



Coalition for
Career Development
Center



A Playbook for Employers in Every Sector

HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIPS FOR ALL

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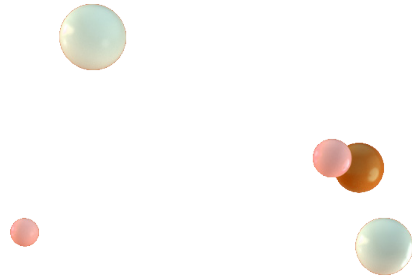
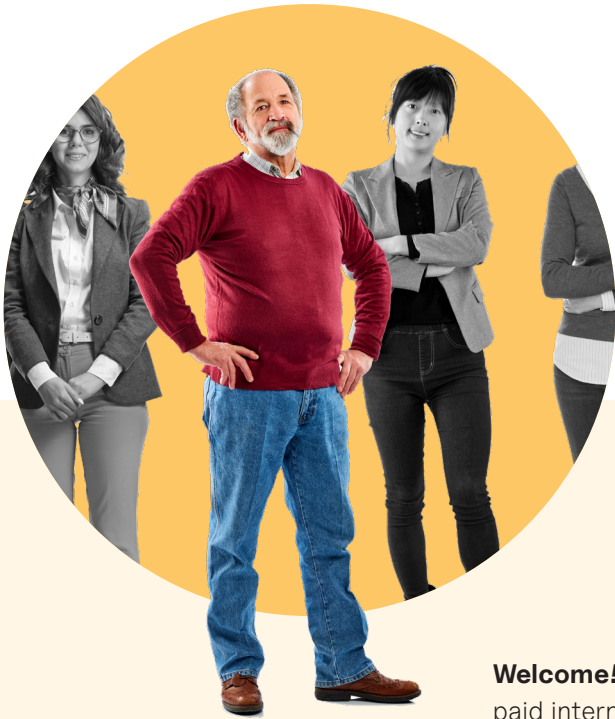
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What's Inside

Introduction	4
The Case for Internships	7
Step 1: Initiate	9
Step 2: Cultivate	19
Step 3: Implement	27
Step 4: Sustain	37
Conclusion	42
References	43
Acknowledgments	44

Introduction



Welcome! This playbook is your go-to resource for launching and managing paid internships for high school students across any industry. It lays out a clear, practical roadmap for creating meaningful career learning experiences that spark curiosity, build real-world skills, and prepare students for future success. Inside, you will find tools to help your organization foster young talent, support career exploration, and turn student aspirations into achievable goals.

Curious to learn how young people can meaningfully engage in real-world work environments and how this early exposure can foster future engagement and equity? This playbook invites you to explore strategies that honor the unique developmental needs and gifts of young people while introducing them to career pathways.

What Is the Purpose of This Playbook?

Across the country, employers—from local shops to global corporations—are feeling the pressure to find talented, motivated workers. At the same time, millions of young people are eager to gain real-world experience but do not know where to begin. This playbook exists to bridge that gap—and help *you* be part of the solution. Whether you are starting from scratch or looking to strengthen an existing internship program, this playbook is your guide. It offers practical, step-by-step advice for designing internships that are meaningful, inclusive, and aligned with your business needs. You will find checklists, templates, proven strategies, and inspiring examples—all ready to adapt to your industry and company size. And while the focus is on high school students, many of these tools can be easily tailored for either recent high school graduates or middle-grade learners.

This playbook is also a resource for education leaders, career program directors, and counselors working to build strong partnerships with local employers. Schools cannot do it alone—your expertise, your voice, and your workplace matter. Employers are an integral part of a robust career-ready ecosystem, and we are glad you are interested in deepening your involvement with the ecosystem by learning more about quality internship experiences.

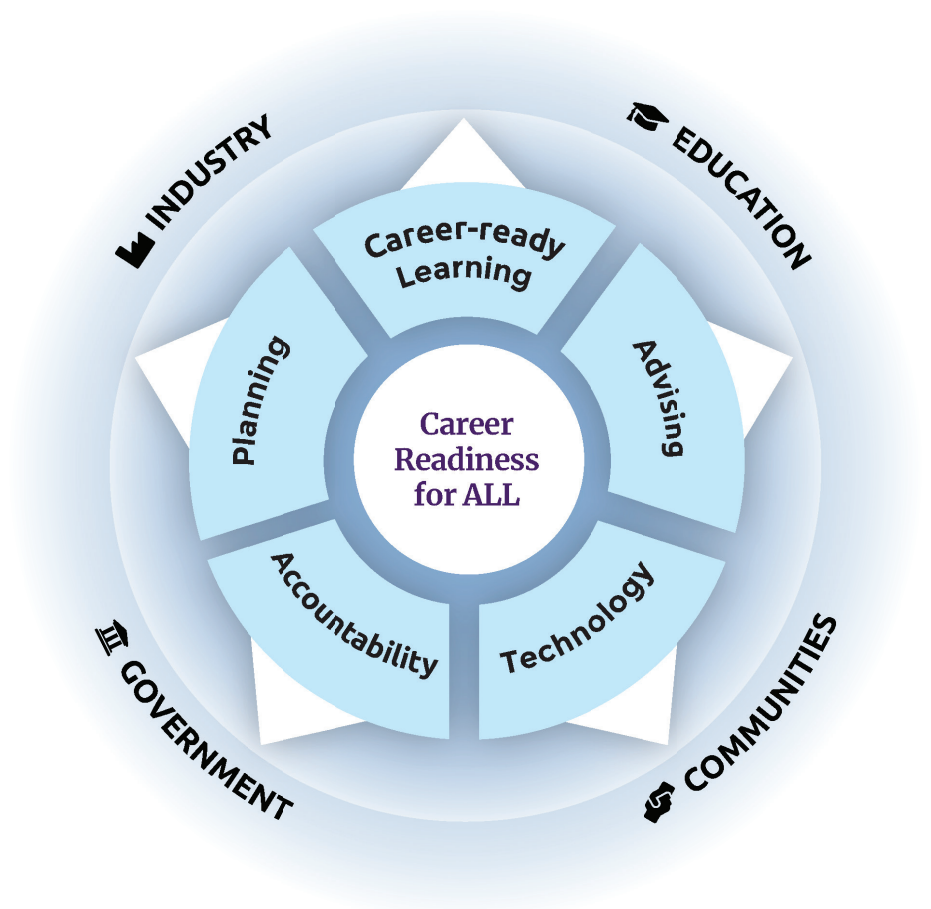
Internships are more than just a résumé booster. They help students build durable, transferable skills—like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—and explore pathways they might never have imagined. And when students connect what they are learning in school to real-world work, it can be transformative. Bottom line: quality internships work. They work for students. They work for businesses. And they work for communities. With this playbook, you will have everything you need to build a program that makes a real difference—for your company and for the next generation of talent.



What Is a Career-Readiness Ecosystem?

A **career-readiness ecosystem** is a cross-sector approach to collaborative action resulting in collective impact. It includes the following:

- **Career-ready students** who are individuals gaining experiences, knowledge and skills that allow them to navigate a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous future with confidence and autonomy.
- **Career-ready partners** who actively support learners to be career ready. They include schools, families, employers, workforce boards, and community based organizations who invest time, talent, and treasure to prioritize career readiness.
- **Career-ready programs and initiatives** support the ecosystem by supporting one or more of the five career readiness pillars developed by the Coalition for Career Development Center



The Case for Internships

What Are Internships?

Internships are a set of professional training experiences that provide students the opportunity to gain workplace and technical skills while under the supervision of an industry professional in a career path of interest. These experiences are structured, set for a finite period of time, and require student interns to complete real work to reach specific learning goals.

The internship experience allows student learners to gain experience in problem-solving, decision-making, and skill-building while taking part in projects at the internship site. Internship programs offer the opportunity to earn money or school credit while learning about prospective careers. They provide experiential, applied, and hands-on learning experiences that prepare students for the world of work.

Why Internships for Young People Ages 14-18?

CAREER-READY LEARNING EXPOSES YOUNG PEOPLE TO REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES. IT HELPS ANSWER THE COMMON QUESTION: “WHY AM I LEARNING THIS?”

“Why am I learning this?” is more clearly answered for young people when they can make a direct connection between what they are studying and what they might choose to do in the future. Studies confirm students are more engaged and satisfied with their learning experience than those without a career in mind (Lindsay et al, 2024). Students with a career and academic plan are more likely to graduate and achieve their goals (Solberg, 2019).

DEVELOPMENTALLY, STUDENTS AGES 14 – 18 ARE DISCOVERING GENUINE INTERESTS, BUILDING CONFIDENCE, AND EXPLORING THEIR FUTURE PATHWAYS.

Internships provide work-based learning to help students prepare for their next move along their career and education pathway. Often ready for practical application and more in-depth skill development, students can thrive in environments outside of, and complementary to, classroom learning. High school students face important life decisions as they approach graduation, and internships can serve as a way to gain real-world experience for decision making.

What Are the Benefits of an Internship Program?

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

- ✓ Attracting young workers to your company and a specific field
- ✓ Developing and nurturing a talent pipeline
- ✓ Contributing to the community
- ✓ Supporting growth in your industry
- ✓ Training future workers
- ✓ Building brand recognition
- ✓ Screening potential employees
- ✓ Building supervisory skills of current employees
- ✓ Bringing new perspectives and fresh ideas into the workplace
- ✓ Tapping into young people's skill sets, viewpoints, and ingenuity

BENEFITS FOR INTERNS

- ✓ Gaining experiential learning with real-life experience to help inform career choices
- ✓ Earning and learning in paid internships
- ✓ Developing and practicing durable skills and abilities necessary for success in any career
- ✓ Learning about an industry and specific career fields
- ✓ Building relationships and experience that may lead to a full time job
- ✓ Earning school credit—high school, college, or both

BENEFITS FOR SCHOOLS

- ✓ Offering career exploration opportunities to students
- ✓ Connecting classroom learning with the workplace
- ✓ Engaging students in applied learning
- ✓ Enhancing curriculum with work-based learning
- ✓ Making connections with local employers

Step 1: Initiate

Lead With Purpose

Company leadership support and buy-in are critical for launching and sustaining a high school internship program. Initiating an internship program requires leading with purpose, developing a strategy, and articulating the program benefits.

“Businesses today are struggling to fill open positions with skilled workers, often faulting our nation’s K-12 and higher education systems for not aligning learning curriculums with the skills needed for the modern workforce. Educators and school administrators point out that industry needs to do its part to bridge the gap between education and industry, by reaching back earlier into the workforce pipeline to help expose young people to the world of work, and ensure they are learning the skills needed before candidates interview for open jobs. The reality is education and employers must better work together to give middle- and high school-age youth the hands-on, workplace experiences they need to acquire durable professional skills for work and life, develop confidence, and build social capital.”

- American Student Assistance

In today’s rapidly evolving world of work, businesses can strengthen their talent development strategy by embracing innovative, forward-thinking approaches. Building the future workforce requires intentional leadership and openness to new ideas.

Leaders who prioritize inclusivity and purpose help cultivate a culture that values both current and future employees. When a company aligns its mission with a commitment to people—within the organization and the broader community—it fosters a growth mindset, stronger performance, and meaningful engagement.

A business valuing its people is the foundation for company-wide support of youth career-readiness efforts, including internships, as essential components of long-term talent development.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY

Define the goals of the internship upfront. Starting with an end in mind yields the best results. Begin with these questions to determine your priorities:

- Why does your company have/want an internship program for high school students?
- What is the main goal for your company's internship program?
- How can an internship program benefit the interns, our company, our employees, and our community?
- How can the internship program support current business activities? What ongoing work would you like to expand or projects would you like to initiate or complete?

To achieve the goals and priorities, you can utilize a logic model as a structure to articulate the rest of your strategy, including what you need, hope to achieve, and desire as impacts. (Learn more about [logic models](#)).

Inputs: What you need

- Identify the human, political, knowledge, and tangible resources that would make the internship program possible in a way that meets your goals

Outputs: What you hope to achieve

- Describe the kinds of high school students, educators, schools, organizations, and members of the community you want to work with to meet your goals (participants)
- Outline what you want staff to accomplish at a high level to meet your goals (activities)
- Outline what you want students to accomplish at a high level to meet your goals (products)

Impacts: What you want as outcomes

- Articulate what kind of impact you want to have on your staff (short-term)
- Articulate what kind of impact you want to have on the organization as a whole and your community relations (intermediate)
- Articulate what kind of impact you want to have on talent development, workforce pipelines, and the loyalty of both staff and customers (long-term)

Evaluation: How you will know you are successful

- Determine how you will keep track of inputs, outputs, and impact over time

CONSIDER BOTH ROIs

When thinking about an internship program (or any business initiative), it is critical to consider Return on Investment (ROI). In this playbook there are two ROIs to consider. The first ROI—**Return on Investment**—is commonly used for making a business case for investment of resources. It answers the question: *What do we get out of this?* This ROI may consider internships as a talent development initiative, with ROI related to improved talent attraction, low-cost recruiting, and reduced turnover.

The second ROI—**Responsibility of Investing**—involves calling on others in your organization and industry to contribute their time and talent in meaningful ways to grow and develop our young people. This ROI is about what your company is willing to do. How will your company invest in people to unlock their full potential and drive your business's success, both in the short-term and the long-term? How can your company engage with the community and inspire young people to pursue promising careers? This approach is about recognizing and seeing the potential in our youth and in our communities, in addition to growing and developing our future talent.

A June 2024 study by American Student Assistance (ASA), [Building Bridges Between Education & Industry: Youth Work-Based Learning as Talent Development Strategy](#), highlights how youth internships—when treated as core to talent development—deliver tangible business value. While many companies cite altruism as a motivating factor, the study reveals that internships also play a critical role in building diverse, skilled, and future-ready teams. Among the reported benefits:

- Strengthening the entry-level talent pipeline
- Broadening opportunity to join the workforce
- Introducing fresh perspectives and technical skill sets
- Providing mentoring and leadership opportunities for staff
- Raising brand visibility and community engagement
- Easing workloads for full-time employees

The associated survey data underscores this impact: 86% of employers said internships help strengthen their industry pipeline; 81% credited internships with diversifying their candidate pool; and 77% used internships to recruit for entry-level roles. Importantly, an underrecognized benefit of providing high school internships is that your business or industry could be enhanced by the skills or talents that your intern shares.

Researchers at the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) [report on intern retention rates](#) stating that, at both the one-year and five-year marks, those who interned with their employer are 16% more likely to be retained than hires who interned elsewhere. Furthermore, those who interned

with their employer are 32% more likely to be retained than those with no internship experience (Gray, 2021).

In the January 8, 2025 issue of [The 74](#), writer Patrick O'Donnell shares the story of Jubei Brown-Weaver, who secured a rare youth apprenticeship with Accenture while a junior at McKinley Technology High School in Washington, D.C. Now 19, Brown-Weaver is employed full-time as a package app developer at Accenture, earning over \$20 an hour. Reflecting on his experience during a Brookings Institution panel, he acknowledged the opportunity as pivotal. Brown-Weaver's story underscores the power of youth apprenticeship pathways.

The takeaway? High school internships are not just a good deed—they are a smart business strategy.

MAKE THE BUSINESS CASE

Identify goals, success metrics, and cost-benefits to make the case for any talent development initiative. Strong metrics and the cost-benefit analysis can persuade the board, leadership, membership, or investors that the case is strategically aligned to organizational goals.

To align goals with your business strategy, options include the following:

- Expand talent attraction channels
- Increase the pool of qualified candidates
- Enhance supervisor training and development
- Increase awareness of and interest in industry careers
- Engage with local communities and educate youth in alignment with corporate social responsibility
- Build brand awareness and loyalty
- Bolster public and community relations, communications, and media
- Improve employee experience and engagement

Metrics might include:

- Number of interns completing internship in specified business areas
- Number of employees involved in the internship program who recommend others to participate
- Supervisor ratings on both intern and supervisor/mentor employee performance and growth

- Number of interns hired for longer term positions
- Growth of the program year over year
- Additional evaluation items or surveys pertaining to the intern and employee experience

Developing and nurturing the future workforce calls for innovative strategies and intentional leadership. Fostering an inclusive, purpose-driven culture is not just ideal—it is essential for attracting and cultivating talent. Investing in youth career-readiness initiatives, such as high school internships, and building a clear strategy and business case around them, will deliver meaningful short- and long-term returns.



Make Work Meaningful

The prospect of working with youth should give a company a chance to impress young people—especially if they eventually want them to work there someday. A company should prepare a job experience that is designed to both excite the young person and eventually, over time, allow the young person to contribute to the company’s productivity. Internships are a type of experiential learning in which interns gain knowledge and skills in real-world situations and practical experience in a professional environment.

A challenge employers often face is identifying appropriate tasks and responsibilities that high school interns can perform that both enhance their learning and contribute to business needs. This section provides solutions for determining meaningful work for interns.

FOCUS ON LEARNING

The learning landscape of your organization encompasses learning about your industry overall and your workplace specifically. Ask the questions:

- What projects will give the intern(s) a view into how your company operates and what it is like to work there?
- How can they learn an industry-critical skill and practice that skill by working on the assignments?
- What should this intern be able to do at the end of the internship that they could not do before?

Learning how the industry and organization operates

An important aspect of a student’s learning is gaining an understanding of the industry, the career field, and how companies function. The Manufacturing Institute in partnership with Toyota developed a guide to internships which recommends the following best practices ([High School Internship Toolkit for Manufacturers](#)):

- Develop and use real job descriptions for internship positions that outline the requirements you are looking for in an ideal candidate and the skill sets needed to perform the responsibilities of the position.
- Have the intern shadow in other departments to familiarize them with your organization and expose them to opportunities outside of their original scope.
- Upon internship completion, have interns report to executives on what they learned, their career pathways plan, and any personal reflections.
- Invite your intern to company-sponsored professional development and events when possible.

Learning the skills in your industry

Provide the intern with opportunities to build real skills before or during the internship that will help them add value. If the internship is in a more technical or specialized area of your business, teaching interns industry-specific skills will be part of the tasks and project assignments. See the [High School Internship Resource Toolkit](#) for ideas.

Participating in company training is a valuable part of an intern's experience; just be sure that the training is appropriate for teenage students. Opportunities might include participating in a training on-site or using free online training. Software programs that your organization uses may have free training programs (e.g., Microsoft, Google, Salesforce, Autodesk, and others).

Zytabreyious “Zy” Marshall, a student at Franklin Central High School, exemplifies how high school internships can be transformative for both students and businesses. As the youngest person in Indiana to earn the INDOT Certified Technician Program certification, Zy stood out early in the construction industry. He proactively connected with Howard Companies at a career fair, leading to an internship focused on asphalt testing and quality control. His rapid mastery of technical skills—passing the INDOT certification on his first try and completing OSHA 30—demonstrated exceptional ability and dedication. In turn, Howard Companies invested in his training, recognizing the long-term value of nurturing young talent. Zy's story shows how internships can build career pathways for students while helping businesses identify and develop skilled, motivated future employees. Zy connected to this opportunity through EmployIndy's Talent Bound initiative.

Learning the durable skills needed to thrive in a workplace

Durable skills are foundational and transferable abilities that are valued and required across different jobs, industries, and life situations. Durable skills are those that have longevity and remain relevant beyond technology and other industry and environmental changes over time. They are sometimes called soft skills or human skills. Examples of the most commonly cited durable skills include:

- Information processing
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Creativity
- Analytical and critical thinking
- Leadership
- Adaptability
- Planning and prioritizing
- Decision-making and problem solving
- Data analysis
- Computer skills
- Written and verbal communication

There are many more durable skills that can be integrated into intern tasks and projects. For more information and more examples, see [DurableSkills.org](https://durable-skills.org). Also, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) provides additional data on [key skills employers teach interns](#).

EXPLORE INTERN ROLES

For industry leaders seriously committed to investing in a more “work-ready” emerging talent pool, [Advanced CTE](#) offers a career cluster framework that can serve as a foundation for career pathway models.

Consider cross-cutting roles

There are three cross-cutting clusters of work that can apply to any industry and employer: (1) marketing and sales, (2) management and entrepreneurship, and (3) digital technologies ([Advance CTE](#)).

- **Marketing and Sales:** The role of an intern in marketing and sales can involve tasks related to social media management, database management, and market research, among others. This area of the business may really benefit from the fresh perspective, specific target audience, and technology skills of the young interns.
- **Management and Entrepreneurship:** An internship in management and entrepreneurship can be both supportive of these departments and also allow the intern to learn business-critical processes and tasks.
- **Digital Technologies:** The role of an intern in digital technologies can involve tasks related to data management, IT support, software management, and many more. Young interns may well have technology skills to bring to the roles and the opportunity to develop analytical and problem solving skills in an internship position.

Establish industry-specific roles

Articulating the industry-specific roles should be based on what is unique or essential about a job within its specific industry context. Below are some targeted questions to help identify industry-specific roles:

- What tasks or responsibilities are unique to this role in this industry?
- How does this job contribute to the core functions of the industry?
- What industry-specific tools, technologies, or systems are used in this role?
- Are there any certifications or licenses required specifically for this job in this industry?
- How does this role support industry standards or regulations?

- What kind of specialized knowledge or training is needed to perform this job in this field?
- How does the day-to-day work in this job differ in this industry compared to others?
- Who does someone in this role typically collaborate with within the industry (e.g., engineers, designers, clinicians, educators)?
- What are common career pathways or advancement opportunities in this role within the industry?
- Are there seasonal or economic trends in the industry that affect this role?

Once a majority of these questions have been addressed, you can think more concretely about introductory and exposure activities, as well as specific skills and talents that are relevant to high school interns. Also, consider the business needs for intern support and any targeted occupations for talent development. These roles may involve more technical or specialized tasks and ideally align with interns' career interests. Assessment of students' skills and abilities entering the internship may be helpful in some situations to better fit the intern and the specific role.

Identify tasks and projects

Intern Projects - In the [High School Internship Resource Toolkit](#), you will find a template that offers examples of two-hour, once-weekly, and six-week internship projects. You will also find a detailed plan and ideas for longer or shorter possible internship projects for many career clusters. These examples and templates are generalized and could be adapted to your business.

Intern Tasks - Smaller, shorter-term assignments can both support staff and provide opportunities to learn and practice the durable, transferable skills that are so important in jobs across industries and career fields. Integrating more clerical work, for example, with more technical or advanced assignments creates variety and diversity in the interns' day. Balancing the more involved projects with some smaller tasks also helps ensure the interns' time is filled. Remember that every task an intern performs can build their skills and give them valuable workplace experience. Some ideas for tasks are included in the [High School Internship Resource Toolkit](#).

Given that skills-based hiring is a promising trend for businesses, “many employers include skills development in their internship programs to enhance their interns’ [career readiness](#).” ([naceweb.org](#)) For example, [NACE highlights Jackson National Life Insurance Company](#) has structured its internship program, development programs, and part-time roles to include (Gray, 2025):

- Development workshops to build professional skills, preparing interns for what comes next;
- Hands-on, real-world work with structured feedback to grow strengths and understand areas of opportunity; and
- Network opportunities with organizational leaders for cross-departmental exposure and increased understanding of the business.

Step 2: Cultivate

Gather Resources

Creating meaningful internship opportunities for high school students requires intentional planning, appropriate support, and collaboration between employers, schools, and communities. Being “resource ready” means removing common barriers and equipping interns with what they need to thrive—professionally, socially, and logistically.

Investing in youth is an investment in the people who will literally shape our shared future. When we recognize and nurture their emerging talents, ingenuity, curiosity, and skills, we create pathways not just to existing opportunities—but to futures we have not yet imagined. By opening doors today, we plant the seeds for innovation, prosperity, and possibility tomorrow.

SECURE FUNDING

Paid internships are highly encouraged. Compensation affirms that students’ contributions are valuable and removes financial barriers to participation. It also sends the message that the students’ work is important and sets the stage for accountability. Employers can fund stipends directly or seek support from:

- Local government (e.g., summer youth employment funds)
- Philanthropic or corporate foundations
- Board members or individual donors
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds
- Community development or equity-focused grant programs

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) offers [key factors to consider in setting intern salaries](#) with helpful data and standards on fair intern compensation.

CONSIDER SPECIAL LOGISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Transportation. Access to reliable transportation is often a major barrier for youth participation. Some suggestions for employers include the following:

- Offer or reimburse public transit passes
- Coordinate carpooling options with staff or other interns
- Partner with community-based organizations or schools to provide van services or shared rides

- Choose worksite hours that align with school dismissal and transit schedules

Technology. Whether in-person, hybrid, or remote, students must have access to the tools necessary to perform their responsibilities. This includes:

- Laptop or desktop computers
- Internet hotspots for remote access
- Training on workplace platforms (e.g., Zoom, Slack, Microsoft Teams)
- Access to IT support or troubleshooting resources

Dress Code and Work Attire. Clearly communicate expectations around dress code in advance. If specific attire is required—such as uniforms, safety gear, or business casual clothing—employers should:

- Provide the necessary clothing or reimburse for its purchase
- Clarify expectations using visual guides or photos
- Allow for culturally inclusive dress and offer flexibility where possible

Meals and Breaks. If the internship spans several hours, consider:

- Providing snacks or lunch stipends
- Offering break areas or guidance on meal options nearby
- Explaining policies on breaks and lunch periods
- Taking the intern to lunch periodically



Plan the Program

With the goals for the internship as a guide, establish a plan that leads to success for the company and the students while addressing any of the various structural and logistical challenges that may exist.

IDENTIFY WIN-WINS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION AND THE INTERNS

- **Win-Win Projects:** Choose projects that are beneficial to your organization that also provide challenging learning experiences for interns. Consider current business activities, ongoing work you would like to expand, or projects you would like to initiate or complete.
- **Win-Win Placement:** Determine whether interns would be best placed solely in a single department or rotating through different areas and departments to both lessen responsibilities for individual staff and create more diverse experiences for interns.
- **Win-Win Positions:** Examine your company's recruiting needs and consider departments that have multiple employees retiring, are expecting growth, are adding positions due to economic recovery, have demand for new/emerging required skill sets, or have positions for which it is difficult to recruit or hire.

CHOOSE AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM MODEL

Consider three internship program models as you set the number of hours, schedule, funding, and team.

Onsite internships, in which interns:

- Perform duties at a physical business location
- Access business facilities, technology, equipment, and tools to perform duties
- Report to a specified location and visit other areas as directed
- Meet with supervisors, mentors, and other employees at the workplace

Hybrid internships, in which interns:

- Combine onsite and remote or virtual learning
- Perform tasks with provided tools and technology both remotely and onsite
- Manage responsibilities within a flexible schedule to accommodate transportation or scheduling constraints
- Perform assigned tasks and projects both remotely or onsite with very clear instructions and expectations outlined for both

- Meet with supervisors, mentors, and other employees either virtually or in-person

Remote internships, in which interns:

- Perform duties and tasks from a remote location, such as the intern's home or school
- Communicate with supervisors consistently and frequently for project check-ins and monitoring
- Meet with supervisors and others via virtual meetings

[ASA's Spotlight on High School Internships](#) report highlights the rise in virtual internships given that the working environment is at least partly remote or blended. For ideas about how to organize a remote or virtual internship, find a list of [virtual internships on CollegeVine](#).

DETERMINE SCHEDULE AND TIME FRAME

Internships have a start and an end date and can last one week to many months. Internship timeframes are typically shorter than apprenticeships or co-op programs. Often, internships are offered over a semester or summer break.

Daily and weekly schedules are typically planned for anywhere between two to 20 hours per week during the school year or full- or part-time for one to eight weeks during school breaks, for example. Setting a consistent weekly schedule helps the student organize around class times, extracurriculars, family obligations, and transportation needs. When setting the weekly schedule, think about how you can also involve the intern in experiences beyond the actual workday, which can include training programs, social events, and opportunities to network with other industry representatives. The schedule must, however, be mindful of students' other obligations with school, work, and family; not all students are available in the evenings and on weekends.

Challenges frequently arise with intern schedule availability. High school students often have busy schedules with classes, extracurriculars, and personal commitments, making it hard to align internship hours with business needs. Remaining flexible is key. Solutions to this challenge can include:

- Choosing a variety of internship structures—onsite, hybrid, and remote—to accommodate diverse schedules and availability
- Coordinating with schools and existing programs to avoid overlaps and ensure that internship hours complement academic schedules and calendars
- Partnering with a school or educator to make internship activities a class project, with the teacher serving as the supervisor

- Planning in-person work on summer and school break weeks
- Identifying work that can be done outside of school hours

DECIDE ON THE BUSINESS AREA

Ideally, determining the target business areas for hiring interns will be included in the initial planning phase. In what areas of our business do we need to develop talent? Where can we place interns to ensure success for the intern and the company? For example, do we need help with a customer database? Do we need a redesign of our website? Do we want a feasibility study, and could the intern do some research or interview people?

The department or business unit will inform the intern role with tasks and projects. Identifying the supervisors is critical and may impact the decision about which area of the business is most feasible to have an intern. Some internships plan for a rotation between departments to expose students to more types of career pathways within the company and industry.

DEVELOP WELCOME MATERIALS

Provide a clear and succinct internship guide

To set high school interns up for success, it is critical to provide a simple, welcoming document at the start of their internship. Such internship guides help demystify the workplace and support students—especially those who are new to professional environments. The document should be:

- Written in clear, accessible language
- Visually organized with bolded headers, bullet points, and space for notes
- Designed as a reference tool the intern can revisit throughout the program

The internship guide should include these sections:

- **Job description:** Outline job responsibilities
- **Internship schedule:** Include start/end dates, daily hours, lunch/break times, and special event dates
- **Attendance expectations:** Explain how to request time off, who to notify if running late or sick, and preferred method of contact (e.g., phone/text/email)
- **Workplace behavior and culture:** Outline expectations for professionalism, communication, punctuality, and attire. Include unique cultural norms like: Casual Fridays; Potluck Wednesdays; Monthly staff meetings; and End-of-project presentations or celebrations

- **Workplace routines and protocols:** Include check-in/check-out processes, badge access, Wi-Fi codes, food/eating policies, or technology setup
- **Internship goals (employer perspective):** Clearly state what the company or supervisor hopes the intern will learn or contribute
- **Personal goals (intern perspective):** Include a section for the intern to document a conversation with their supervisor about their own goals, interests, and hopes for the experience
- **Support contact info:** Name, title, and contact information of the intern's supervisor, Human Resources point of contact, and who to reach out to in emergencies or with questions

Create a family/caregiver welcome packet or letter

Families and trusted adults play a critical support role in the success of high school interns. Providing a brief, informative welcome packet or letter ensures they understand:

- Where their young person will be interning and what type of work they'll be doing
- When and how long the internship takes place
- The importance of consistent attendance and timely communication
- What to expect in terms of attire, transportation, meals, and supervision
- Contact information for the supervisor and program lead
- Emergency protocols and how to report concerns or request support
- Encouragement to check in with their student regularly about how things are going

This document helps build trust between the company and the student's support system and demonstrates that the employer values the whole ecosystem around the intern.

Address Safety and Legal Requirements

Creating a safe and legal internship experience means upfront planning and clear communication. Employers should:

- Understand and comply with [child labor, wage, and hour laws](#)
- Clarify the nature of work allowed for minors in their state/industry
- Establish or update company policies to include youth interns
- Identify a designated supervisor or mentor to guide and support interns
- Develop or adapt workplace safety protocols that apply to young workers
- Communicate expectations, schedules, and reporting procedures clearly to both interns and staff

Preparing your program is more than checking boxes—it is about building infrastructure that supports success. When employers invest in the real needs of young people, they help create a more equitable workforce and unlock the brilliance and creativity of the next generation.

ENSURE PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND INFORMATIONAL SAFETY

Just as businesses prioritize safety in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of following safety and health standards, avoiding hazards, using safety gear, and other physical safety precautions with the interns is essential.

Company policies are designed to maintain appropriate boundaries, prevent conflicts of interest, and ensure a safe and ethical learning environment. It is often required to conduct background checks and written acknowledgment of behavior may be required for visitors, speakers, and partners when employees are engaging with high school students.

Be sure to know your company's policies when planning the high school internship components and intern roles. Verify that policies and processes are appropriate and applicable to high school internship programs. Students and educators or families, if applicable, must be aware of and agree upon the relevant policies.

CONSIDER LEGALITIES IN WORKING WITH YOUNGER STUDENTS

Given that high school internships involve minors (for whom parents or other legal guardians are legally responsible), industry partners need to understand the legal and professional boundaries between industry partners and students. If a school or non-profit agency is brokering the internship, having families on board is key. Legal documentation is often required.

Employing minors in an internship program requires consideration of child labor and wage and hour laws that will inform the structure of your program.

Compliance concerns mostly arise from implementing work-based learning experiences—like apprenticeships, internships, or job shadowing—with more regulation and compliance requirements than other career-centered activities with youth.

Each state has regulations concerning what is permitted, so it is an imperative to check your states' laws for your company to plan the appropriate activities with youth programs. Industry partners need to be aware that youth employment laws and policies and young people must be a certain age to get a work permit. Also consider applicable federal labor laws. Review this summary of the [major laws of the U.S. Department of Labor](#), which has strict guidelines regarding the criteria of organizations that qualify for paid and unpaid internships.

Be sure to ensure accessibility by working with schools and families to navigate paperwork where needed. Translate materials, simplify forms, and offer in-person support for families unfamiliar with documentation processes. This is an area where establishing a partnership with schools and community organizations is very helpful.

You should also regularly review compliance practices with legal advisors, school partners, and program staff. Schedule annual safety audits and require refresher training for mentors and supervisors on working with minors, including mandatory reporting laws.

The Texas Education Agency provides [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) administrative resources](#), and related law, industry, and career awareness and exploration resources. Resources vary from a Student Attendance Accounting Handbook to a Training Plan Agreement for Paid Interns.

Step 3: Implement

Identify and Support Your Internship Team

Your **internship team** is defined by those who show interest in and are committed to providing youth work-based learning opportunities through internships. Team members could include internal internship champions, external partners like a school leader or career technical education department head, or just a good colleague who is willing to engage in planning and participation. Also, consider any intern you bring on as a potential thought partner for refining the program for the future.

ASSIGN COMPANY ROLES

By articulating the roles and identifying the employees assigned to each role, coordination between the internship team will be easier. At your company, involvement in the internship program could be voluntary or an assigned job responsibility, which may be dependent on intern roles or program goals. Consider employees' time and effort as a professional development investment.

Roles in the internship program for company employees can be assigned to one or multiple people, including the following:

- **Supervisor** - Assigns work, sets frequent check-in meetings, connects intern with others to perform work, monitors progress, and evaluates performance
- **Mentor** - Provides guidance, conducts more involved career conversations, answers questions, and cultivates a safe space to learn; meets less frequently with the intern than the supervisor
- **Task/Project Manager** - Oversees assigned tasks or projects, trains on skills and knowledge needed, and guides daily work
- **Trainer** - Conducts training on how to perform a task, manage a project, or leverage specific technical skills and knowledge
- **Career Expert** - Dedicates a short amount of time, possibly only one meeting, during the internship to talk about their job and career path to expose intern to multiple career and job opportunities

Regardless of the role, to avoid any missteps and confusion, it is important to make clear to all employees involved both the policies for intern interaction as well as the intern's role and responsibilities.

OFFER MENTORSHIP AND SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION

Provide multiple opportunities for support

High school interns benefit tremendously from mentorship. Internships are often their first exposure to a professional setting, so it is essential to:

- Assign a supportive, trained supervisor who understands youth development
- Provide regular check-ins and feedback
- Encourage supervisors to model professional behavior, workplace norms, and communication
- Offer opportunities for reflection, skill-building, and confidence development
- Include students in team meetings and let them see how their work connects to larger goals

Clearly delineate supervisor and mentor roles

A practical approach is to clearly define and assign both a supervisor and a mentor to each student worker. Student workers should understand the utility of each role. For the supervisor and mentor, they should each receive training on how a mentoring relationship is distinct from a managerial role. Below is a description of each role and a few variations on how the two roles should work together to best support student workers:

Supervisor is responsible for:

- Orientation or onboarding
- Training, or coordinating training by other departments, on how to accomplish desired deliverables
- Assigning job tasks and responsibilities on a consistent basis
- Providing regular feedback on the student worker's performance
- Ensuring the student understands the resources available

Mentor is responsible for:

- Serving as a liaison between the student and the supervisor
- Checking in on a student's overall well-being and satisfaction at the workplace
- Allocating time with the student for conversation within work hours (i.e., lunch)
- Fostering a collegial work environment

It is often the case that a supervisor also takes on the responsibilities of a mentor, but when both roles are present and carried out by different people, the mentor should never assume the responsibilities of a supervisor. Multiple student workers may be assigned to the same supervisor, but each student should have their own designated mentor.

Use proximity as support

Helping an intern to learn skills by sitting with them can help them to think aloud and hear instructions, expectations, and advice from you immediately. Allow time to work in proximity to interns and observe them when they begin a project.

At Cristo Rey Brooklyn High School, the Corporate Work Study Program has designed a quarterly “Zoom Lunch & Learn” series specifically for workstudy supervisors. Supervisors are from 75+ companies representing 15+ different industries and work with young people ages 14 - 18. These workshops are facilitated by trained educators who can help add an “educator’s lens” to the students’ workstudy experiences and provide invaluable insight related to child psychology and the everyday “happenings” in the students’ school settings. The series is divided into parts:

- October - Settling into the school/work year and establishing goals
- December - Checking in on goals and how to have a performance evaluation process and conversation with youth
- February - How to maximize downtime at the workplace and upskill students
- May - Revisiting goals set at the beginning of the year and conducting the end-of-year performance evaluation

Source: <https://www.cristoreynetwork.org/corporate-work-study>

Partner for Success

In its report, [Building Bridges Between Education and Industry: Youth Work-Based Learning as Talent Development Strategy](#), American Student Assistance found that many businesses had to problem-solve perceived challenges and barriers. More challenges often arise with longer-term, more involved programs like internships, work-study, and other work-based learning programs. School and organizational partners often plan for and provide solutions to many of these issues. Finding partner organizations to support students and help remove these barriers may be a viable solution for more complex or lengthy engagements with students.

LEVERAGE INTERMEDIARIES' SUPPORT

Consider work-based learning intermediaries to provide support for intern supervisors with guidelines and standards for responsibilities. Some examples of these include:

- [NAF](#) has company partners that align their industry expertise, community leadership, and pipeline development needs to transform the high school experience.
- [ImBlaze](#) is an internship management system that enables schools and organizations to manage their real-world learning programs.
- [INROADS](#) is a college and career readiness program for high school students that connects interns to employer partners.
- [Apprentice Learning](#) provides real-world work experiences for middle-grade youth. In direct partnership with schools and employers, it leverages career exploration to teach skills, ignite purpose, and nurture dreams.

An initiative powered by the CAPS Network and American Student Assistance (ASA) demonstrates how [profession-based learning](#) (Pro-BL) offers a unique opportunity for businesses to connect with the next generation of talent while addressing real needs within the organization. Examine [profession-based learning through the stories](#) of industry partners, educators, and students who have collaborated.

PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS

Establishing a partnership with high schools to provide career-readiness, work-based learning opportunities serves the internship program in critical areas. When partnering with high schools, be intentional about how you as the employer intend to prepare students and work with the schools effectively. For the company, this partnership can also serve as community engagement and youth education as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The benefits of engaging with local schools are plenty. In the partnership, the high schools can:

- Market to and recruit potentially interest-aligned students for the internship
- Act as a liaison or connection to family and caregivers
- Handle compliance and legal paperwork
- Provide course credit, if included in the program
- Ensure that the internship provides direct instruction on workplace and durable skills, career and industry knowledge, and technical skills

Other potential partners include Education Service Agencies (ESAs) that provide work-based learning opportunities for students in the region and partnership opportunities for employers. Look for the equivalent in your state or county, such as [WSWHE BOCES Internships](#) in New York and [Adams County Education Consortium](#) that offers industry credentialing for high school students in Colorado.

Bank of America's [Student Leaders Program](#) connects high school juniors and seniors to employment, skills development, and service. Through paid internships with local nonprofits and participation in a national leadership summit, they gain practical work and life experience.

[Industry Scholars for Partners](#) - NYC Public Schools introduces impactful work experience to Career & Technical Education (CTE) and Future Ready (FRNYC) high school students through curated curriculum, industry recognized credentialing and work-based learning activities.

WORK WITH INDUSTRY AND WORKFORCE PARTNERS

Consider partnering with your local workforce organization to develop the internship or recruit candidates. Contact your industry association to see if they provide programs or materials for young people or internships.

Some examples of workforce organizations that support internships include:

- [EmployIndy](#) connects youth with real-world work experiences that align with emerging economic trends. The organization facilitates and supports work-based and career-connected learning activities for students with employers engaged in delivering career exploration, engagement, and experience activities through an initiative [TalentBound](#).
- [Skills for Rhode Island's Future](#) (SkillsRI) is a statewide workforce intermediary that runs the PrepareRI high school internship program, which fosters connections between educators and the business community. The program offers the Work-based Learning Navigator, an online platform to better connect educators to year-round, work-based learning resources. The Navigator serves as a matchmaker where educators can post opportunities their students are looking for and employers can post the experiences they can provide. While some states lack these tools, many do have similar resources to help students navigate these opportunities.
- [Urban Alliance's](#) High School Internship Program provides skills training, mentoring, and paid internships to high school seniors that keep them connected to school or the workforce. Employers can partner to host or sponsor interns.

- **The Boston Private Industry Council** (The PIC) partners with the Boston Public Schools to connect school to career and with leading institutions and employers to promote equitable practices. Its work is at the intersection of business and community interests to connect Boston residents to promising career pathways, while creating a diverse talent pipeline for local employers. Its work is grounded in the belief that meaningful employment changes lives, lifts people out of poverty, and strengthens the local economy.

PARTNER TO RECRUIT CANDIDATES

Employers across the country often find it challenging to attract high school students who are prepared, interested, and aware of internship opportunities. Recruiting high school interns can be accomplished in many ways:

- Establish partnerships with schools and school districts for direct recruitment channels to students through key contacts like counselors, career advisors, and program directors at the schools.
- Leverage networks in the industry and in the community.
- Utilize online platforms to post internship positions, including social media, websites, and job boards. Examples include LinkedIn.com, Idealist.org, InternJobs.com, InternMatch.com, Experience.com, Standoutsearch.com, and Fastweb.com.
- Post applications that are easy to follow with clear instructions for students.

School and educational organization partners can provide channels to identify and recruit candidates. For best results, provide schools with job descriptions and enticing details about the internship in marketing materials, such as flyers and social media posts.

Community and family outreach efforts can build awareness and promote the opportunities. Parent connections can be valuable for spreading the word about internships. Community-based organizations—including churches and recreation centers, for example—can promote opportunities by posting flyers, sharing in newsletters, or notifying students when participating in other youth activities.

Internships provide a business with the opportunity to increase engagement in local communities, through school partnerships in particular, and to connect with diverse student populations with promise and potential for joining your industry.

Onboard and Manage

Supporting the interns in the workplace is critical to a successful program and deserves special consideration. After all, this internship may be the students' first exposure to the workplace, so it is important to plan for meaningful connections, intentional exposure to jobs and careers, developmentally appropriate work, and consideration of student needs.

SET THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

Interviews with high school students can be quite different from interviews with adults. Plan to be more conversational in interviews, with relevant and appropriate questions, stated expectations, and clear next steps. Clear and detailed matrices for the interview and selection process will greatly assist in making decisions and will set the intern up for success as well.

Your business should provide orientation and onboarding resources to help ensure students—especially those with limited exposure to internships—are prepared to succeed. Thoughtful preparation for introducing interns to the workplace and their job will pay off down the road, so be sure to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Young people need to feel seen, respected, and included.

To foster belonging and provide clarity of expectations, onboarding activities for the first few hours/days should include the following:

- Present and discuss the Internship Guide (outlined in the Plan the Program section)
- Take time to talk through expectations, job responsibilities, and an overview of internship projects to help ease a high school student into the workplace
- Ensure interns know where and with whom they need to report each day, where and for how long they take breaks, and any other location they'll need to know
- Supply interns with the necessary supplies and equipment
- Introduce interns to people on the Internship Team with whom they will work
- Allow time for them to ask questions and get clarification
- Set and communicate a consistent and frequent schedule of meetings and check-ins to provide guidance and monitoring of tasks
- Invite interns to share their goals and interests and shape part of their experience accordingly

CREATE A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Young people need to feel seen, respected, and included. To foster belonging:

- Use inclusive onboarding practices and avoid jargon
- Clearly define roles and tasks that are meaningful, not just busywork
- Acknowledge the developmental stage of high schoolers—especially their need for clear structure, affirmation, and real-world relevance
- Invite interns to share their goals and interests, and shape part of their experience accordingly
- Include them in community-building activities like team lunches or end-of-project presentations

SUPERVISE WITH INTENTION

A dedicated supervisor and support network will help interns be successful in their learning and in their job responsibilities. While managing interns can be time intensive and present some challenges, the experience can also be very rewarding for managers, interns, and organizations. Interns often bring fresh perspectives, creative solutions, and innovative ideas. Practices for effective intern supervision include:

- Assign meaningful work that benefits the company and the interns' learning
- Make expectations clear and share goals
- Present a clear plan for tasks and projects with timelines and specifics on the “how-to”
- Set up regularly scheduled meetings for check in
- Provide opportunities for interacting with others at the company
- Ensure the assignments are enough work to keep busy but not too much to make it stressful
- Provide training with the supervisor, project managers, trainers, or by using online training methods
- Communicate whom the intern can go to for answers
- Evaluate performance/activities midway through the internship period to provide feedback and at completion

See more on supervisors and mentors in this playbook's Identify and Support Your Internship Team section. For additional ideas, Parker Dewey offers practices in [How to Supervise Interns](#).

LEAD WITH INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND UNDERSTANDING

Approaches for supervising interns can vary, and preparation and training may be required. When outlining roles for your internship program, consider the typical roles most adults have played throughout a young person's life up to this point: parent or teacher. It is critical for workplace supervisors/mentors NOT to take on the role of parent/caregiver or teacher; they have a different role to play here. The supervisor and mentor are exposing young people to a new category of adult relationships.

This new category's exclusive role is that of a managerial relationship. The manager of the young people will also gain skills by working with a new generation—those that will be future employees—so this is good practice. The best “managers” of young people incorporate the following elements:

- Care and concern for the student but not serving as an emotional outlet or a disciplinarian in the way a family member or school official would. It is important to make these boundaries explicit. The supervisor should have resources of their own (provided by the internship program staff) should they need assistance.
- A desire to train the young person (or outsource the training) in both the industry-specific skills and essential durable skills, such as the ability to receive constructive feedback. This involves clear expectations for both the students and the supervisors. Supervisors must engage student workers in entry-level tasks that can be scaffolded and grow more complex over time. Students must understand the difference between a teacher (who is dedicated entirely to teaching) and a manager (who is dedicated to directing and evaluating one's work).
- Fostering a sense of independence in their student workers. They do not have the constant vigilance of a parent or teacher, but that does not mean they do not *care* about the child's growth and development.

With these elements in mind, industry partners are both helping to reinforce the roles other adults may play in the lives of young people and creating a new role for a young person to understand. In the case of an internship program, without explicitly putting all three parties (parent, teacher, and supervisor) in the same room, the experience is organically training the young person to develop different skills with different adults. This novel arrangement exemplifies a “holistic” education.

Planning to build in student support systems in an internship program increases learning effectiveness and the quality of the experience according to [ASA's Five Tips for Successful High School Internship Programs](#).

MAKE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH CAREER CONVERSATIONS

At the core of student support—like support for all people—is understanding the individual’s interests, goals, and needs. Many young people begin career and academic planning in middle school because these individualized, personalized, academic, and career plans are a part of a statewide, district, or schoolwide strategy to engage youth in thinking about their future earlier in the process. The most important thing to learn—whether you are working with students or the young people in your own lives—is how to have career conversations with young people. An excellent guidance document was developed by the American School Counselors’ Association, titled [Employers and Industry Based Partners Career Conversations](#).



Step 4: Sustain

Evaluate and Celebrate Intern Experience and Performance

Feedback for the intern throughout the internship experience and through various communication channels will serve as informal assessment. Requesting the student intern complete an evaluation form both midway and at the completion of their internship is an excellent way to gather feedback and inform program management. This information will also provide data for the final evaluation and serve as a reference point for the students' subsequent performance. Consider the intern's ability to follow directions, work habits, time management, quality of the work produced, and areas needing growth and development.

The concept of giving and receiving feedback and self-advocacy are key components of an internship. In [Cristo Rey's](#) workstudy model, they use a weekly feedback loop (each student works one day a week from Sept to June) to both evaluate the work experience and determine if the student performed the assigned tasks. The cumulative nature of these timecards allows the student and supervisor to see growth over time. Each weekly timecard must be initiated by the student and approved by the supervisor. This practice creates a habit around how to take and receive feedback and should provide the company with insight into the worker's experience.

Final evaluation of the intern's experience and performance should be a priority, as it provides valuable feedback to the student and the supervisor, as well as informing program management. Examples of intern evaluation forms are offered by [Greater Des Moines Partnership](#), in the [Manufacturing Institute-Toyota Internship Toolkit](#), and from [NACE](#). The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) offers sample forms for members as well.

Remember to find out whether the school requires meetings, evaluations, or other documentation for course credit, if applicable. Exit interviews with students offer program administrators helpful feedback on intern satisfaction, level of skill and knowledge development, task, or project completion, and capture any program logistical comments.

And don't forget to celebrate! Share intern accomplishments and memorable moments through internal communications, newsletters, and social media. Recognizing these successes publicly helps amplify the program's value and builds excitement for future cohorts.

Assess the Internship Program

Evaluating the internship program is an essential step in effective program management, continuous improvement, program sustainability, and making the business case for continuing the program.

Use the program goals or objectives to reflect and report on the internship. Solicit written feedback from supervisors and any other employees involved in the internship. The quantitative reporting about the internship informs the ROI evaluation and any funding consideration for further development or continuation. The qualitative aspects can be beneficial in evaluating the model, schedule, supervisory issues, and the interns' role in projects and tasks.

Feedback from all participants—including interns, supervisors, and staff—will uncover what worked, what didn't, and what might be refined or reimaged. Use evaluation tools such as surveys, focus groups, or debrief conversations to gather insights. The data you collect will help you make thoughtful adjustments, strengthen systems, and create more inclusive, impactful experiences going forward.

The senior living and healthcare services provider, is a [strong example](#) of a successful approach. Committed to cultivating future workforce through internships, use thoughtful feedback tools and reflection questions to gather input from both interns and staff—ensuring each cycle informs the next.

FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A successful internship program is not just a one-time effort—it is a learning process. Each cycle offers a chance to refine, evolve, and deepen your impact. Whether your organization hosts interns once a year or runs multiple cohorts, sustaining and improving your internship program requires ongoing reflection, feedback, and adaptation.

Treat each cycle as a prototype

Think of each internship cycle as a prototype for the next. Some things will absolutely not work, others may show promise but need tweaking, and a few elements will be clear success stories. That is exactly how it should be. Use each cycle as an opportunity to experiment, learn, and build a stronger model over time. Embrace this learning process. Ask:

- What structures supported intern success?
- What training or onboarding elements fell flat?
- What projects or tasks engaged interns most deeply?

- Where did interns or staff feel overwhelmed or unclear?
- What systems (communication, scheduling, supervision) need refining?

Encourage honest feedback from interns, supervisors, mentors, and partners. Use surveys, exit interviews, and debrief conversations to gather insights, and capture lessons learned while they are fresh. View your internship program through a lens of **iterative design**:

- What parts of the experience were energizing for interns?
- Where did students or supervisors feel confused, disengaged, or under-supported?
- What moments built confidence, connection, or clarity for students—and how can those be replicated or expanded?
- What systems created friction (e.g., communication, supervision, technology), and how can they be improved?

Internships are not static—they evolve with every cycle. By treating each cohort as a pilot with the potential to inform a better version of itself, you will create a dynamic and responsive program that grows stronger over time. By continuously improving your internship program, you are investing not just in students—but in your own organization’s capacity to nurture talent, build community, and contribute to a stronger, more equitable future.

Commit to Iteration, Not Perfection. No internship program is perfect. What matters most is the commitment to show up, reflect, adapt, and grow. When you treat each cycle as a prototype, you not only strengthen your program—you model the same growth mindset you hope to instill in your interns.

Track outcomes and celebrate wins

Collect data and stories to demonstrate the impact of your internship program:

- Intern skill growth or post-program placements
- Supervisor reflections on intern contributions
- Broader access and opportunity throughout your hiring pipeline
- Intern testimonials that show engagement and learning

Use this information to:

- Advocate for continued or expanded funding
- Inspire colleagues or other departments to get involved
- Refine your approach with evidence-based insights
- Celebrate small wins to help build organizational momentum
- Share intern successes internally and externally—through newsletters, social media, or staff meetings—to generate pride and commitment

THINK FORWARD

Build internal infrastructure

Once your program is in motion, think about integration for sustainability. Embed your internship program into your larger workforce development strategy and career pathways planning. This ensures your efforts are not one-off or siloed, but rather part of a sustainable pipeline that reflects your company's mission and values.

To sustain your program, consider integrating internship planning into existing organizational systems:

- Include internship roles in your annual hiring or budget process
- Identify a consistent internship coordinator or point person
- Build a knowledge management system (e.g., a shared drive with templates, checklists, and past evaluations)
- Maintain and update a timeline or calendar of key internship milestones for staff planning

Deepen partnerships and stay engaged

Partnerships with schools, community organizations, workforce boards, and peer employers can offer consistency and sustainability. Share best practices, co-develop talent pipelines, and invite partners into improvement conversations. Consider joining or forming a local industry advisory council or employer cohort focused on youth talent development.

Sustained engagement fosters meaningful, long-term relationships. When students feel connected to a company beyond a single internship experience, they are more likely to envision themselves in that industry and aspire toward future roles.

Strategies to maintain engagement include:

- Sharing job and internship opportunities through email, LinkedIn, or text
- Sending quarterly or seasonal newsletters with company or industry updates
- Hosting recurring short-term events (e.g., monthly career chats, recruiting events, virtual panels)
- Inviting past interns to speak on panels or mentor incoming interns
- Encouraging students to join your company's talent network or community platforms

Internships for high school students are more than early career experiences—they are equity-building tools that can **expand access to opportunity**, ignite career identities, and inspire long-term personal and professional growth. These inclusive, future-focused models benefit not only individual students, but entire families and communities.



Conclusion

Internships deliver a range of benefits to multiple stakeholders. For businesses, internships introduce fresh perspectives, cultivate future-ready talent, and support more inclusive and representative workplace practices. For industries, they help ensure a steady flow of skilled, motivated workers who are equipped to meet evolving demands. For students, internships offer a powerful bridge between classroom learning and real-world application—boosting confidence, expanding networks, and helping clarify future goals. And for the community, they contribute to a more equitable and resilient local economy.

By investing in high school interns, you are investing in the people who will **make our future viable**—people whose curiosity, ingenuity, and emerging skills have the potential to solve problems we have not yet imagined. When employers sustain and improve these programs with intention, they help shape a workforce that is innovative, resilient, and reflective of the communities we serve.

Employers in every sector have a unique opportunity to strengthen their talent pipeline and positively shape their communities by engaging high school students through meaningful internships. These experiences do not just benefit young people—they deliver value across the board.

To create **sustained career-readiness opportunities for ALL**, industry partners are encouraged to **connect across sectors**: business, education, government, and nonprofit organizations. Sharing resources, collaborating on projects, and participating in cross-sector advisory groups can amplify the impact of your efforts. Together, we can transform learning from isolated career-ready experiences into an integrated, community-wide practice that fosters economic mobility and lifelong curiosity.

“When we plant seeds of possibility in young people, we cultivate not only their futures—we transform our shared world.”

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The Coalition for Career Development Center will continue updating this playbook and adding examples of practice, so please share with our community what worked for you! Send an email to communications@ccd-center.org with the subject line: “High School Internship Playbook.”

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