Chapter 3: Developing a Program

Having performed an assessment of your library's readiness for hosting interns, it is now time to begin building a formal internship program. Don't let "building a program" seem intimidating though; this doesn't necessarily mean hiring all new staff or developing a convoluted infrastructure to add to what is probably an already hectic workload. Instead, this chapter offers several models to consider and processes to implement to find and host interns with little effort.

Develop Goals and a Vision for Your Internship Program

Before we start to dive into the specifics of internship program infrastructure and activities, it is a good idea to spend a little time thinking about your library's vision and goals for internship engagement.

To get started with this, consider the following two questions; these should be answered both by you (or whoever is most responsible for developing the infrastructure for your internship program) as well as, ideally, fellow staff members and leadership at the library:

1. What would a successful internship program look like at your library?

    a. Consider writing a narrative description of this; for example, "our staff have more time to take on new projects while partnering with interns to complete ongoing library tasks."

    b. Do you know of any existing internship programs that you admire? What is it about their program that you find appealing? How can your library emulate that?

    c. Take a look at the list of potential benefits in Chapter 1. Which are you aiming for? What would you like to see happen?

    d. If someone were to ask you "Why should we host interns at our library?," how would you answer their question? Consider revisiting Chapter 2's section on making the case.

2. What tangible objectives and deliverables can you develop for your library internship program?

    a. For example, would you like to have interns complete a pre-determined number of projects per year?

☑ Internship Management Checklist[1]

- ☐ *Develop goals and a vision for your internship program*
- ☐ *Determine your intern program infrastructure*
- ☐ *Craft policies and procedures*
- ☐ Brainstorm potential internship roles and projects
- ☐ Develop internship position descriptions for available roles
- ☐ *Create an internship application*
- ☐ *Create an internship agreement form*
- ☐ *Create an internship handbook*

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1. Tasks in italics are those that you may only need to do when you are first setting up your internship program (although you should certainly plan to revisit these tasks at least once per year to confirm that they are still relevant).

i. What other deliverables might there be: number of interns, hours contributed, etc.?

ii. If you think interns might be able to provide new stories of interest for public relations or fundraising, how might you craft interesting projects that are newsworthy and/or fundable?

Internship Program Structure and Staffing

Now let's start putting a basic framework in place. Looking at your library's internship program from 30,000 feet, consider using one of the following program structure and staffing models:

1. You might assign one staff person to develop your library's internship processes and infrastructure (using the steps in this chapter), then assign responsibilities for implementing each step of the process to one or more existing staff persons.

2. Another option is to develop the program in partnership with a skilled volunteer – or intern! – and again assign responsibilities for implementation to various staff persons, whether they be paid staff or volunteers.

3. Alternatively, if your library has funds and/or personnel available, consider hiring or allocating one or more full-time or half-time staff persons to develop and run the formal internship program from recruitment to evaluation.

For additional staffing/procedural models, including real world examples utilized by traditional and non-traditional libraries alike, consider reading "Public Library Internships: Advice from the Field," edited by Cindy Mediaville and published by Scarecrow Press, Inc. in 2006.

Regardless of whether you are able to allocate half to all of a paid employee's time to serving as an internship program coordinator, it is a good idea for at least one person to be designated the point person for this process. This is especially important if considering a model where multiple people will be responsible for various pieces; the more complex the ship, the more important it is to have a competent captain at the helm!

However you assign responsibilities, there are several key steps to the internship engagement process that you will need to consider:

- Finding/recruiting potential interns;
- Selection, vetting, and interviewing potential interns;

> **Here's an example responsibility framework led by two staff persons:**
>
> - First, the library's Volunteer Coordinator reaches out to all staff to determine internship needs and projects. Simultaneously, staff members come to the Volunteer Coordinator with ideas for internship roles. Let's say in this example that the Technology Director has a project idea and is seeking an intern.
> - The Volunteer Coordinator will next develop a position description for this project in partnership with the Technology Director.
> - The Volunteer Coordinator then leads the recruitment and screening process; the interview process is done in partnership with the Technology Director
> - Once the intern has been hired, the Technology Director is responsible for leading (or potentially assigning the responsibility to other people within his or her department) training and orientation for the intern, ongoing management and communications with the intern (including ongoing professional development), and evaluating/recognizing the intern (including completing any paperwork that might be required by the intern's college or university).
> - Evaluation results then go back to the Volunteer Coordinator so that they can track overall internship program statistics as well as continue to fine-tune internship program components.

- Training and orientation;
- Supervision and management (including facilitating intern professional/ educational development); and
- Evaluation and recognition.

Each of these steps in the process will be addressed by subsequent chapters in this toolkit. However, you may want to start thinking now about who might be available and/or most appropriate to do these types of work within your library's staff and volunteer team.

Develop Policies and Procedures

Based on your organization's vision, goals, and internship engagement infrastructure, you can then craft a short set of policies and procedures for the program. These will provide an overarching outline of your entire internship program.

Key components of a good set of policies and procedures will be:

- Rules and regulations governing the engagement of interns (for example, labor rules discussed in Chapter 1);
- Strategies for finding interns (including any standing relationships with university programs);
- Process for screening interns, including applications, interviews, etc.;
- Criteria and process for accepting or rejecting potential interns;
- Risk management, including how the intern program will seek to identify and avoid risks;
- Conflict resolution including disciplinary procedures, an intern's rights and responsibilities, and the process for letting interns go where appropriate;
- Management framework, including communications and supervision techniques for engaging interns;
- Intern recognition, tracking, and evaluation strategies.

> **Start With What You've Got**
>
> If your library already engages volunteers, chances are good that an existing set of policies and procedures exists for that program. Start with these and then change as needed to address specific internship concerns.

Keep in mind that the content for each of these components will be developed as you continue to work through this toolkit.

In addition, you should develop and include copies and/or templates for:

- Standing internship position descriptions and templates;
- Internship application form(s)
- Internship contract/ agreement forms where the intern and library agree to a written set of expectations (based on the internship position description)
- Intern handbook

We'll start developing these program components here in this chapter. You can also find good examples of internal internship policies on our website at http://libraryinterns.blogspot.com, as well as in the book "Public Library Internships: Advice from the Field," edited by Cindy Mediaville and published by Scarecrow Press, Inc. in 2006.

Intern Projects and Roles

Before you begin crafting position descriptions for potential interns, spend a little time brainstorming potential projects, tasks, and roles for them. Ask yourself – as well as staff peers and library leadership – questions like the following:

1. What are some skilled projects or tasks that you just don't have time to get done?

    a. How might an intern be able to assist with this? Can they take the lead? Assist with specific pieces of it?

    b. What skills and/or education would they need to have to succeed?

    c. Do you suspect that the time spent training and managing an intern to take on this role will be worth it for the final product?

2. What is on your wish list of new projects and tasks to try? For example, a new approach to an old problem or a new idea/project entirely?

    a. How might an intern help you accomplish this? Might they take the lead on it? Can they get started on one part of it?

    b. What tasks or responsibilities might an intern be able to free you from so that you can focus on this new project?

    c. What skills and/or education would they need to have to succeed?

    d. Do you suspect that the time spent training and managing an intern to take on this role will be worth it for the final product?

3. If you were in charge of educating the next generation of library leadership, what would you want them to know?

    a. What are the top five things you think an intern should know about our library and/or library careers?

    b. What are the top five skills you think an intern should learn in order to be prepared for a career with libraries?

You'll notice that the word "skilled" appears here when thinking about potential projects or tasks. This is because an intern is meant to be learning and growing professionally in their role; assigning them the "grunt" work that no one else wants to do is not only not keeping with the spirit of internships but is also likely to result in an unproductive internship (and likely an unhappy intern). In addition, your library's reputation as a high quality place for interns to learn and grow could potentially be tarnished if interns consistently report having bad experiences there, thereby perhaps limiting your ability to attract qualified interns down the road.

Again, it is very important that you seek the opinions and ideas of staff throughout the library. Not only will this help to increase staff buy-in of the internship program and

future intern efforts as they participate and have opportunities to provide feedback on the process and work, but you'll also likely identify potentially internship projects that you wouldn't have otherwise considered.

Once you have a working list of potential projects or tasks, it's time to break them down into the component parts of the work. For example:

- What specific tasks and responsibilities are associated with this role or project?

- How many hours per week will it likely take an intern to do these tasks?

  - Should they be full-time? Part-time?

- What training might they need to succeed? Who can provide this?

  - What do they need to know coming into the position that training and orientation likely won't cover?

- What resources will they need to do this work? Keep in mind that this can range from financial resources to having a place (and a computer with which) to work.

> **Identifying Projects and Roles**
>
> Ready to start answering the questions we've asked in this section? See the appendix section of this toolkit for a printable list of questions.

- Who is available to supervise an intern in this role? How much time will this likely take?

- Are you open to accepting interns from out of town?

  - If so, can you help them find accommodations?

- Are any of these projects amenable to finding online interns? This can be an especially good option for libraries located in rural areas and/or far from universities.

  - Keep in mind that many writing, research, and web-related projects can be completed from anywhere in the world, using the Internet and phone to collaborate between staff and intern

- Are these projects open to people with varying degrees of mobility or other potential physical limitations? How can we ensure that these projects are accessible to a broad pool of potential candidates?

So what are some potential library internship projects to consider? Here are just a few that other libraries have tried:

- Developing programs for children, youth, and teens

- Planning and coordinating community events

- Assisting with technology and media projects, including website development/ management, social media, digital collections, digital publishing, and systems administration

- Archiving and digitizing library materials, including converting files and encoding

- Assisting with ongoing library tasks and programs like cataloging, references, instruction, collection development/management, weeding, circulation, Summer reading programs, book clubs, storytime programs, after-school mentoring/ tutoring/homework help

- Designing and delivering internal trainings for staff on topics like effective social media and conducting outreach to diverse communities

- Designing marketing and outreach materials – from blogs to newsletters

- Conducting assessment and research projects on topics like working with special needs patrons, distance education tools, and community needs

- Assisting with fundraising and grant writing

- Developing research and subject guides

- Creating videos and photography to exhibit or supplement library materials and programs

Keep in mind that many internships may be structured as a combination of several types of projects. For example, you might have an intern whose main responsibility is conducting a community needs assessment of youth programs but who, during their internship, will also assist with collection development, storytime activities, and identifying potential funders for future programs per their research.

Internship Position Descriptions

So how should your internship position description be structured? Here are some key elements to consider including in your internship position description:
- Basic information about your library (size, staffing, communities served, current programs, etc.)

- Context of the work within the library. (for example: "every month, our Youth Department serves 3000 young people who use the library for everything from researching school projects to receiving homework assistance to learning about new technologies in community workshops")

- Internship project details, including:

  - Specific tasks of this internship position

  - What skills and education are required

  - What skills and education are preferred

  - What training will be provided

  - Where and when the project takes place, including work environment and culture

  - Who the intern will work with and report to

  - Length of project/time commitment and schedule

> ### A Template for Internship Position Descriptions
>
> Once you are ready to start crafting your internship position descriptions, visit the appendix section of this toolkit; you'll find an Internship Position Description template for your use there.

- Importance of the internship, including how interns are important to the overall work of your library

- Benefits to the intern, including how they will personally and professionally learn and grow in this position. Also be sure to explicitly state whether this intern is paid or unpaid.

- Educational opportunities for interns at or via your library (we'll talk more about these in Chapter 7)

- Finally, your position description should provide information on the application process, including a formal application and contact information

Overall, try to be as descriptive, thorough, and realistic as possible when crafting your position description. The more accurate the description, the better your chances that both the intern and the library will be happy.

A quick Internet search will turn up several examples and templates of internship position descriptions that you can emulate; you'll also find several examples on our website at http://libraryinterns.blogspot.com. An internship position description template can also be found in the appendix of this toolkit. Do consider starting with existing volunteer position descriptions used by your library and expanding out from there, using a similar format but incorporating more of the information listed above.

Internship Applications

The next few things you'll want to develop are an internship application form and an internship contract or agreement. The application form can be as simple or as complex as you'd like for it to be, although there are a few key questions that you'll likely want to ask all interns:

- Basic contact information

- Current academic affiliation (if relevant), including major/degree program, year in the program, university internship requirements, etc.

- Educational background to date

- Professional/work background to date, including any previous experience working in and with libraries

- Skills and abilities (for example, second language aptitude)

- Availability for internship, including length and any requirements re: schedule

- Why they are interested in this particular internship? For example, what do they hope to gain from the experience? What do they hope to learn?

- Contact information for two or three professional references (for example, professors in their department and/or colleagues in their field)

> **An Internship Application Template**
>
> Please see the appendix section of this toolkit for a customizable template of an internship application form.

Finally, consider asking applicants to submit written questions related to the internship opportunity, their relevant skills and experience, and their career objectives. Their answers to these questions may give you further insight into their goals and expectations for an internship (as well as offer a sample of their writing should the internship require strong writing skills). Examples of written questions to consider include:

1. What are some of the skills that you hope to learn/sharpen during this internship?

2. What is your ideal work environment?

   a. Give examples if necessary: do you prefer receiving specific instructions

and steps or are you more interested in crafting your own approach, do you prefer working in a collaborative environment with lots of stimuli or in an uninterrupted quiet space, etc.

3. What aspects of the library system interest you the most? What areas would you most like to learn about?

4. What role do you see the library playing in the 21st Century? What vision do you have for the future potential of libraries?

5. How has the library played an important role in your life?

6. Describe a particularly meaningful personal or professional experience.

7. Describe a professional challenge you faced and how you dealt with it.

Internship Agreement

An internship agreement serves both as a written understanding of the internship – from both the intern's and the library's perspective – as well as foundational document for managing internship progress and expectations. Some of the elements you might consider including in an internship agreement include:

- Internship title

- Key internship tasks/deliverables/responsibilities

- Agreed-upon length of internship

- Acknowledgement that the internship is unpaid and is in adherence with federal, state, and/or local labor laws

- Mutually agreed-upon expectations of the intern and the hosting library; for example, as de facto representatives of the library, interns will treat members of the public with professional courtesy and respect (NOTE: these types of expectations can be pulled from existing human resources and/or volunteer engagement documents as well as from the rights and responsibilities discussed in the following section on internship handbooks)

This document should be read by each party, discussed in person (or over the phone for online internships), and then signed to indicate agreement. Keep in mind, however, that this will almost certainly not be considered a legal document or agreement; rather, this is an informal written understanding of the professional relationship into which all parties will soon be entering.

You'll find a template and example applications and internship agreements in appendices of this toolkit as well as on our website at http://libraryinterns.blogspot.com. Many examples can also be found by searching for "internship application" and "internship agreement" on search engines like Google.com.

Internship Handbook

One last document you might want to create to prepare for future interns is an internship handbook. Similar to handbooks created for new staff members or volunteers, this can serve as an introduction to the library, the role of interns as part of the library team,

and the rights and responsibilities of interns. This handbook can also serve an introductory guide to the internship program for future participating staff. Some of the things you might want to include will be:

- A brief history of the library

- A snapshot overview of communities served by the library, current programs, library hours and locations, staffing hierarchy, etc.

- A brief history of interns at the library

- Frequently asked questions (for example, where can I park? Who do I talk to when I have a scheduling conflict? Where are some good places to eat lunch nearby?)

- Human resources policies and procedures, as well as ethical expectations, that might apply to interns; for example, issues of confidentiality, intellectual property, safety and security, and dress code

You might also include information on internship and library rights and responsibilities. These might include such things as the library offering educational opportunities and being clear about internship tasks and expectations as well as the intern discussing project progress and communicating questions and concerns to their supervisor or other staff persons.

Again, keep in mind that these types of rights and responsibilities can build upon any existing rights and responsibilities crafted by your library for paid staff or volunteers. One example, specifically designed for volunteers, can be found online at Idealist.org here: http://www.idealist.org/info/Volunteer/Rights.

To get started on your internship handbook, talk to fellow staff members who are responsible for hiring/training paid staff and volunteers to see what if any kinds of handbooks might already exist. You can then expand upon these and/or tailor information for an intern audience as needed. Again, you might also do a quick web search for example and template internship handbooks; one example available online, developed by the Center for Sacramento History, can be found at http://www.cityofsacramento.org/ccl/history/pdf/volunteer/Handbook.pdf.

Additional examples can be found on our website at http://libraryinterns.blogspot.com. ●

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