

Chapter 8: Mentoring, Shadowing, and Supervision

Establishing a supportive environment and facilitating the development of positive interpersonal relationships between interns and staff will help you achieve the best possible results from your internship program, both in terms of project deliverables as well as intern satisfaction. As part of this though, you'll need to ensure that appropriate intern supervision and support is interwoven throughout the program.

Who Manages the Intern?

First things first: who should primarily be responsible for managing each intern? At a minimum, you should have one staff member who is professionally responsible for supervising each intern. However, ideally, there will be enough library staff to provide two or perhaps even three professionals to oversee an intern's experience. If this sounds unrealistic at first, that's entirely understandable. After all, how can you justify the time of up to three staff members for one intern? The answer is in clearly defined roles and expectations.

Here are a few potential staff supervision roles to consider implementing at your library:

Internship Program Manager: This person oversees the overall internship program. Duties might include:

- Developing internship program infrastructure and materials such as application forms and handbooks
- Gauging internal needs and potential positions for interns
- Serving as the primary person responsible for recruitment, screening, and matching
- Providing orientation to new interns (as well as support/training to staff supervisors)
- Helping mentors and supervisors understand, contribute to, and adhere to the internship program vision, goals, and objectives
- Serving as liaison with academic partners
- Serving as a neutral third party when resolving conflicts between a supervisor and an intern
- Ensuring that interns have access to and opportunities for ongoing professional

Internship Management Checklist¹

- Determine ongoing internship management roles*
- Assign management roles per individual internship
- Prepare for the first supervisor/mentor meeting with a new intern
- Mutually determine communications/check in methods with the intern
- Develop a plan or series of steps to take in the event of conflict
- Talk to human resources staff persons about how and when to let an intern go*

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).

learning (including potentially facilitating internal learning opportunities)

- If necessary, supervising library interns themselves (in this case, responsibility for conflict mediation would go to another staff member)
- Monitoring intern program evaluation and spearheading improvement efforts

Intern Manager/Supervisor: This library staff member oversees the individual intern's experience. Duties might include:

- Working with the Internship Program Manager to assess needs and potential internship projects and roles
- Contributing information to help craft comprehensive internship position descriptions and recruitment messages in order to attract qualified candidates
- Participating in internship candidate interviews (perhaps also application screening)
- Providing training for the intern's specific project tasks and responsibilities
- Supervising the intern on a daily basis (more on this later in this chapter)
- Potentially facilitating internal learning opportunities
- Evaluating the intern's work throughout and upon completion of the internship as well as sharing results with the Internship Program Manager
- Writing recommendations for formerly supervised interns

Internship Programs Are Not One-Size-Fits-All

Feeling overwhelmed by the suggested roles and responsibilities we've listed here? Don't worry. Instead, just keep in mind that your internship program can be as big or as small, as formal or as informal, as you'd like for it to be – or as your library is currently capable of sustaining. If you're concerned about your internal capacity to manage interns and need to skip some of the suggested staff roles or duties described here, just keep them in mind as possibilities should your internship program formalize or expand in the future. In the meantime, consider revisiting the section on potential staffing models in Chapter 3 for suggestions on how you might share and delegate responsibility among existing staff, volunteers, and interns.

Intern Mentor: Often, the mentor and the supervisor are the same person. However, it can also be beneficial to enlist other staff from either the same or different departments to serve as additional mentors. Bear in mind that mentoring does not have to be a daily activity. For example, a mentor can:

- Meet with an intern every few weeks for a cup of coffee, a meal, or a walk.
- Serve as an informational interviewee
- Invite an intern to shadow them during a meeting or community event
- Invite the intern to professional networking events and introduce them to other library staff and community partners.

Keep in mind that you may also partner with individuals outside the library to recruit and manage interns. For example, if working with an academic partner, the person most responsible for facilitating internships from that school may also be an active partner in your supervisory process. This person's responsibilities might include:

- Promoting your library's internships among their students
- Helping to identify and screen potential applicants
- Ensuring that the library internship program adheres to the requirements of

the academic program (for example, systems for documenting hours, providing written feedback, applying experiential learning techniques, etc.)

- Potentially serving as a neutral third party for such things as conflict resolution and providing an outside perspective on program improvements
- Assisting the Internship Program Manager and Intern Supervisors during program review and training in best practices.

A variation on this role might be what you'd call a community partner liaison; this might include individuals involved in such community entities as job-training programs (career coaches and others who manage a pool of clients) and civic engagement groups (business, neighborhood, and community groups). While these liaisons are not monitoring the academic requirements of an internship experience, they can be beneficial in the other roles such as helping to get the word out on upcoming internships as well as providing additional opportunities for professional development learning and mentorship.

Support, Supervision, and Communication

Whether the roles discussed above are fulfilled by one staff member or several, the responsibilities of each position will likely be complementary. For example, the primary role of the supervisor is to ensure that the learning objectives for the intern and program goals for the library are met and that all necessary reporting (both from the intern and the supervisor) is completed. Simultaneously, the primary role of a mentor is to facilitate the experiential learning process for the intern, a key component of a successful internship program. This section of the toolkit will discuss strategies and characteristics of high quality internship supervision and communications.

A Supervisor's Checklist

Please see the appendix section of this toolkit for a checklist supervisors can consult before their first meeting with a new intern.

Qualities of Good Supervisors and Good Mentors

A good supervisor is there to do such things as answer questions, manage schedules, supportively enforce goals and deadlines, and share knowledge. A good mentor is there primarily to share expertise, serve as a sounding board, and encourage growth. Both individuals should ideally possess such characteristics as:

- Strong interpersonal skills
- Credibility, expertise, and knowledge of their field
- A genuine interest in being a role model
- Teaching or training experience
- Patience
- Flexibility
- Sensitivity
- Respectful and both giving and deserving of trust
- Interest in the personal and professional development of their interns

- The ability to communicate and give constructive feedback
- Organizational skills (for example, be ready for interns when they arrive, keep them engaged in their work, find new tasks and roles for them should their primary projects be completed more quickly than anticipated)
- Inclusivity (Interns like to feel wanted and included!)
- Listening skills

The First Meeting: Supervisors

The first meeting can set the tone for an entire internship experience. This is true even if the supervisor and/or mentor was a part of the interview process (which, again, would ideally be the case). However, the interview environment and the workplace are quite different. For example, many people show up for an interview with one mindset (“please choose me!”) and the workplace with another (“how can I do my best job now that they’ve hired me?”)!

Being organized and ready for the intern’s arrival demonstrates to them that they have a reliable supervisor and encourages them to model this behavior going forward. Items for discussion might include:

- **Work style:** What are the intern’s work preferences? What are the supervisor’s work style preferences? Does the intern/supervisor like to work from the big picture or from a detailed to-do list? Are strict deadlines helpful or hindering? Do they motivate or create anxiety? How often should interns and supervisors check in? How should they check in (emails, short meetings, shared documents)? Keep in mind that one person’s micromanagement is another person’s idea of being attentive...
- **Internship goals:** As a library staff person tasked with the responsibilities of your program, what are the supervisor’s goals regarding the work of the intern? Revisit the skills, experiences, and professional experience the intern hopes to garner during their time at the library. Mutually create and agree to a timeline and key deliverables for successful completion of internship project goals and objectives.
- **Feedback:** How does the intern/supervisor prefer to give and receive feedback? Do they like immediate feedback or feedback during check-ins? Do they prefer written or oral feedback? Keep in mind that feedback on projects and professional-development/behavioral feedback may differ. It is usually easier to hear negative feedback on a project (more impersonal) than on how one goes about their work (more personal). Be clear at the onset how each party would like to give and receive these kinds of information.

The First Meeting: Mentors

Just as the supervisory first meeting sets the stage for a positive work style, work goals, and feedback relationship, the first mentorship meeting can help to establish another very important facet of the program: experiential learning and reflection. Setting up dedicated reflection opportunities for interns can be one of the easiest and best ways to begin a mentorship experience. For example, as explained in the [“Employer’s Guide to Building a Quality Internship Program”](#) by UNLV Career Services:



There are a variety of ways to assist the student in reflection. Reflection can include group discussions among interns, focus groups, 1-minute writing on a particular subject or the day, and on-going journaling. You can also strengthen the mentorship by offering feedback to the journals or through periodic informal meetings such as a standing monthly lunch.

Examples of reflection questions you might pose to your interns might include:

- “What did I learn today?”
- What ‘best practices’ did I observe?
- What professional problem-solving did I observe?
- What did I learn not to do?
- What did I learn about myself: my strengths, my weaknesses, my likes, my dislikes, learning gaps? new courses? more experience needed?”²

Facilitating Reflection

For a printable list of reflection strategies and questions, please see the appendix section of this toolkit.

The First Days

Similar to how the first meeting can help to set the tone for the interpersonal relationship between interns and supervisors/mentors, the first days of an internship can set the tone for the experience as a whole. The rate and flow of first tasks can signal to the intern what they can expect in the future. For example, too much work might overwhelm them (“I can’t possibly do all this work in the time allotted without burning out!”). Conversely, too little and they may think the work will be too easy (“This is going to be boring and I’m not going to get anything useful out of the experience!”)

The organization of your program as a whole and the attention you paid to matching the right intern to the role will help the intern feel that they are going to have a positive, enriching experience. Now be ready to hit the ground running these first few days. Be prepared to spend a bit of extra time with them. And don’t forget to focus on the future, looking forward from these first few days to their inevitable last few days. What do you hope to say you’ve collectively accomplished by then?

As time goes by, you’ll want the intern to feel more and more trusted in their role. Whether this means a bit less direct supervision or greater latitude to make decisions on their own is up to you (and the parameters of the internship project or role). Ultimately, what you want is for the intern to develop a sense of ownership of their work, all as a member of the larger library team; this will help to ensure that they give their best effort as well as gain the most possible from their internship experience.

Finally, keep in mind the following advice from Lock Haven University’s [“Employer’s Manual for Internships”](#): “Keep the intern busy and directed towards his/her learning objectives. Students rarely complain of overwork, but they do complain if they are not challenged. Encourage professionalism by assisting the intern in developing human relation skills, decision-making abilities and managing office politics. Show how this work relates to the overall efforts of the [library].”

2. “Public Library Internships: Advice from the Field,” edited by Cindy Mediaville, p24

Ongoing Communications, Meetings, and Check-Ins

In today's interconnected world, there are a myriad of ways to stay connected, not to mention potentially save time in the process. This is good news because regular, meaningful check-ins are generally not something that can be considered optional. Rather, methods for checking in with the intern should be established on the first day of their internship and adhered to as closely as possible throughout their time with the library.

A quick note: checking in with your intern is going to take time and there is no way around that. Indeed, supervision is likely to take more time at the start of an intern's service as well as where the position or project is technically challenging or there are any safety concerns. To help quantify the value of this time investment, consider how many hours of work an intern will be able to accomplish in exchange for what might be just minutes of your time. Done well, supervising can pay off at close to one minute of supervising for one hour of work done and that's an equation that's pretty tough to beat.

Strategies for Checking In

See the appendix section of this toolkit for a printable list of the check in strategies described in this chapter.

A few check in methods to consider might include:

- **Daily Check-ins:** Even though daily meetings may seem more demanding on the surface, daily check-ins can actually be one of the more efficient uses of your time. Set an outline for brief 5-10 minute meetings and, if items don't fit into that outline, save them for email discussions or a longer weekly meeting. One possible format can include:
 - A quick report on yesterday's work: What was accomplished? What questions came up? (Note: you may not have time to answer all of their questions and that's okay. You can always come back to these during a longer meeting).
 - What's happening today? What are the goals? What support do they need?
 - Sharing updates: Do you have anything to share from a wider organizational perspective for the intern? Library news? Feedback/responses from staff connected to the intern's work? Anything else that can help them today and going forward?
- **Weekly Meetings.** These 30-45 minute meetings can serve as either your primary check-in opportunity or, if you are also doing daily check-ins, offer a time to dig a bit deeper into the past week and to focus more intently on the coming week's work. If you're also holding short, daily meetings, these weekly meetings should flow quickly while also allowing time to discuss things like:
 - Intern questions, ideas, or concerns
 - How the intern's work is helping the library
 - Challenges, successes, strengths, and comforts
 - Long-range plans
 - Professional development goals and progress
 - "Non-work conversation" like anecdotes, institutional questions (sharing institutional knowledge), and other discussions not focused solely on the intern's work.

Both daily and/or weekly check-ins can be done via email, online shared document sites like Google Docs, or other technology mediums but there is also substantive value to face time; it can often help to limit confusion, speed up the answering of questions (and therefore the ability for an intern to proceed with their work), and, most importantly, make an intern feel like they are worth your time. That said, there are several ways to use web-based tools for communication and project management – especially if you are working primarily with online interns! – including:

- **Shared Documents:** Google Docs and other shared, virtual workspaces are an increasingly popular way to collaborate online. These tools allow for anyone to work on a project from anywhere with an internet connection at any time, meaning you can add ideas, contacts, and suggestions to the document for the intern to incorporate as both of your schedules allow. This is also a great way for a supervisor to check in on daily progress. Just pop over at the end of the day to see what's been added.
- **Instant Messaging:** Instant messaging can be an excellent way to get quick questions answered during the course of the day. You can log on and off IM if you don't want to be interrupted or keep it open to communicate with your intern as needed throughout the day.
- **Email:** Daily check-ins can sometime occur via email. As well, you can email interns new ideas, slight adjustments to schedules, to-do lists, organizational information, introductions to staff members, and other information that might be of interest.
- **Calendars:** If your intern has a variable schedule during their internship, online calendar sharing can be a useful tool for scheduling and aligning meeting times and other in-person gatherings.

Conflict Resolution

Interpersonal relationships are at the core of internships and, no matter how well matched interns and staff may be, conflict is often an inherent part of any relationship. While most well-designed programs staffed by well-trained professionals will ensure an overall positive experience for an intern, the best programs should also be prepared for when, not if, conflict occurs. When dealt with professionally and conscientiously – as well as with empathy (after all, most people don't aspire to deliver poor quality work) – conflict can lead to both better working conditions as well as overall internship program improvements.

A quick note: Regular, honest check-ins and establishing a supportive, respectful environment can often be the first line of defense against full-blown conflict. Establishing at the beginning of an internship experience that weekly check-ins are a good place to freely and openly address difficulties is essential to creating an open dialogue. Consider offering supervisors and mentors access to training and tools for basic conflict resolution and negotiation to ensure they know how to appropriately handle challenging circumstances.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

For a printable list of potential conflict resolution strategies, please see the appendix section of this toolkit.

An important part of any conflict resolution is the involvement of a neutral third party – not the intern, not the supervisor, and, ideally, not even a staff member from the library.

This could potentially be someone from the intern's college or university or a community member from a conflict resolution or similar type of organization. If a third party from outside the library cannot be secured, the Internship Program Manager and/or staff persons most responsible for human resources or engaging library volunteers (who have likely experienced similar types of situations with staff or volunteers) can also fill this role.

The first step to addressing problems and resolving conflict is to immediately address them. For example, a supervisor might need to discuss work-performance issues, interpersonal challenges, missed deadlines, missteps if/when dealing with the public (misinformation, unsatisfactory patron services, etc.), or other issues directly related to the intern's work at the library. Discussing subpar intern performance can be addressed in a couple of ways:

- Revisit the internship agreement and mutually agreed upon expectations, goals, and objectives. Also potentially revisit training and orientation materials that might have covered the issue at hand. Then address inconsistencies and see if the intern understands your concerns and is still committed to the principles and practices agreed upon at the start of the internship.
- Reassess the goals and deliverables for the remainder of the internship experience to identify mutually acceptable goals between what needs to be done at the library and what the intern is capable of doing.
- Keep in mind that an intern might need to discuss a lack of support, insufficiently challenging work, interpersonal issues, unrealistic deadlines, misinformation leading to missteps when dealing with other staff or the community at large, and other issues directly related to how they are supported or have been prepared for their work. In these cases, your role will be to listen and offer suggestions for resolutions and support.

By treating the issue as one between professionals in the library system and following any conflict resolution training and best practices as developed internally by human resources or volunteer engagement staff persons, library staff can help limit the issue to one of work rather than allow it to become something personal.

If either party is uncomfortable or unwilling to address the other directly, consider bringing in the previously discussed neutral third party as soon as possible to facilitate a resolution. The inclusion of a neutral third party may also be necessary if either the supervisor or the intern feels that they've raised the issue with the other and, after more than one conversation and an acceptable window of time allowing for reasonable improvement, feel that the issue is still not being resolved.

Despite excellent internship program design, staff and internship training, careful matching, clear expectations, and professional, conscientious conflict resolution, there may still be times when it becomes clear that an internship is more detrimental than beneficial to the professional development of the intern as well as the work of the library; in these cases, you may decide to let the intern go. While this is obviously a difficult decision to make, it is likely to be of greater benefit to all concerned to accept when an internship experience is untenable than to continue investing in it at the cost of staff and intern time and emotional energy. Just as it is difficult to let staff go, letting an intern go with whom you've invested significant time and energy is a hard decision to make.

However, if library staff and any involved neutral third parties (including any contacts you might have at the intern's university or college – it is critical that you talk with these folks in advance of any decision-making, both to preserve the long-term partnership with their institution as well as to seek guidance on their own policies and procedures on this issue) determine that it is necessary to terminate an intern's tenure, it is a good idea to discuss the issue with library human resources staff in advance; these folks are likely the most well-trained professionals in the library for dealing with this sort of issue. This is not to say that human resources staff should be the ones to tell the intern that the library has decided to end the internship; rather, they will likely be helpful in counseling supervisors, Internship Program Managers, and neutral third parties in how to best break the news. ●

About this book

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