Once you have a pool of potential applicants to consider for your available internships, the critical work of screening and selection begins. This is arguably one of the most important steps in the process: with proper screening and selection, you'll be able to find a great fit between intern and library needs and expectations. Should this step be skipped, however, you may end up with a poor fit, satisfying no one's goals and objectives and unfortunately wasting time in the process (especially as this means you'd likely need to start the process of recruitment over again or forego hosting an intern in the desired role).

This doesn't mean that screening and selection must be arduous though. Think of it instead as three steps to due diligence: screening, interviewing, and matching.

☑ **Internship Management Checklist[1]**

☐ Review and screen applications

☐ Complete background checks (where needed)

☐ Interview promising applicants

☐ Contact applicant references

☐ Determine whether/how to engage an applicant

Screening

You've already gathered key screening information during the application process, including previous experience, educational background, professional references, and responses to written questions. You should then formally begin the screening process by reviewing these materials and determining if their skills and experience appear to be a good fit for the internship role or project in question.

Keep in mind that many intern candidates are still learning their professional craft and so will likely not have the same level of professional experience you might expect from candidates for paid library positions. Instead, give extra attention to the types of coursework they have taken, academic accomplishments they have achieved, or community and extracurricular activities. At the same time, you may also receive applicants who appear to be overqualified for the role, especially where these applicants are mid-career professionals or professionals in career transition. For these candidates, bear in mind that the internship would be primarily about gathering new skills and experiences, so the weight of consideration should go to what they are hoping to learn during the internship as well as how their existing skills might make them appropriate for the role.

Criminal Background Screening

Do you need to conduct a criminal background screening of your intern candidates? The answer to this question likely depends on several issues. For example, will this intern be working one-on-one with vulnerable populations such as children or people with developmental disabilities? To determine whether you need to conduct this additional level of formal screening, talk to your peers in Human Resources and/or volunteer management to learn more about what if any legal or ethical rules or guidelines the library already has in place for bringing on new personnel. You might also seek guidance from the library's legal counsel or advisor on this issue.

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).

A quick note: in many cases, screening in tandem with academic partners can offer a distinct advantage. Service learning, career services, and academic departments can serve as a first step in the screening process by referring from their internal pool of applicants who might best match up with your library internship needs. Indeed, they should generally know more about both the student's strengths and interests as well as the particular strengths of the department in which they are studying. Having an external partner directing qualified, well-matched applicants toward a library internship can potentially be a huge timesaver for you and your staff. This partnership is also important if you need a last minute intern as schools can often direct qualified people your way more quickly and easily.

Interviewing

Once you have one or more individuals who appear to be qualified for the position, you are ready to move on to the next step of this three part process: interviewing.

Interviews should ideally be conducted face-to-face; where this isn't possible – for example, when the student would be moving to your library's community specifically to do the internship or the internship is primarily web-based – consider using web-based technology with a video component such as Skype.

The purpose of the interview is twofold. First, you will be seeking more in-depth answers to questions about the candidate, their goals and expectations, and how they might best fit with your internship needs. Second, you'll be learning more about how the individual communicates, how they present themselves professionally, and how they handle stressful (although hopefully not too stressful!) situations – all good things to know, especially if the intern will be interacting with the public and thus informally (or formally) representing the library.

Here are a few questions to consider asking as part of your interview process; you'll also find this list of questions as a printable checklist in the appendix section of this toolkit:

- What most appealed to you about our library? This particular internship?

- What are your future career goals? Why have you chosen libraries as your career path?

- (For students) Tell me about your degree program. How did you choose it? How do you think it has prepared you for an internship in a library setting?

- (For non-students) Tell me about your professional experience in __ field. How will these experiences and skills potentially benefit an internship in a library setting?

- Tell me about your experience with [one or more specific skills required to succeed in the internship].

- What would you most like to learn from an internship? What would you most like to experience?

- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths (for example, writing,

Signs of the Over-Committed

Sometimes the most attractive candidate stands out because they have a stellar set of skills, experiences, and current responsibilities. So how can you make sure that you don't choose the intern who – despite their enthusiasm and assurances that they won't take on too much – will need to cut back on their responsibilities once things get too busy? The best way to approach this is to offer candidates ways to self-identify their own availability and provide them with clear, realistic expectations of the internships time commitment. For example, being clear with expectations for hours expected each week, appropriate schedules, length of internship, and any deadlines or timelines associated with internship deliverables should help to serve as a good first step to give candidates a realistic picture of what they are agreeing to should they decide to serve in the internship.

research, having a long-term vision, attention to detail, etc.)? How might these lend to and/or be strengthened by this internship?

- What would you consider to be your greatest challenges? How might this internship help you to address these challenges?

- What is your availability for the internship: when can you start, how long can you stay, what type of schedule might you be available for, etc.?

- Is there anything else that you would like for us to know about your qualifications for this internship?

- Do you have any questions for me today?

Don't forget to include the staff person who will be most responsible for supervising this intern in the interview process. After all, the most successful internships are often first and foremost about positive relationships and no one will be more involved in day-to-day relationship building with an intern than their future supervisor. In addition, engaging staff peers in the selection process can help to increase the level of investment those staff members have both in the success of the individual intern as well as the overall program.

Following interviews, contact references for your most promising candidates in order to learn more about their strengths and weaknesses; you'll find a References Interview template that you can use for this activity in the appendix section of this toolkit. Questions to ask might include: 1) what do you consider to be this person's strongest skills and qualities?; 2) what might you consider to be their greatest challenge or weakness?; 3) Describe a situation in which you have seen this person excel. What was most impressive?; and 4) In what type of role do you think they might most thrive as an intern?

Matching

The third step in your screening and selection process is to identify your most qualified applicants and match them to your available internships. Ideally this will consist of matching a qualified intern with the internship position for which they have applied. However, in some cases – for example, if you received applications from two quality candidates for one position and you'd like to engage them both – you might consider offering a different position to an applicant.

DIY Candidates

Chances are good that you've had individuals approach your library in the past with the interest of securing an internship – only it wasn't in response to one of your recruitment efforts. For example, perhaps they happened to be on your website and think it could use a tune-up, so they have approached you to see if you'll take them on as an intern to do so. What do you do in these situations?

Don't panic. Instead, just add two preliminary steps to the screening and selection process described above. First, ask them to craft a detailed outline for the internship position they have in mind. What would the goals be? What kind of timeline would they have in mind? What resources would they need? Once they have this ready, take a look and assess it much as you would your internal wish list of potential internship tasks and projects. Is this project something you need? Something the library could benefit from? Run it by relevant staff. In the case of the website example, does the Director of Technology agree that it makes sense? Also, does the staff person have the time to manage this intern? If so, then you might have the makings for a good internship on your hands.

If the answer is no, then be sure to communicate your gratitude to them for sharing their idea with the library. Let them know that you would like to keep them in mind for a future internship on this topic should it become a priority. In the meantime, they are welcome to apply for any of the existing internship (or volunteer) opportunities that have already been created; they might also pitch their idea to your library's volunteer coordinator as an independent volunteer project.

The goal here is to not succumb to the desire to create something for everyone who comes in with an idea or a desire to help. Instead, put the responsibility for making the case for the internship project or role back on them and, should it seem like a good fit for your library, then have them go through the same screening, interviewing, and matching process that you'll conduct for all of your other candidates. If a mutually beneficial fit is not the outcome, you can always help direct them to other organizational partners to ensure that they are supported in finding opportunities to serve that best suit their skills and interests.

Include both the person responsible for the overall internship program as well as the potential supervisor in the decision-making and matching process. Also, keep in mind how you will balance your opinions on candidates. For example, can you ask people to rank their first, second, or third choices of candidates for the position? Again, consider talking to your peers in human resources for models to emulate.

When making your decision, consider the personal and professional interests of the intern (particularly ways in which they want to grow), their skills, strengths, and experiences, and their work style (work environment, supervision, goal-setting, etc.) alongside the opportunities you have available. Again, remember that while a personality fit with their supervisor is imperative for success, if you feel the opportunity is ideal for a candidate but there could be a potential work style clash with that position's supervisor, there are also ways to cross-mentor (we'll discuss these kinds of strategies in Chapter 8).

When you're ready to make the decision about which intern for which position, consider the following three criteria:

Intern's Expectations:
☐ Based on the intern's application and subsequent interview, as well as their individual goals, learning objectives, desired skill acquisitions, networking opportunities, work styles, passions, and planned professional next steps, is our internship an appropriate opportunity for this candidate?

Library Needs:
☐ Given the skills required to be successful, learning and achievement objectives of the project, and management style of supervisory staff, is this the "right" candidate for our internship needs?

A Question of Fit: Will this intern be a good fit with their future supervisor? Do they seem like they will fit in well with the library's organizational culture? A good internship should be an appropriate fit of intern goals and skills, library needs and expectations, and how well the intern fits in with existing organizational culture. For example, if your library environment tends to be a serious place, a candidate with a penchant for practical jokes may not fit well. Alternatively, if the atmosphere is lively and interpersonal, a candidate seeking minimal human interaction may have a more difficult time fitting in and thus learning and accomplishing as much. These are all subjective criteria so they shouldn't be deal breakers, rather just factors to consider. ●

What Should You Do When You Don't Find a Great Fit?

While in a perfect scenario, you'll have a number of applicants from which to choose, it is possible that you'll receive only one application for your internship position. So what should you do if the applicant seems unqualified or otherwise not an ideal fit for the position? In some cases, you might consider giving them a chance anyway – it will certainly be a good learning opportunity for the intern as well as a way to hone and sharpen management skills for intern supervisors internally. However, if it seems as though you will likely spend more time training or supervising the intern than the project is worth – or if you have sincere doubts that the candidate has the ability or know-how to do the work at hand – don't be afraid to say no. You can always recruit for the position again down the road, all while avoiding the potential negative experience that might otherwise result from a poor fit of skills, goals and interests. In the meantime, you might consider referring the individual to a skilled volunteer opportunity at your library instead of the internship.

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