

# Steps to Finding Internships

## Identify why you want to do an internship.

Before you begin searching for an internship, think carefully about your goals for your internship experience. Setting goals will help you evaluate the opportunities you find and guide you to the best experience for you.

- What do you want to learn or gain from an internship? Do you want to explore career options? Get the inside scoop on a particular industry or company? Learn a new skill set or apply a particular skill you've learned in school? Network?
- What are your career interests? What industry would be the best fit for your skills and interests? If there are multiple specialties you are interested in, have you considered doing multiple internships to explore each career path?
- What kind of organization do you want to work for? A large corporation or a small family business? A for-profit or a non-profit company?
- One website that may help you think about your goals, motivations and priorities in finding a good internship is  
<http://www.northwestern.edu/careers/internship/pursuing.html#3>.

## Explore the fields of interest, careers, or organizations where you might intern.

Learn what types of careers are available in your field of study and explore the possibility of securing a summer internship to explore those careers. Resources you can use include:

- **Career Center** on your college campus.
  - Schedule an appointment with a career adviser to discuss your goals and options.
  - Take a career assessment if it's available.
  - Review the Career Center's website. Most schools use their websites to promote internship opportunities and resources.
- **Libraries and local bookstores** have many publications on internships and how to successfully apply for one. Some useful guidebooks are:
  - *Vault Guide to Top Internships*
  - *The Student's Federal Career Guide*
  - *Hello Real World! A Student's Approach to Great Internships, Co-ops, and Entry Level Positions*
- **Online searches** for internships will bring up a myriad of resources. Just using terms like "summer internships" or "finding an internship" will give you many leads.
- **Networking** is an often overlooked strategy, but may be one of your best sources for inside information. Talk to everyone you know about what you are seeking to tap into. Ask about each person's career and career path, and set up informational interviews with professionals about a field that may lead to a possible internship.
  - People to talk to include:
    - Your college department chairs, professors, and office staff.
    - Alumni of your college. Your school has an alumni office that can help connect you with alumni who are in your field.

- Family, friends, and friends of friends.
- Fellow Scholars, using the Forum and Facebook to connect.

### **Things to Consider**

Once you've started searching for the perfect internship, there are some details of which you should take special note when deciding which you want to apply for.

- Application deadline
  - Deadlines vary, but many internship opportunities for summer positions are posted in mid- to late-fall with deadlines in early to mid-spring.
  - Some programs have “rolling deadlines”, but getting your application in earlier rather than later is recommended.
- Compensation
  - Consider whether the program you are considering offers a salary or stipend or, conversely, has fees you need to pay in order to participate.
  - Consider other practical benefits such as housing, public transportation passes, group events with other interns, or seminars with management or other field experts.
  - Research other “perks” the company can provide such as tickets to events or travel opportunities.
  - Note that, in general, paid internships are most common in the medical and related research field, architecture, science, engineering, law, business (especially accounting and finance), technology, and advertising. Unpaid internships are common at nonprofit organizations and in government agencies as well as in the fields of journalism and the arts such as museums and theatres.
- Length of internship
  - Determine if the internship coincides with your summer break schedule (or winter break schedule for an externship).
  - If you have a scheduling conflict, ask whether the program could be flexible with the start and end dates for participation.
- Location
  - Determine whether you will enjoy living and working in the city or community where the program is located. Also check to see if housing is arranged by the program or if the company will help you find housing or roommates.
  - Also, determine whether the cost of living at the internship site is feasible based on the compensation.
  - If the internship is not near your home or school, determine whether expenses such as travel and rent are included or out-of-pocket.
- Academic credit available for program
  - Does the internship require that you receive academic credit for the internship?
  - Does your school or major require an internship as part of your coursework?

- What are the requirements to receive credit, and what is tuition on those credits?
- Background check
  - If you are seeking a position with some government agencies or defense contractors dealing with sensitive material, you may be asked to undergo a background check as well as drug testing, so be prepared for that possibility.

### **Applying for an Internship**

Now that you've sorted out which internships seem to be a good fit, there are a number of steps to take and documents to prepare in order to successfully apply for the program.

#### **Create or update your résumé and cover letter**

- Look at examples online or in books from the Career Center, library, or local bookstore.
- Draft a résumé and request feedback from the Career Center or others in the field.
- Be sure to note that you are a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Scholar. The Foundation has created an overview of the scholarship programs to acquaint the internship coordinator with the Foundation and what being a Scholar means about you.

#### **Strengthen your professional writing skills**

- Since many applications require short essays, consider drafting a few based on typical topics such as “How You Will Benefit from this Internship” and “What Your Career Goals Are.”
- Request feedback on your essays or other writing samples from a professor, the Career Center, or the Writing Center at your school. You can also request feedback from family or friends.
  - Note that some of the science-related internships in research will require you to submit an outline of the proposed project. If you're interested in this field, be sure to start crafting a well-thought out proposal and request feedback from your professors. One good site to consider as a guide to creating a competitive science internship application is [www.training.nih.gov/student/common/appadvice.pdf](http://www.training.nih.gov/student/common/appadvice.pdf).
- Prepare thank you notes or letters to be sent immediately after phone and/or in-person interviews. If you are corresponding via email, remember to remain professional with your writing.

#### **Practice interviewing**

Your interview for an internship is as important as having a good application. Be sure to think through possible interview scenarios beforehand so that you are best prepared to give thoughtful answers. Practice both phone and in-person techniques.

- Memorize your résumé and be able to provide specific examples that exemplify your responsibilities or your character.

- Create a list of questions to ask that will help you decide whether the program or organization would be a good fit for you.
  - Always ask a few, even if you just ask about the hiring process.
  - Do your research on the organization to ask thoughtful questions for both an informational interview and an internship interview. You can tailor organization-specific questions based on the examples you find online, such as the website link listed in the previous bullet.
    - Check online at the organization’s website or request materials from the company. Also ask anyone in your Career Center, department, family, and friends about the company—you may be surprised to discover that someone works at the organization and can give you first-hand knowledge.
  - Similarly, if you know with whom you will be interviewing, see if you can find out some background information about the person online at the company website so you can connect on a personal level, especially if they are an alumnus of your school.
- Set up practice interviews with the Career Center or someone you know who can give you constructive feedback.
- Dress appropriately and review techniques on professional conduct. Information can be found online or in books about interviewing.
- Remember that the in-person interview is your chance to make a good first impression.

### **Recommendations/References**

Identify at least two professionals who can write strong letters of recommendations on your behalf. Ask them if they would be willing to serve as a reference. Share your résumé and the internship job description.

- Confirm that you have the best contact information for the company to use – some people may prefer to use their cell phone instead of an office line, for example.
- Give your references advance notice that someone may be in touch, including the name of the company and internship coordinator if you have it.

### **Transcripts**

Be prepared to provide official transcripts for the internship if requested. These can usually be ordered for a nominal fee from your school’s Registrar’s office with advance notice, usually three to five business days. For an additional cost, many Registrar’s office can overnight a transcript. Transcripts can often be requested online, by mail, or in person.