

Employers' Guide to Building Internship Programs

**A Framework for Developing Meaningful
High School Internships**

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Introduction



Louisiana's commitment to prioritizing high school students' preparation for life beyond graduation underpins the vision for work-based learning (WBL), where schools and employers collaborate to build a skilled, adaptable workforce that meets industry demands and student aspirations. Student internships offer employers and schools a unique opportunity to partner in designing a learning program that helps employers meet their workforce needs while giving students valuable, real-world experiences that align with their coursework. By participating in internship programs, employers can play a crucial role in enhancing students' educational journeys and better prepare them for future career opportunities. This education-employer collaboration expands the local labor market while creating pathways to success for young people as they transition into post-secondary education, training, or employment.

Internships are work-based programs where high school students work with an employer for a specified period of time to learn about a particular occupation or industry. The workplace activities involved with an internship could include special projects, a sample of tasks from different jobs, or tasks from a single occupation. An internship agreement is set up prior to the experience and outlines the expected objectives to be accomplished by the student. This must include financial compensation. A student must complete at least 106.2 hours of work with an employer and 26.55 hours of classroom instruction with their school.

There are several benefits for employers when hosting student interns, including:

- **Talent Development:** Hosting interns allows employers to identify and nurture young talent, creating a pool of skilled individuals who are already familiar with the company's operations and culture. By investing in internships, employers can strategically prepare for future workforce needs and reduce the costs associated with recruiting external candidates.
- **Enhanced Community Reputation:** Offering internships showcases a company's commitment to supporting education and workforce development in the community. This involvement strengthens relationships with local schools and organizations and enhances the company's reputation as a responsible and community-minded company.
- **Fresh Perspectives:** Interns bring fresh energy and new ways of thinking that can invigorate a workplace. With their unique viewpoints and familiarity with the latest technologies and trends, they can provide innovative solutions to challenges and contribute to a more dynamic and creative work environment.
- **Cost-Effective Workforce:** By assigning meaningful projects to interns, employers can address tasks that may otherwise burden full-time employees, allowing them to focus on more strategic priorities. This cost-effective approach increases overall productivity while providing interns with hands-on learning experiences.

This guidance provides employers with the information needed to partner with their local school system to implement a structured, rewarding, and legally compliant paid high school internship opportunity.

Legal Compliance

Louisiana Minor Labor Laws

[Louisiana minor labor laws](#) provide certain restrictions on the employment of minors under the age of 18. Any specific questions about minor labor laws should be referred to the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) and your company's attorney. The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), the local school system, and the school are not able to give specific legal advice to employers participating in the internship program. See further information in the Additional Resources section.



Fair Labor Standards Act and Compensation

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and child labor standards that apply to full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in federal, state, and local governments. Employers must pay at least the federal minimum wage (currently \$7.25 per hour) to eligible employees, including minors in paid internships unless specific exceptions apply. The FLSA also outlines regulations on the number of hours minors may work and the types of jobs they are permitted to perform to ensure their safety and well-being.

In Louisiana, where there is no state minimum wage law, employers must adhere to the federal minimum wage requirements set by the FLSA. Internships are an opportunity for employers to develop talent and build a workforce pipeline. To attract and retain motivated and skilled interns, employers may compensate interns above the federal minimum wage, particularly if the internship involves significant responsibilities or skill development. Competitive compensation can also make internships more accessible to students who rely on paid work.

Employers should coordinate with local school systems to determine the most effective compensation mechanisms, whether through direct payment to the student or payment to the school system, which then compensates the student. Additional incentives, such as transportation assistance or stipends, can further enhance student participation by addressing potential barriers like travel costs.

Local school systems may have financial resources available to assist in compensating students during internships. WBL teacher-coordinators and school systems can help employers identify and access these resources to support meaningful and equitable internship experiences.

Employment Certificate

Minors between the ages of 14 and 17 may work in Louisiana with an executed [work permit](#). Before an employee under the age of 18 begins working, both the employer and the intern must complete the Application to Employ Minors Under Age 18. This [form](#) is published by LWC. After the employer completes and signs the “Employer Information” section, the intern completes the “Applicant Information” section and has a parent or legal guardian sign the form giving their consent. Then, to obtain an Employment Certificate, the intern submits the completed form to an [authorized issuing location](#).

After the intern is issued an Employment Certificate, the intern provides the certificate to the employer to keep on file as long as the intern is working at the business. LWC can assist with this process by contacting laborprograms@lwc.la.gov.

Health and Safety

The State of Louisiana requires every employer to furnish a "reasonably safe" work environment, including safety devices and anything reasonably necessary to protect the life, health, safety, and welfare of employees. It is important that students participating in an internship program understand the importance of complying with the employer's workplace safety plan and how to report incidents. Employers need to maintain records of any incidents that occur during the Internship experience and share them with the WBL teacher-coordinator as soon as possible.

The Internship

Step 1. Internship Planning Design

1.1. Getting Started

- A successful internship program involves four key players: (1) the employer who provides the work-based learning experience; (2) the school system that coordinates the internship and provides the classroom experience; (3) the student who participates in the internship; and (4) the parents or guardians of the student.
- Initiation of an internship partnership can take one of many forms:
 - the school system outreach to local chamber facilitation or interested employers who make direct contact with their school system;
 - the student or the parent makes contact with potential employer(s); or
 - employers take the lead in communicating their workforce needs and expectations for employing interns.
- For an employer to offer a mutually beneficial internship program, they will need to understand what students should gain from the internship for their academic progression. Working together the employer and the school's WBL teacher-coordinator can develop an agreement that considers the employer's expectations and meets the student's graduation requirements. The WBL teacher-coordinator is a key asset for facilitating the entire internship process.

1.2. Defining Objectives and Job Descriptions

- A well-structured internship program begins with clear objectives and detailed job descriptions that align the intern's experience with both the employer's operational needs and the school system's educational goals. These elements serve as a roadmap for the intern's role, ensuring they gain valuable skills while contributing meaningfully to the organization.
- The employer can develop clear objectives that reflect the knowledge and skills the student will gain during the internship. These objectives will serve as a roadmap for the intern's experience, ensuring that their work aligns with both the employer's operational needs and the school system's educational goals. Clear, well-defined objectives also provide a framework for evaluating the intern's progress and success. Objectives may include:
 - Introducing interns to the employer's business model and culture;
 - Developing core competencies and key skills important in the employer's industry;
 - Providing real-world, hands-on assignments to interns;
 - Reinforcing soft skills such as communication, time management, problem-solving, and teamwork; and
 - Creating a sense of work ethic and respect for the chain of command.

- Internships are carefully designed work experiences, so each intern should have a clear job description that specifies their responsibilities, any necessary qualifications, and expectations while also emphasizing the opportunities for learning and professional development. Job description components include:
 - Overview:** A general description of the responsibilities expected of the intern.
Ex: The Marketing Intern will assist the marketing team in executing campaigns, managing social media platforms, and conducting market research. This internship offers an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in digital marketing and contribute to real-world projects.
 - Responsibilities:** List of the specific tasks to be performed.
 - Learning Objectives:** The skills and proficiencies to be learned during the internship.
 - Required Qualifications:** If applicable, those qualifications an intern needs to possess to be a successful candidate for your Internship program.
 - Pre-Hiring Requirements:** Any pre-hiring requirements for the intern such as drug test, background check, TWIC card, etc.
 - Time Commitment:** According to BESE policy, internships must be at least 106.2 hours in length. The schedule for the internship can occur during school hours, weekends, evenings, holidays, or the summer. Employers work with WBL teacher-coordinators to establish the intern’s work schedule. Employers acknowledge that the intern is a student, and many need to adjust their schedule to school requirements with adequate advanced notice. The intern is expected to keep their supervisor apprised of any changes in their schedule.
 - Compensation:** Interns must be compensated. If the wage escalates with increased skill development, provide the maximum wage to be earned during the internship program.
 - Location:** Include the specific address of the site of the internship and what transportation assistance is available. This may include transportation provided by the student, employer, school, public transportation, or a not-for-profit organization supporting internship programs.

Step 2. Developing a Memorandum of Understanding

2.1. Requirements

- Employers and schools are required to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for an internship program to establish clear guidelines, responsibilities, and expectations for both parties.
- If a company hires more than one intern, each intern will require a separate MOU unless all internships have the same objectives.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities

- Defines the roles of both the school and the employer in managing the internship program.
- Ensures that each party understands their duties and that they work collaboratively.

2.3. Align Educational and Workplace Goals

- Ensure that the internship aligns with the student's academic coursework and learning objectives.
- Specify the types of skills, competencies, or knowledge the student should acquire while employers outline the tasks and projects that will allow the student to meet these learning goals.

2.4. Ensure Legal and Compliance Requirements

- Ensure that the internship program complies with relevant laws and regulations, such as labor laws (Fair Labor Standards Act), minor labor laws, and safety requirements.
- Legal responsibilities, such as workplace safety, insurance coverage, and non-discrimination policies, can be clearly articulated in the MOU to protect both the school and the employer from potential legal issues.

2.5. Set Expectations for Compensation and Benefits

- Specify the wage, payment schedule, and any benefits such as transportation stipends.

2.6. Define the Duration and Scope of the Internship

- Establish the expected duration of the internship (e.g., number of weeks or hours) and the nature of the work the intern will be doing.
- Ensure that the internship has a clear start and end date and provides details on the work schedule (e.g., part-time, full-time).

2.7. Establish Supervision and Evaluation Processes

- Formalize the supervision process, including who will be responsible for overseeing the intern's daily work, mentoring, and providing feedback.
- Formalize how the intern will be evaluated, both from the employer's perspective (e.g., performance reviews) and the school's perspective (e.g., meeting educational objectives).

2.8. Communication and Collaboration

- Establish a framework for regular communication, whether through progress meetings, check-ins, or feedback sessions.

Step 3. Internship Planning

3.1. Mentorship and Supervision

- Selecting and Assigning Mentors**
 - Employers must assign a mentor or supervisor to each intern for regular guidance, feedback, and professional development.
 - When selecting mentors for interns, pick high-performing employees who are willing and capable of taking on interns.
 - In coordination with the WBL teacher-coordinator, mentors provide clear, direct oversight to help students understand the expectations of the job, such as: working collaboratively with others, showing up for work on time and prepared to work, understanding the company culture, improving communication, leadership, and team-building skills.

- Goal Setting**
 - Create a training memorandum for each intern. A training memorandum is a personalized document that helps interns set, track, and achieve their goals.
 - The training memorandum should outline specific, actionable steps to accomplish short- and long-term objectives giving structure to the Internship experience.
- Regular Check-Ins and Feedback**
 - Create a schedule of regular check-ins between supervisors/mentors and students to track progress on their training memorandum.
- Coordination with WBL Teacher-Coordinator**
 - The WBL teacher-coordinator will visit the job site four times during the school year or two times during a summer internship to ensure the student is progressing satisfactorily.

3.2. Project Assignments and Responsibilities

- Meaningful Work**
 - For the intern to gain the most valuable experience from their internship, employers should assign interns small project-based assignments that allow the intern to apply their knowledge, learn new skills, and make real contributions to the company and ensure the assignments align with their training memorandum.
- Clear Expectations**
 - Interns need to receive clear deliverables and timelines and understand the resources available and who their assigned mentor is who can help them resolve questions and conflicts.
- Interactions with Upper Management**
 - Arrange opportunities for interns to interact with upper management through Q&A sessions or shadowing experiences. This exposure broadens their understanding of the company's vision and operations and can inspire them by witnessing leadership in action.
- Exposure to Different Departments**
 - Integrate interns into team meetings, cross-departmental projects, or brainstorming sessions to give them exposure to various parts of the organization.
 - Consider organizing brief department overviews or shadowing opportunities so they can gain insight into different functions.

3.3. Training and Development

- Orientation and Training:**
 - Employers should ensure their intern orientation program covers the basics: the vision, mission, and purpose of the company; an initial tour of the company offices/site and introduce the intern to new co-workers; company policies, dress code, and expectations; and review of the intern's training memorandum.

- Skills Development**
 - If available, offer interns training opportunities, such as access to workshops, webinars, or internal resources that can help interns build new skills.
- Flexibility in Job Assignments**
 - As interns learn about their strengths, weaknesses, and interests through assigned tasks discuss roles and opportunities that may be the best fit in their growth path.
 - Offer opportunities to switch into these roles as the internship progresses.
- Remember Interns are Students**
 - Think about what the interns are going through at school (tests, midterm/final exams, and extracurriculars) and be flexible with scheduling during these times.

Step 4. Evaluation and Feedback

4.1. Performance Reviews

- Intern evaluations are essential tools for learning, accountability, and progress. They ensure that resources are used efficiently, goals are met, and continuous improvement is fostered. Reviews also: encourage accountability; foster continuous improvement; facilitate career development; and improve communication with supervisors.
- Employers should adapt their existing performance evaluation process for their student interns. General categories for evaluating an intern include:
 - Job knowledge and skill competency
 - Quality and accuracy of work
 - Productivity and time management
 - Communication and collaboration
 - Problem-solving and adaptability
 - Accountability and dependability
 - Initiative and self-motivation
 - Customer service and client relations (if applicable)
 - Goals and development
 - Overall performance and potential
- See the Additional Resources section for a sample evaluation form.

4.2. Self-Evaluation

- Self-evaluations allow interns an opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences and areas for improvement. A self-evaluation is highly beneficial for an intern as it encourages personal growth, reflection, and accountability. Added benefits include:
 - develops critical thinking skills;
 - enhances self-awareness;
 - builds confidence;
 - provides valuable input for supervisor feedback; and
 - encourages goal setting.
- See the Additional Resources section for sample self-evaluation questions.

4.3. Exit Interviews

- Conduct exit interviews with interns to gather feedback about their experience and the overall program to assess not only the interns' experience but how you can improve the program for future students.

4.4. Retention and Conversion

- From time to time, there may be an opportunity for an employer to employ a student upon graduation from high school and/or their post-secondary education. The intern's experience in your program can make them an attractive candidate for future employment.
 - Pathways to Full-Time Employment:** Provide a clear path for interns to transition to full-time employees by outlining the steps and requirements needed to reach the next level within the company. Identify students who are a good fit for full-time positions and ensure they understand the opportunities available to them upon graduation, including how to contact your business in the future. Create a smooth transition from student to employee by extending offers and discussing compensation and benefits packages for full- or part-time employment.
 - Stay in Touch:** Recommend ways to stay connected with former interns, such as through email, LinkedIn, company newsletters, website, or social media.

Step 5. Program Review

- 5.1. Employers will want to regularly assess the effectiveness of their internship program. Establishing key performance indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the program itself is as important as assessing the performance and experience of the individual student intern. Decisions regarding how best to enhance a program should be based on objective criteria. Examples of key performance indicators include:
- Intern performance and contribution to your company's strategic goals.
 - Talent pipeline development is measured by how many interns seek permanent employment post-internship and the level of reduced recruitment and retention costs.
 - Supervisor feedback on how well the internship integrated into daily operations was measured by whether interns contributed to improved workflow.

Step 6. Recruitment and Onboarding

6.1. Recruitment Strategies

- Meet Students Where They Are**
 - Visit high school campuses, participate in career days, and engage directly with students to build awareness of internship opportunities.
- Collaborate with Schools**
 - Work with CTE supervisors at your school system to determine the technical skills that align with your Internship opportunities and identify opportunities to engage with interested students.

- Provide local high schools with a list of available internship positions suitable for high school students.
- Provide local high schools with any current students you employ so the school district can count those interns in their planning and reporting.
- Seek a list of students who may be interested in working and learning more about the jobs available in your industry and set up interview opportunities.
- Host Job Shadowing Days**
 - Invite potential interns to spend a few hours at your company to experience the workplace firsthand before committing to an internship.
- Job Boards**
 - Create an announcement of your available internships and post to local chamber of commerce boards, or on school campuses.

6.2. Interview and Selection Process

- For many student interns, this will be their first employment experience, so the selection criteria should take into consideration that the intern will have limited prior work experience and qualifications. This will increase the importance of the job interview, academic courses completed, school clubs/activities/sports, community/civic involvement, and school/teacher recommendations.
- Provide a job description of the position(s) to be filled.
- Clearly communicate expectations to potential students.
- Share company vision, mission statements, and annual reports, if available.

6.3. Onboarding

- Employers should incorporate the student learning experience into their existing onboarding procedures.
- To acclimate the intern to your company culture, a thorough orientation program allows new interns to easily understand their place at the company and the expectations. It also helps them have a successful start and ensures consistency in the workforce.

School System Support

Program Development

- 1.1. WBL teacher-coordinators for work-based programs create a student-focused goal/vision for an Internship program in the community, including:
 - Ensuring the internship is aligned with relevant industry standards.
 - Creating a framework for identifying and selecting businesses.
 - Developing a checklist of employability skills students will work on during the experience.
 - Engaging students and their parents and guardians about internship opportunities.
 - Addressing student transportation issues.
 - Creating promotional materials to share with community businesses.
 - Promoting employer partnerships.
- 1.2. Classroom Instruction
 - Identify and develop a curriculum that includes WBL experiences to provide foundational knowledge and criteria based on WBL guidance. WBL teacher-coordinators also determine the student's grade.
- 1.3. Recruitment
 - Recruit appropriate worksites and create career day opportunities where students can engage with potential employers.
 - Assess student readiness, attitude, and skills as determined by the WBL teacher-coordinator and employer.
 - Place students in appropriate and safe learning environments.
- 1.4. Transportation
 - School systems work with employers to identify resources to assist students with transportation to and from the job site. Schools also work with students to structure class schedules to accommodate work obligations. In some instances, the employer or local economic development organizations offer financial resources for an intern's transportation needs.
- 1.5. Site Visits
 - WBL teacher-coordinators visit the worksite four times during the school year or two times during the summer to observe the student at work, confer with the employer, and obtain an evaluation of the student's progress.
- 1.6. Communication
 - Conduct ongoing community engagement with industry partners through advisory boards or other processes.
- 1.7. Work Permits and Labor Law
 - Acting with the advice and support of its legal counsel, assist students in obtaining necessary work permits and consult with the employer regarding labor laws for the industry and inform the student and the parent or legal guardian of labor laws as they apply to minors engaged in work-based learning.

1.8. Expectations

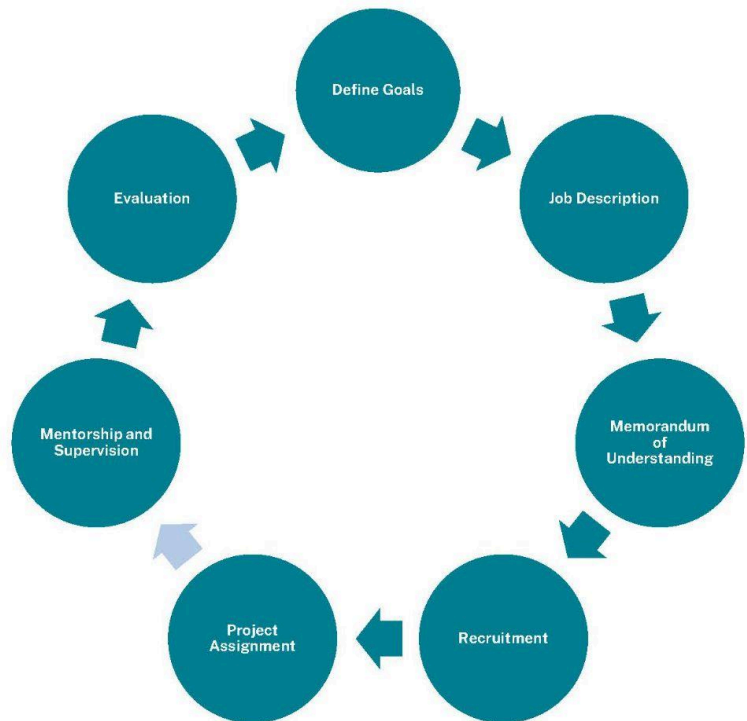
- Outline expectations for students participating in WBL programs.
- Communicate regularly with teachers, counselors, and industry partners to ensure quality placements and learning experiences.
- Document and communicate the roles and responsibilities of all invested parties to internal and external stakeholders.

1.9. Program Promotion

- Coordinate open houses (as a district or at each school) to promote the program:
 - Students present on their experiences during the internship.
 - Students hold culminating presentation(s) on the overall experience.
 - Businesses speak to experiences with students.
 - Monthly Newsletters Showcasing student experiences.
 - Report detailing the number of students, number of hours, and number of employers.
 - Presentations to town hall meetings, Rotary, chambers of commerce, and church groups.

Summary of Best Practices

- Internship programs have clear objectives that reflect the experience students can expect from their internship.
- Employers and schools sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for their internship program to establish clear guidelines, responsibilities, and expectations for both parties.
- Employers work with CTE supervisors at the school district to align diploma pathways with internship opportunities and to engage with interested students.
- Robust orientation programs allow new interns to easily understand their place at the company and the expectations. It also helps them have a successful start and ensures consistency in the workforce.
- Intern mentors provide regular guidance, feedback, and professional development so interns can successfully fulfill the employer's expectations and provide valuable work experience for the intern.
- Employers assign projects that allow the intern to apply their knowledge, learn new skills, and make real contributions to the company.
- Post-internship evaluations are essential tools for learning, accountability, and progress. They ensure that resources are used efficiently, goals are met, and continuous improvement is fostered.



Ready to start your internship program? Contact the LDOE at fastforward@la.gov for support in setting up a legally compliant and effective internship program tailored to your needs.

Additional Resources

- [Employment of Minors Informational Booklet](#)
- [Internship Program Guides](#)
- [Louisiana Economic Development \(LED\) Partners & Allies](#)
- [Louisiana Employers' Duty as to Safety Law](#)
- [Minor Labor Law Placard](#)