to Creating an Internship Program"](#)

¹² The Intern Nebraska Program. ["Employer's Guidebook to Developing a Successful Internship Program"](#)

¹³ Work and Learn Indiana. ["The Indiana Employer's Guide to Internships"](#)

¹⁴ Parker Dewey. ["Demonstrating Need for an Intern"](#)

¹⁵ University of Portland: ["Internship Guide for Employers"](#)

¹⁶ Work and Learn Indiana. ["The Indiana Employer's Guide to Internships"](#) (Adapted)

¹⁷ US Chamber. ["Behavioral Interviewing: What it is and Tips for Getting Started"](#)

¹⁸ LinkedIn. ["30 Behavioral Interview Questions to Assess Soft Skills"](#)

¹⁹ Indeed. ["Guide to Interview Scoring Sheets \(with template and sample\)"](#)

²⁰ Bamboo HR. ["Interview Scorecard Template"](#)

²¹ Universal Coach Institute. ["The Art of Asking Powerful Coaching Questions"](#)

²² Forbes. ["3 Ways Gen Z is Redefining Mentorship in the 2025 Workplace"](#)

²³ MENTOR Virginia ["Book a Training Course"](#)

²⁴ Ten Thousand Coffees (10KC). ["Early Career Mentorship: The Secret to Developing Top Talent"](#)

²⁵ NACE. ["Getting the Most Out of Intern Surveys"](#)

²⁶ Work and Learn Indiana. ["Final Internship Evaluation by Intern"](#)

²⁷ Work and Learn Indiana. ["Final Intern Evaluation by Intern Supervisor"](#)

²⁸ Bamboo HR. ["Intern Experience Survey Kit"](#)

²⁹ Nebraska Department of Economic Development. ["Employer's Guide to Developing a Successful Internship Program"](#)

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