

Appendix A:

Potential Benefits and Challenges of Hosting Interns

There are several reasons to consider hosting one or more interns at your library. Indeed, there are a number of benefits that can be accrued both the library and the individual intern. Here are a few of those benefits, as collected from sources in the field as well as respondents to the internship engagement survey of libraries in the Pacific Northwest:

A Quick Note Regarding Paid Internships

This toolkit focuses almost entirely on the development and management of unpaid internships. If you are considering offering paid internships, you might want to read *Public Library Internships: Advice from the Field*, edited by Cindy Mediaville and published by Scarecrow Press, Inc. in 2006, for additional information and possible models.

Potential Benefits for the Library

- The ability to get more work done with the assistance of skilled interns, including tasks and projects that might otherwise not get done at all (as well as opportunities for staff to try out new projects which they previously would have been unable to try);
- The opportunity to train and invest in the next generation of library leadership (including identifying potential future employees);
- Model career paths to and within libraries to your patrons;
- Access to new perspectives, ideas, and skill sets;
- Access to professional development opportunities for existing staff (for example, developing management skills);
- The opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation, facilitated by sharing staff expertise with interns;
- Opportunities to build and sustain partnerships with educational institutions and communities;
- Furthering the library's mission of reaching out to and providing educational opportunities to the community;
- The affordability and flexibility of engaging interns;
- Interns diversifying the library team, including bringing in younger individuals and individuals representative of the community served; and
- Opportunities for positive public relations in the community and with funders.
- To better serve and support your community.
- Building a cadre of people who better understand the work of the library and can therefore be strong advocates of their importance

Potential Benefits for the Intern

- Opportunities for high quality, hands-on experience in a real world library setting, including mentorship, job-shadowing, and exposure to many different kinds of library roles and projects;

- Professional skill development and resume-building in a supportive environment;
- Chance for interns to confirm that they are on the right career path and/or determine specific interests or areas of specialization within library environments to pursue;
- Access to building new professional relationships, networks, job contacts, and potential references; and
- Opportunities to gain and fulfill academic credits and requirements, all while applying real world practice to academic learning.

Potential Challenges to Consider

So with all of these potential benefits to garner from hosting interns, it might seem like a no-brainer to get started. However, there are also some real challenges to consider before taking the leap, including:

- Lacking the infrastructure to effectively find, train, and manage interns and/or adhere to university requirements;
- Lacking knowledge of and/or time to develop appropriate internship projects;
- Lacking time and/or staff capacity to effectively engage interns;
- Lacking the necessary financial, space, or other types of resources to effectively engage interns;
- Finding and matching appropriate interns given available internship roles or tasks;
- Establishing clear understanding of and agreement to library and intern needs and expectations;
- Staff lacking the necessary skills to train and supervise interns (as well as an understanding of what interns can potentially do); and
- Sustaining intern projects after the internship is complete.
- Understanding the culture of your workplace and bringing in someone who will be a good fit;
- Interns taking the lead on a project that a staff person wants to take on, potentially unintentionally fostering jealousy or resentment.

Having reviewed these challenges though, one of the goals of this toolkit is to help you assess, prepare for, and ideally prevent them from diminishing the benefits your library can experience from hosting interns.

Consider what Cindy Mediaville wrote in “Public Library Internships: Advice from the Field” on this topic:



Although internships demand a lot of effort on the part of the student, the school, and the worksite, the benefits of such programs are overwhelmingly positive. Not only does the practicum allow the student an opportunity to put into practice new skills and knowledge learned in the classroom, but this experience may actually lead to one’s very first professional job. In addition, the internship site gains an enthusiastic, if temporary, employee

who often brings a fresh perspective to the workplace. Mentor relationships may also develop as new professional networks are formed.¹ ●

1. "Public Library Internships: Advices from the Field" edited by Cindy Mediavilla. introduction viii

About this book

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