



Working with interns and volunteers



What is the difference between an intern and a volunteer?

An intern is someone who works in your business for little or no money in exchange for skills and experience. Many are college students who are looking to get experience needed for graduation. Internships are generally for a fixed and limited period of time – from a few weeks to about six months. Ultimately internships should include some form of training along with direct supervision of the work involved. Many university programmes require that a student does intern work under the direction of someone in the profession for which the student is training. The purpose of an internship is to introduce and train for a particular job or gain experience in a particular career field.

These days, however, an increasing number of recent graduates are seeing internships as a way to get valuable work experience and a 'foot in the door' of an organisation. This group are much closer in definition to a volunteer.

A volunteer is someone who works in your business for no money. The age range can be much greater than for interns, from teenagers to those past retirement age. Generally, there is no fixed period of 'employment'. A volunteer works with an organisation generally because they believe in its vision, mission and values and wish to donate their time and expertise. Similarly to interns, this is a good way for a person to build up employability skills and obtain a reference.

Why have an intern or a volunteer?

One of the biggest challenges for social entrepreneurs is shortage of time and human resources in order to do everything that needs to be done. Interns and volunteers offer organisations a way to access talent and an 'extra pair of hands' whilst, in return, they receive work experience that enhances skills and employability.

If you take on an intern it is important that you hold up your end of the bargain in exchange for the work that the person puts in. An internship is a way for someone to gain experience, and you have an obligation to educate and train them. Also, many interns do not have much experience (hence the reason they are a cheap resource), so while it is reasonable to ask for a particular skill, many will need guidance from you as they go along. Interns are a low cost resource in financial terms, but not necessarily time-wise, at least initially.

Alternatively, working with volunteers helps you to build links with the local community or within your own sector. Volunteers are often highly motivated and flexible, and are a cost-efficient resource to employers providing the volunteer can do the job they have been asked to do. Not all volunteers are young or inexperienced. Many are older and come with many years of valuable experience. You still need to support and manage them well, to ensure you keep them motivated and your organisation gets full benefit of their experience.

How do I recruit an intern or volunteer?

Recruiting an intern or volunteer is more difficult than one might imagine. Finding the right one for your enterprise is just as important as carefully selecting your employees. And if you're hiring your intern for a short-term project, it's especially important to find someone who can jump in and get the job done.

The best ways to attract interns and volunteers include word of mouth, approaching colleges and universities, and promoting the position on your website or in your building. You can also use other organisation's websites and online social networks and forums. This can be particularly effective if they are ethically-minded or relate to your social enterprise needs, such as Enternships, corporate social responsibility (CSR) networks such as CSR blokes/chicks. Some organisations also specialise in volunteer and internship opportunities, such as your local Volunteer Centre and Intern Town.

What qualities should I look for in an intern or volunteer?

- Enthusiasm
- Commitment
- Willingness to learn
- Good communication skills
- Trustworthiness
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Ability to prioritise
- Problem solving skills
- Appropriate energy level
- Ability to take constructive criticism

How should I 'manage' an intern?

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) has drawn up the Internship Charter which aims to improve the quality of internship schemes. Although it is a voluntary code of practice, the CIPD recommend organisations providing internships should follow these six principles:

1. Recruitment – You should recruit an intern in broadly the same way as regular employees. Have a real job for them to do. Consider how their skills and qualifications will fit with any tasks they will be expected to do. The job advertisement should say how long the internship is for and what financial remuneration there is. Recruit and interview in a fair, open, rigorous way and being mindful of equal access for all. At the interview, be clear whether or not there is a real chance of the internship leading into a permanent job.
2. Induction – It is important that an intern has a proper induction, as you would have for a regular employee.
3. Supervision – You should ensure there is a dedicated person(s) to supervise, train and mentor the intern. This person should also give regular feedback to the intern and conduct a formal performance review at the end of internship.
4. Treatment – Interns should be treated with the same professionalism and duty of care as regular employees. They should be given proper training which enhances their skills and not automatically be given routine tasks, such as the photocopying, that do not make use of their skills.
5. Payment and duration – At minimum, you should pay any necessary work-related expenses incurred by the intern. This will include all travel expenses. If the internship is unpaid and only covers expenses, the internship should only be for about four months. If it is longer than this, then you should have a Volunteer Agreement between both parties. If you are paying the basic minimum wage, or above, then draw up a Fixed Term contract.

Remember that an intern is entitled to statutory leave from day one and other statutory benefits that accrue with length of service such as sickness pay and maternity, paternity and adoption leave. Please see the relevant Business Link and CIPD) web pages for templates of these documents.

6. Certificates / reference and feedback – At the end of the internship, you should give the intern a certificate or reference letter which details the work they have done, what skills and experience they have gained, and the content of the formal performance review. Interns should also be offered the chance to feedback their experience to you. This may help make future internships more useful for both parties.

How should I work with volunteers?

Volunteering England and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) have signed a 'Volunteer Charter' that sets out a series of guidelines to be followed by organisations that work with volunteers. A key point is that volunteers should not be used to displace paid employees or undercut their pay and conditions. A summary of the agreement between Volunteering England and the TUC can be found below.

While volunteers are not entitled to the same rights as an employee, such as the minimum wage, holiday and sickness pay, they should receive "reasonable out-of-pocket expenses" and have access, alongside paid workers, to training and development. Volunteers, like paid staff, should be able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments that are free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, violence and discrimination. They should receive some form of agreement from the organisation they are volunteering with which includes information about the type of work the volunteer will be doing and the support they can expect from the organisation.

Before taking on a volunteer, make sure you have a suitable vacancy and the space that is needed to accommodate them. Have a member of staff who is responsible for looking after the induction, training and supervision of volunteers. Consult with volunteers to find out the level of involvement they would like and what their role is going to consist of. Draw up a Volunteer Agreement, see the Business Link website and be careful not to offer any contractual rights. Refer to Volunteering England and their good practice bank in managing volunteers.

Things to look out for when working with interns and volunteers

- The words intern and volunteer are descriptors – not job titles.
- A volunteer may be eligible to receive certain benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or Jobseeker's Allowance although, for the latter, they must still be seeking work and able to take up the paid post immediately.
- You can pay for a volunteer's travel expenses but be careful with things like meal vouchers as, if they are getting Job Seeker's Allowance, this is classed as 'payment in kind'.
- Make sure you have a suitable vacancy and the space that is needed to accommodate them.
- Have a member of staff or a 'buddy' who is responsible for looking after the induction, training and supervision of interns and volunteers. Consult with them to find out the level of involvement they would like and what their role is going to consist of.
- Although interns and volunteers often prove incredibly useful and supportive, it is important to weigh up any potential risks against cost savings. Managing volunteers and interns can sometimes take more time than you think so ensure it doesn't take time away from dealing with essential work or affect the capacity of your team to deliver on time.

Further information

Visit the Business Link website:

www.businesslink.gov.uk

Visit the Volunteering England website to find your nearest Volunteer Centre at Volunteering England:

www.volunteering.org.uk

Visit the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) website for information on the Internship Charter:

www.cipd.org.uk

Visit the TUC's website to see the agreement between Volunteering England and the TUC:

www.tuc.org.uk/publicsector/tuc-17329-f0.cfm

Visit the VolResource website for information for voluntary and community organisations:

www.volresource.org.uk/briefing/volunteer.htm

Visit the Enternships website:

www.enternships.com

Visit the Graduate Talent Pool website:
www.graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk

Visit the Internocracy website and download the Intern Manager's Guide for Third Sector organisations:
www.internocracy.org

Visit the Idealist website:
www.idealist.org

Visit the Timebank website:
www.timebank.org.uk

Visit the Student Gems website:
www.studentgems.com