

IAEM Internship Guidelines for Employers



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Disclaimer

This guide will provide practical information regarding internships. The information contained herein may help your agency decide whether or not to pursue an intern placement within your organization; it is not designed to provide legal advice.

What is an internship?

An internship is an opportunity for an entry-level professional to gain real-world experience while pursuing a college education. Internships may be required in order for a student to complete a college program or may be sought by recent college graduates desiring to gain experience before entering the job market.

Paid or Volunteer (Unpaid) Internship

Internships in the public and non-profit sectors may be paid or unpaid; while those in the private sector should be paid. Some college programs require paid internships. The Internship Coordinator at the respective College/University will be able to assist you with those requirements. Your Human Resources Department or legal counsel should also be able to provide guidance to ensure compliance.

The U.S. Department of Labor provides the following guidance regarding the application of the Fair Labor Standards Act to internships. If all six of these factors are met, an employment relationship does NOT exist under the FLSA, and the Act's minimum wage and overtime provisions do not apply to the intern.

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

Benefits to the Host Organization

An internship can provide multiple benefits for the host organization. These include, but are not limited to:

- The host organization receives free or low-cost labor
- Completion of tasks that would normally remain static for an unknown period of time
- Gain of insight and perspective from a member of a new/different generation in the workforce
- Initiation of tasks from an enthusiastic, goal-seeking, potential member of the workforce
- Opportunity to give back to the profession by mentoring future generations of Emergency Managers
- Access to resources (through the academic or private sector providing the intern) not normally available to the host agency
- Establishment of a relationship between the host agency and entity providing intern which may support further activities (research, outreach, publications)
- Depending upon the experience, education, and knowledge of the intern (and whether it is a paid or unpaid internship), some medium-to-high level tasks may be successfully assigned

Private sector internship hosts may also see additional benefits, including:

- Fresh ideas and input from individuals with something to gain -- experience.
- The potential to identify new profit-making ideas.

Benefits to the Intern

Internships provide many benefits to the individual as well, including:

- Allows individual to explore the career field
- Provides an opportunity to exercise knowledge learned in school
- Creates a network of contacts, mentors, and career coaches.
- Produces meaningful work that increases their skills and abilities
- Aids the development of creative problem solving skills
- Establishes workforce practices and experience
- Provides an opportunity to gain experience using internal industry software and programs
- Completion of internship hours for academic credit towards degree, if required

Organizational Responsibilities

It is important to note that while there are many potential benefits to hosting an intern, there is considerable responsibility that goes along with it. The benefits to hosting must always be weighed against the responsibilities of doing so.

Internships are a shared responsibility between the hosting organization, educational institution and intern. Clearly defining these responsibilities will promote a positive working environment and lead to mutual benefits and successes for all those involved. Organizations hosting internships have a responsibility to:

- Write a complete job description outlining assignments for the internship
- Integrate the internship program into existing organizational policies and procedures where applicable
- Understand the educational institution's internship guidelines and requirements to ensure the organization can comply with their standards prior to seeking an intern
- Communicate regularly with both the intern and the intern's educational institution
- Comply with all reporting requirements set forth by the educational institution in a timely manner to ensure the intern receives applicable college credit
- Clearly define and communicate the goals and expectations of the internship
- Provide a detailed orientation for the intern, introducing them to the organization.
Discussion should include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - Chain of command
 - Workplace rules, policies and procedures intern is expected to follow
 - Methods to resolve differences in the workplace
 - Expected dress code and professional conduct as intern is representing your organization
- Invest time mentoring and coaching the intern, supporting their professional development, recognizing that this may be their first actual work experience.
- Conduct one or more evaluations of the intern, pointing out both proficiencies and deficiencies in work, identifying areas where improvement can be made during the course of the internship, and suggesting (or providing) tools to facilitate improvement. When applicable, follow organizational employee evaluation processes and procedures.
- Provide the intern with the tools and resources needed to be successful
- Have a direct Point of Contact to address any issues for both the host agency and the entity providing the intern

Planning For, and Creating the Intern Position

Bringing an intern into the workplace changes the work environment for the host agency and the agency's permanent staff. Before the decision to host an intern is made, the agency should carefully consider and answer the following questions:

- Can the organization commit the personnel time and resources required to host the internship?
- What are the goals and objectives of the internship as they relate to the intern, educational institution, and organization? Is it meaningful work?
- What are the parameters of the intern's work schedule, including length of internship, hours per week, and flexibility within the schedule?
- What is the expectation, if any, for availability to work evenings, weekends, or emergency/disaster call-out?
- Will the internship be paid or volunteer (unpaid)? If paid, determine the wage.
- What are the education, experience, training, or certifications needed for the intern to complete the defined goals and objectives?

The hosting agency should also identify any other workplace requirements which may impact the internship position. These may include:

- Will the agency require a background check, current driver's license, driving record check and/or drug testing for the intern position?
- Will the intern will have access to organizational vehicles for business purposes, or will they be expected to use their own vehicle. If they will be using their own vehicle, discuss liability issues with Human Resources and/or Legal Counsel.
- Which expenses, if any, will be reimbursed (i.e. mileage, tolls, parking, meals, travel, etc.)?
- Is there a dress code for the intern? Is so, clearly set the expectations prior to the intern's first day
- For volunteer internships, a Memorandum of Understanding should be considered to safeguard both the intern and the organization.
- For both paid and volunteer internships, a Disclosure and Authorization for Release should be considered to safeguard both the intern and the organization.

Defining the Internship Position Description

An internship position description should look very much like a regular job description; and should include most of the elements found there, including duties, desired qualifications, benefits offered (specifically state if there are none, to eliminate any misunderstandings), job location and hours (including any expectations of emergency work), information on how to apply, duration of the position, and any special requirements (background checks, etc.).

The internship position description should specifically address the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the intern is expected to gain by serving, as well as the ones they should already have before applying.

Finding Candidates for Internships

Locating appropriate internship candidates may require a bit of creative thinking on the organization's part. An organization may find candidates at the local College or University; distance learning programs may be explored as well. Organizations may want to expand their search beyond emergency management, as other college programs require internships and may yield potential candidates with an interest in emergency management. Programs to explore may include, but are not limited to:

- Public Administration
- Public Health
- Environmental Health and Science
- Political Science
- Risk Management
- Homeland Security
- Geography/Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Internship candidates may also be found through professional associations, such as IAEM and individual State Emergency Management associations. There are also many internet websites which provide postings for individuals seeking internship positions (indeed.com, Craigslist, etc.).

The host agency may need to “sell” the position to the intern by telling them how great the organization is; how valuable their experience will be (both to the agency, and to them); and how their service with your agency will benefit their future career plans.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Internship Resources

Appendix 2: Example Internship Job Description

Appendix 1: Internship Resources

1. U.S. Department of Labor Internship Program and the Fair Labor and Standards Act
FAQ: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>
2. List of state labor departments, websites and contact information:
http://www.dol.gov/whd/contacts/state_of.htm
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics why be an intern flier (recruiting materials):
<http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2006/summer/art02.pdf>
4. Legal Issues Surrounding Internships by Rochelle Kaplan:
http://www.sahrma.org/images/studentchapter_legal_issues.pdf

Appendix 2: Example Intern Position Summary

[should be modified for your organization and position prior to use]

POSITION TITLE: Intern, Emergency Preparedness

POSITION SUMMARY:

This position will support the emergency preparedness function of the organization in the development and implementation of the “all hazards” emergency operations plan and continuity of operations. Work includes developing and coordinating response planning, testing, and evaluation of approaches to assure continuation of critical operations during an emergency. Position assists with inter-departmental/organizational work for government recovery and assists with crisis communications with internal and external partners. Position supports the planning and execution of drills to evaluate preparedness effectiveness.

POSITION ACCOUNTABILITIES:

The following are essential job accountabilities:

- 1. Supports the implementation of the organization Emergency Operations Plan.**
 - a. Observes and participates in emergency advisory committee to assure that the goals of contingency planning efforts are met. Works with internal customers to assure department readiness for accomplishing work related to contingency incidents.
 - b. Assists with the implementation of emergency preparedness training.
 - c. Provides staff support to emergency related committees charged with developing a comprehensive approach for responding to disasters that affect operations.
 - d. Assists with the tracking and follow-up of the implementation of committee recommendations.
 - e. Supports the testing of the plans, assists with the documentation of these tests and the subsequent implementation of corrective action plans.
- 2. Assists with the coordination of the government continuity of operations plan (business continuity processes) to enable rapid recovery from an incident that would disable critical operations.**
 - a. Supports the maintenance of the Continuity of Operations Plan/Business Continuity Plan, ensuring that the plan is current and relevant.
 - b. Assists with the coordination of collecting the priorities of a diverse set of departments to meet their business recovery priorities.
 - c. Supports the education and cross-training of critical staff positions.
 - d. Supports the testing of the COOP/BCP plan, ensures that results are documented and evaluated, and that plan revisions are made as warranted.
- 3. Training**
 - a. [add training related details as appropriate, including what the intern may be able to attend and learn from]

4. Exercising

- a. [add exercise related details as appropriate, including what the intern may be able to observe and participate in]

5. SOP Development

- a. [add SOP related details as appropriate]

6. Tasks as needed

- a. Performs various job related tasks as warranted by the situation; this can be a diverse set of tasks during an emergent situation.

JOB SPECIFICATIONS:

Minimum Education:

Prefer pursuit of bachelor's degree in emergency management, engineering or related field or other subject area related to position; or military experience.

Minimum Experience:

None

Key Knowledge:

Knowledge or experience in disaster response, emergency preparedness, continuity of operations, or business continuity planning management.

Familiarity with the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Associate Emergency Manager (AEM) certification or Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) certification and a desire to work towards achieving one or the other.

Candidate must be able to observe, track and comment on drills and exercises internal and external to the organization.

Key Skills:

[note that it's important not to get too detailed here. You're recruiting people who little or no job experience.]

Excellent planning, organizational, writing, listening and presentation skills.

Prefer proven customer service skills and the ability to work with diverse, geographically dispersed organization having varied program education and training needs.

Other Requirements:

Intermediate to advanced word processing, spreadsheet and presentation computer skills required – specifically Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Must be detail and multi-task oriented; flexibility to work within a fast-paced environment.

No travel required.

Possible shift work due to a disaster response.

Must be able to pass comprehensive background investigation, including FBI fingerprint check.

Supervises:

None

Reports To:

Director, Emergency Management