

Facilitating Intern On-the-Job Learning

As discussed in Chapter 1, a major component of internships is access to and incorporation of ongoing experiential learning and professional development for the individual intern. But what are your options for facilitating this ongoing learning?

Establishing Expectations

Start the ongoing learning process by discussing with the intern, as well as any contacts you might have at any academic institution where they might be enrolled, what expectations and/or requirements they might have. For example, is the library expected to offer a certain number of formal trainings per internship? Are there specific topics that are meant to be covered? Talk to the intern and ask questions such as what would they like to learn, what library roles they are most curious about, and what topics they are most hoping to delve into during their time with the library. Ideally, you'll want to mutually agree to a plan for the intern's continued learning throughout their internship. For example, you might decide that the intern will complete and/or have access to at least two relevant workshops or trainings per month as part of their continued professional development.

Once you know how many and what kinds of learning opportunities the intern might be seeking – and the institution might require – you'll be ready to explore your available options.

Internal Options

You might consider developing and delivering internal workshops and trainings for your interns; these can be taught by various staff members, volunteers, or outside community members who are willing to share their expertise. Topics can range from an informal Q&A with current staff on how they got their first paid library position to a formal workshop, facilitated by References staff, training interns on effective practices in reference interviewing.

If you have more than one intern at your library, you can also help to organize a peer-learning model where interns present workshops on topics of interest to one another. Similarly, you might help to facilitate an independent study option, assigning interesting readings or topics for them to read and discuss collectively as well as encouraging them

Internship Management Checklist¹

- Establish mutual expectations with new interns
- Develop internal professional development opportunities for interns*
- Explore university-based options for intern professional development*
- Identify potential community or web-based professional development options*
- Mutually create plan for facilitating intern learning throughout the internship
- Facilitate intern/staff job-shadowing opportunities

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).

to present new topics for group exploration. A quick note: if you only have one or two interns but they are affiliated with a university or college program, you might see if the university facilitates any similar type of group learning process. If not, you can always suggest it to them and/or reach out to other nearby libraries hosting interns during the same period to see if a collaborative learning effort can be launched and facilitated via conference calls and, ideally, in-person gatherings.

Lastly, one of the most valuable experiences a library intern can have is to learn from and witness firsthand the various moving parts of a library ecosystem. Therefore, if you can help set-up opportunities for interns to shadow particular roles and staff persons throughout the library – from the Library Director to departments like references or youth programs – you will be offering your interns an invaluable opportunity to explore many different types of roles and careers within library environments, helping them to hone in on their key interests and career directions.

University Options

If your intern is a current college or university student, you might also seek to identify what if any ongoing learning opportunities the university currently offers or facilitates for its students. After all, why reinvent the wheel if high quality learning opportunities for your interns already exist?

Community and Web-Based Options

Finally, other options for ongoing learning may take place throughout your community or online via web conferences and trainings. For example, are there résumé or career development workshops offered by a local community college, career services organization, career-focused website, or other source that might be of interest to your interns? If these training and learning opportunities require a registration fee, see if the library can potentially help pay for interns to attend and/or whether you can negotiate free registration for your unpaid interns. You might also look for free library-related webinars; one place to look for these is <http://infopeople.org>. ●

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