

# Scaling Up Work Experience Programs: Policy and Practice Choices for Colorado

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In almost every industry, companies are calling for job applicants with more hands-on, real world experience. In Colorado, the issue of work experience has recently surfaced in many forums, raised by multiple industries and a variety of stakeholders, including key leadership across three major state systems: economic development, education and workforce development. The recent uptick in dialogue reflects a confluence of co-existing forces occurring nationally: increased employer demand for more experienced jobseekers coupled with a short supply of work experience components of education and training programs. Increased demand is attributable to an array of factors: baby boomers are retiring; the skills needed to perform on-the-job today are fundamentally different than those needed in the past; and many employers fear that investing in training will benefit their competitors if the workers they trained seek other opportunities. On the supply side, declining resources and unprecedented enrollments hamper education and training institutes. Combined, these factors result in work experience programs that are inconsistent or unable to scale up enough to have an impact and meet employers' emerging workforce needs.

While there are some very strong work experience models across the country, including in Colorado, most programs operate at an individual program or institution level, and focus on a relatively narrow target population (such as disadvantaged youth or university students in a specific program). Moreover, existing programs have varying degrees of quality and impact. Few states are effectively addressing the issue of scale when it comes to offering meaningful work experience opportunities to students and jobseekers. A handful of states have passed legislation to fund statewide internship programs—an avenue worth exploring in Colorado—but these, too, typically focus on a narrow population, mainly university graduates. The reality across the country is that most work experience programs take the form of internships, and most internships are focused on youth and college students, leaving few work experience options for the adult jobseeker. Offering internships and other work experiences to the broader scope of jobseekers is the true call to action, allowing access for those pursuing Associates degrees, short-term certificates or professional licenses and including individuals displaced during the recession that might be re-careering or receiving unemployment insurance.

Recognizing that now is the time for Colorado to explore this issue further, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC the state's convening body of workforce development, education and economic development) commissioned this paper. Its purpose is three-fold: to present the national landscape of promising practices related to work experience programs; to highlight the best models currently up and running in the State of Colorado; and to provide a set of policy and practice recommendations and tools to guide Colorado in scaling up and replicating successful programs. The recommendations in this paper come from a scan of national work experience efforts and research on successful work experience models in Colorado.<sup>1</sup> The audience for this paper is broad, including educators, training providers, workforce development systems, employers and businesses, and state policy leaders. While developed primarily for the State of Colorado, the CWDC hopes the paper's findings and recommendations will be useful to other states as well.

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1 See Appendix A for full list of interviewees from Colorado.

## Why Work Experience?

For many employers on-the-job-experience matters more than a student's major or grade point average, according to the results of a recent survey published in *The Chronicle for Higher Education*.<sup>2</sup> Half of those surveyed said they had trouble finding graduates qualified to fill open positions, while nearly one-third gave colleges fair to poor marks for producing successful employees. Employers say that today's graduates often do not know how to communicate effectively on the job and struggle with adapting to the workplace, problem solving, working with colleagues and making decisions. This is particularly true in the science, technology and engineering fields, where 64 percent of companies report difficulty finding qualified applicants for management, scientific, engineering or technical positions.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-seven percent of small and mid-sized manufacturers report moderate to severe workforce shortages, and they predict this will only get worse.<sup>4</sup> Currently, only 15 percent of U.S. college graduates major in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM),<sup>5</sup> and only a fraction gain real work experience in STEM-related fields. This issue is not unique to STEM fields; in nearly every industry, companies are calling for job applicants with more hands-on, real world experience.

Formalized work experience models exist in various forms, including internships, cooperative degree programs, apprenticeships, on-the-job training and volunteer opportunities. However, these models are not the norm and they do not operate at the scale that allows employers to readily hire and jobseekers to gain a foothold in the labor market. While internships are required in most graduate school programs, they are less common as undergraduate requirements, and rarely incorporated for adults in short-term education or workforce training programs. This means that millions of jobseekers, unless self-driven to arrange their own work experience program, do not have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in their field before entering the labor market. Considering that roughly 47 percent of all new job openings from 2010 to 2020 will fall into the middle-skills range<sup>6</sup> (jobs that require less than a bachelor's degree), it is critical for education and training programs across all levels to re-visit the value of formalized hands-on work experience. It may be the deciding factor for employers to hire one individual over another.

## The Colorado Context: Emerging Conversations and Existing Statewide Efforts

The issue of work experience has recently surfaced in Colorado in many forums, from multiple industries, and by a variety of stakeholders, including key leadership across three major state systems: economic development, education and workforce development.

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2 Fischer, K. *A College Degree Sorts Job Applicants, but Employers Wish it Meant More*, *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, Special Reports, July 29, 2013.

3 Manyika, M., et al. *An Economy that Works: Job Creation and America's Future*, The McKinsey Global Institute, June 2011.

4 Morrison, T., Maciejewski, B., Giffi, C., Stover DeRocco, E., McNelly, J., Carrick, G. *Boiling Point? The Skills Gap in U.S. Manufacturing*. Deloitte & The Manufacturing Institute, 2011.

5 Kochan, T., Finegold, D., Osterman, P. *Who Can Fix the Middle-Skills Gap? Companies Should Take the Lead in Creating Collaborative Programs to Train Workers*. Harvard Business Review, December 2012.

6 *Preparing for the Future: Closing Colorado's Middle-Skills Gap*, National Skills Coalition, 2011.

*In the course of implementing the Colorado Blueprint, Governor Hickenlooper's economic development plan, the importance of work experience has been consistently raised by private sector leaders from across the state and from multiple industries.*

**Key Industry Networks:** The Colorado Blueprint identified 14 key industries most critical to the state economy using labor market information and a “bottom-up” listening session tour across the state. For each of the fourteen Key Industry Networks (KINs), a facilitated strategic planning session was conducted (or is currently underway) to determine the most pressing needs across the Blueprint's six core objectives. Those objectives are: building a business friendly environment; recruiting, growing and retaining businesses; increasing access to capital; creating and marketing a stronger Colorado brand; educating and training the workforce of the future; and cultivating innovation and technology. The KIN effort is led and convened by the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), and with active participation from private sector executives from each target industry, as well as key state agency and public stakeholders. Eight of the KIN strategic plans highlight work experience and internships a top priority, per the needs identified by business executives. These six KINs are: Manufacturing, Information Technology, Electronics, Bioscience, the Creative Industries, and Tourism and Outdoor Recreation, Energy, and Health and Wellness.

**Colorado Innovation Network:** Also key to the implementation of the Colorado Blueprint is the Colorado Innovation Network (COIN), a statewide partnership of business, government and civil society stakeholders intended to foster collaboration and new ideas related to talent, capital and entrepreneurship. The work experience theme was repeated during the October 2012 COIN Summit where, during separate workforce development and education sessions, business executives expressed a desire to connect more easily with students and jobseekers and highlighted the creation of a statewide internship matching program as a top priority.

*Work experience has long been an important means to connect jobseekers with meaningful employment opportunities throughout Colorado's Workforce System. A strong example of direct support for work experience was Hire Colorado.*

**Hire Colorado:** The Hire Colorado Program was an innovative and successful collaboration between the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) to provide on-the-job training opportunities for individuals receiving Unemployment Insurance (UI). Funded with \$11,200,000 of supplemental Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Reserve Funds, Hire Colorado targeted UI claimants and those that had exhausted UI benefits, as well as other populations eligible for TANF Reserve initiatives. From August 2009 through October 2010, the program served 1,721 participants and 1,122 employers. Participating employers permanently hired 75 percent of participants at an average wage of \$13.27 per hour. The program provided up to six months of wages paid at the prevailing wage to subsidize employment and on-the-job training opportunities. Support services were also provided to participants, including employment-related case management, skills assessments, job development and job placement services, and access to the Federal Bonding and Work Opportunity Tax Credit programs. A true partnership, Hire Colorado demonstrated unprecedented collaboration to afford hands-on experiences for participants, ensure positive experiences for employers, and achieve greater outcomes than the agencies could have realized individually. Most recently, work experience has emerged as part of Colorado's sector strategy efforts, spearheaded by the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and carried out in partnership with economic development and education stakeholders.

**Sector Partnerships:** Sector partnerships are a key strategy for implementing the Colorado Blueprint objective focused on educating and training the workforce of the future. They bring together companies within the same industry—along with P-20 education, workforce development, economic development and community organizations—in an effort to focus on key issues that are critical to the success of the target industry in their natural labor market region. The CWDC and its partners launched Colorado's Next Generation Sector Strategies at the 2013 Sectors Summit, where diverse stakeholder teams representing 14 regions across the state gathered to collaboratively develop and expand sector partnerships.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the Sectors Summit, more than 35 regional sector partnerships are in the process of convening industry members, identifying priority areas for collective action, and taking action. Interestingly, although these partnerships cover diverse industries and geographic areas, finding employees with hands-on work experience is a common need cited by the employers involved.

For more than five years, sector partnerships have connected industry needs with workforce and education providers in Colorado. The Next Generation effort ramps up and expands the model significantly by focusing on all employer needs, not just workforce needs. It also provides intensive technical assistance and training to regional stakeholders in order to build capacity and sustain the model as a way of doing business.

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<sup>7</sup> Key partners in the 2013 Sectors Summit included: The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade and the Economic Development Council of Colorado.

## *The education community in Colorado is also discussing and directly addressing the issue of work experience from a variety of angles.*

**Education Leadership Council:** The expansion of work experience opportunities has been on the agenda of the Lieutenant Governor's Education Leadership Council (ELC) since spring 2012. Comprised of representatives from K-12 and higher education as well as members of business chambers and other business organizations, the ELC provides a meaningful forum to examine the current status of education policies, analyze near-term opportunities and challenges, and make recommendations regarding long-term improvements to the education system. The ELC's STEM sub-committee is now partnering with the Colorado Departments of Education, Higher Education, the CWDC and the Colorado Legacy Foundation to finalize and implement a STEM action plan that features a pilot mentorship program pairing high school students and their teachers with business professionals in STEM-related fields (such as healthcare, manufacturing, technology, engineering, and others). Mentorships may include one-on-one time with business professionals, site visits and collaboration on projects, providing valuable hands-on experiences.

**New High School Guidelines Include Real World Experience:** The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is pursuing opportunities to provide real world experience for high school students. In May 2013, CDE adopted new high school graduation guidelines that make explicit the expectation that a high school diploma guarantees that a graduate is prepared to be a productive entry-level employee in the workforce. CDE has also partnered with Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to delineate criteria for an Endorsed Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness High School Diploma. The endorsed diploma is intended for use as a college and career readiness signal for accelerated advancement in the workforce. The criteria have been approved by all 11 of Colorado's public four-year college governing boards, the State Board of Education and the Commission on Higher Education. To earn the endorsed diploma, students must complete and maintain an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), which helps students explore postsecondary education and career opportunities, and align their coursework with their interests and goals. They must also undertake coursework or extracurricular activities that demonstrate real world competence in 21<sup>st</sup> century skill areas including information literacy, invention, collaboration, critical thinking and self-direction.<sup>8</sup>

**Colorado Community College System Career and Technical Education Programs:** Work experience is a required component of the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. CTE focuses on six industry groups, or career clusters: Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Health Science, Criminal Justice and Public Safety; Skilled Trades and Technical Sciences; STEM, Arts, Design and Information Technology; Hospitality, Human Services and Education; and Business, Marketing and Public Administration. Through CTE programs, high school students are able to get a head start on preparing for college and careers by gaining core academic skills, employability skills, and job-specific technical skills within one of the above career clusters. Approximately one-third of all Colorado high school students participate in CTE; an additional 34,000 post-secondary students already enrolled in community or technical colleges also participate. CTE programs allow many types of work experience, including:



- Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE), which is an agricultural applied learning project;
- Cooperative education, which is a combined program of academic coursework and paid employment, sometimes alternating from semester to semester;
- Paid work experience, in which the student performs the same functions as an employee in a workplace, and is directly supervised by an employer;
- Unpaid work experience, in which the student is not performing the same functions as an employee, but rather performing specialized projects, and is directly supervised by a technical instructor;
- Paid or unpaid internships at a place of work (on-the-job activities directly related to the student's field of study);
- Simulation-based learning, which uses simulation equipment and laboratories are used;
- Supervised occupational experience, which provides students the opportunity to learn and apply knowledge, skills and competencies in a hands-on manner under the supervision of a credentialed technical instructor;
- School-based enterprises, such as coffee shops, delis, etc., that are operated onsite at school; and
- Laboratory methods, such as hands on experience in a welding lab.

**Career Pathways:** Colorado defines a Career Pathway as a series of connected education and training programs, work experiences, and student support services that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in a demand industry or occupation. As a key action item identified through Key Industry Networks (KIN) listening sessions,<sup>9</sup> a new Career Pathways initiative is being led by CTE and coordinated by the CWDC.<sup>10</sup> Launched in 2012 and funded by the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), the Career Pathways Initiative pilot program builds on Colorado's existing CTE programs and aims to meet the following goals: to develop a prototype for a career pathway system across multiple education and training programs within the metropolitan Denver area, targeting the healthcare industry; to navigate and coordinate the multiple resources and funding streams that could support the statewide development of career pathway systems; and to establish shared or common performance metrics to evaluate career pathway systems. The metro Denver area's existing Healthcare Sector Partnership will inform the development of the pilot career pathway. An important part of the career pathways conversation includes the incorporation of hands-on work experience, as with any good career pathway program. The initiative leverages Colorado's KINs and emerging and expanding sector partnerships to ensure that industries are actively engaged in shaping career pathways.

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<sup>9</sup> Seven of the launched KINs have noted the development of career pathways as a priority: manufacturing, food and agriculture, creative industries, tourism and outdoor recreation, health and wellness, and energy, and information and technology.

<sup>10</sup> Other key partners in the Colorado Career Pathways Initiative include the Department of Higher Education, Department of Education, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Development and International Trade and the Department of Corrections.

Among public and private stakeholders alike, there is a groundswell of interest and activity aimed at replicating and scaling up successful work experience models in Colorado. This momentum presents a unique opportunity for the state to become a leader in answering employers' calls for more experienced job applicants. It may also become part of the strategy to respond to the now familiar "Colorado Paradox," in which Colorado is a net importer of college-prepared people (ranking high in adults with post-secondary degrees), yet ranks low in numbers of Coloradans successfully transitioning from high school to college and into Colorado jobs. If Colorado's education and training institutions can—across the board and at scale—integrate strong work experience as a core element of their programs, Coloradans may gain an edge in applying for and securing jobs where they live.

Recognizing that now is the time for Colorado to explore this issue further, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC the state's convening body of workforce development, education and economic development) commissioned this paper. Its purpose is three-fold: to present the national landscape of promising practices related to work experience programs; to highlight the best models currently up and running in the State of Colorado; and to provide a set of policy and practice recommendations and tools to guide Colorado in scaling up and replicating successful programs.

*It is important to note upfront that this paper, and the complementary tools, uses the term "internship" more than any other term or definition of work experience. It also highlights internships as the most common promising practice nationally and within the state. This does not reflect a preference by the CWDC or the author. Instead, it reflects the reality that most of today's work experience programs take the form of internships for youth or young adults in college. The call to action for Colorado is to replicate what works from these models to open the door to work experience opportunities for the thousands of out-of-school adult jobseekers across the state, while scaling up existing models targeted at youth.*

# THE NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR WORKFORCE SUPPLY AND DEMAND

## Why U.S. Employers are Demanding More Work Experience Now

The recent uptick in dialogue within Colorado regarding the need for greater work experience among job applicants reflects a confluence of co-existing forces occurring nationally: increased employer demand for more experienced jobseekers coupled with a short supply of work experience components of education and training programs. It would be a mistake to assume that increased employer demand for more work experience is due to a decreased supply of training and education programs offering work experience. A closer look reveals that a number of contributing factors are at play on both sides.

Employers' increased calls for more experienced job applicants can be explained in part by the greying of the national workforce and retiring baby boomers. Employers and workforce development organizations expected the pending retirement cliff years ago, realizing that mass numbers of baby boomers working across all industries would soon leave their jobs for the greener pastures of retired life. For many, these plans changed by necessity when the Great Recession hit in 2008, stripping boomers of their retirement egg nests and requiring them to stay in their current jobs, transition back into work fully, or take up part-time jobs. But many boomers are now retiring, and will continue to retire, opening up jobs for Generation X, Y and Millennial workers. Employers accustomed to the years of experience boomers offered, this is a game changing disruption. Culturally, baby boomers represent single-career, long-term, workers loyal to a company or industry. This does not align with work culture expectations and norms of younger workers, who expect to hold many careers in diverse fields by the time they retire. In part, this shift, which actually began at least a decade ago when Generation X workers entered the workforce, explains why employers may hesitate to devote as much time and investment into on-the-job training. The fear of training workers only to have them hired by a competitor is real. But this alone does not fully explain industry cries for more experienced, ready-to-go job applicants. Fundamentally, the nature of work today is different from times past, and so are the skills needed to perform a job effectively. The kinds of skills employers need are no longer those that can easily be learned on the job; often, they are those that require advanced technical skills and behavioral skills such as problem solving, communication, leadership, teamwork.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to the supply side, a number of explanations exist for the lack of diversity and insufficient scale of work experience in education and training programs. First and foremost, education institutions may simply not consider it their job to train students on how to get a job, especially if they see work experience components of curriculum as time-consuming and expensive. Those that do consider it part of their mission are operating with fewer and fewer resources, like all public post-secondary institutions. Since 1986, public full-time enrollments (FTEs) have steadily increased (nationally from about 7 million to 12 million), while educational appropriations per FTE have steadily decreased (from about \$8,000 to \$6,000 per FTE).<sup>12</sup> Whether it's a narrow vision of the role of higher education or decreased funding, the result is an even smaller, underfunded workforce investment system that is left to fill the void.

This may not be a safe bet considering that federal employment and training expenditures (for non-veteran programs) have been on a roller coaster for over 20 years. Today's expenditures are roughly the equivalent to 1997 expenditures, and may be squeezed tighter in the coming years as a result of budget cuts. At the same time, overall investments in technical training programs continue to decline (\$35 million in reductions to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical

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11 Kochan, T., Finegold, D., Osterman, P. *Who Can Fix the Middle-Skills Gap? Companies Should Take the Lead in Creating Collaborative Programs to Train Workers*. Harvard Business Review, December 2012.

12 State Higher Education Finance Report, 2012. Retrieved from <http://sheeo.org/projects/shef-%E2%80%94state-higher-education-finance>.

Education Act in 2011 alone),<sup>13</sup> including those supporting apprenticeships (down 36 percent since 1998).<sup>14</sup> Add to this the dearth of work experience programs focused on adults (especially dislocated workers, long-term unemployed and unemployment insurance recipients), and the picture becomes clear: the infrastructure for hands-on, real world work experience in the U.S. is eroding.

## Promising Responses to the Call for More Work Experience

What's the solution? "The best education and training programs do four things: they work closely with employers, offer paid work experience, teach skills that apply to more than one job, and provide a credential that actually means something in the industry".<sup>15</sup> Internships and other work experience opportunities for adult jobseekers and students are one of the best ways to ensure that there is a job at the end of an education and training pathway. The "try before you buy" approach allows employers to assess the skills, work ethic and attitude of prospective employees, while giving specific hands-on training and exposure to the unique operations, culture and work expectations of the company and its industry. Work experience programs, in the best cases, offer adult jobseekers that may be out of school a chance to prove they can apply any training they may have received to a jobsite. They also afford the opportunity to avoid "idle" gaps in a résumé (particularly important for the long-term unemployed and Unemployment Insurance recipients) and to earn income while they learn and transition to work. For students, work experience allows them to earn credit toward graduation, acquire relevant hands-on experience and apply classroom learning to the world of work.

While the benefits are clear for both employers and jobseekers, and the solution may be obvious (more work experience opportunities), implementation at the scale needed to match demand remains challenging. No one is quite sure who owns this job. Ultimately education, training programs and workforce centers can only do so much to connect youth and adult jobseekers to work experience opportunities, while proactive employers that set up their own internship programs are few and fare between. Without willing, proactive partners on both sides, establishing formalized, at-scale work experience for students or jobseekers simply cannot happen. The bottom line: this is everyone's job. Success will ultimately depend on cooperation and partnership between the private sector and public education and training programs.

### Higher Education

Many universities and colleges across the country offer internship connections for their students at some level, and a handful have particularly strong reputations for their internship or cooperative degree programs (a combined program of academic coursework and paid employment, sometimes alternating from semester to semester, and ideally with connecting activities such as seminars and instructor-employer coordination).

- Northeastern University in Boston enrolls 93 percent of its students in cooperative programs, partnering with more than 2,500 companies in over 80 different countries.<sup>16</sup>
- Among the largest and longest running university cooperative programs is the Undergrad Cooperative Education (Co-op) Program at Georgia Tech, introduced in 1912. It currently enrolls more than 4,000 students, and during its history has produced over 15,000 graduates. This five-year academic program is designed to complement a student's formal education with paid practical work experience that is directly related to the student's academic major. It is available in all engineering majors and in many other majors. Georgia Tech's

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13 The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, unlike other federal education and training programs, does not provide direct assistance to individuals but instead provides grants to states to support their CTE programs.

14 Kochan, T., Finegold, D., Osterman, P. *Who Can Fix the Middle-Skills Gap? Companies Should Take the Lead in Creating Collaborative Programs to Train Workers*. Harvard Business Review, December 2012.

15 Holzer, H. in Quinton, S. *The Next Economy: A Joint Project of the Atlantic and National Journal to Explore an Uncertain New Era*, quote by Harry Holzer, March 4, 2013.

16 For more information on the Northeastern University's Cooperative Education program, see <http://www.northeastern.edu/experiential-learning/cooperative-education/>

co-op program allows students to take on increasing levels of responsibility, using their job knowledge and classroom learning to make meaningful contributions to the organizations in which they work. Many co-op graduates are hired by their co-op employer, and more than 700 companies or government organizations throughout the U.S. and abroad currently employ Georgia Tech Undergrad Co-op Program students. Co-ops typically earn \$8,000–\$10,000 per work term.<sup>17</sup>

### Secondary Education

Similarly, at the secondary education level, many schools and programs provide students with hands-on work experience. The previously mentioned Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) program administered by the U.S. Department of Education's OVAE is the most widespread hands-on work experience opportunity in secondary education. In fact, 88 percent of public high schools offer some type of CTE courses.<sup>18</sup> While technical training for secondary students has declined sharply over the past decades, some types of technically focused high schools have emerged (or re-emerged) across the country. These include career academy high schools, technical high schools, trade high schools, and other variations, many of which receive funding from major foundations such as the Gates Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation. A less common alternative to the technical high school is the cooperative education school model. These schools operate much like the Northeastern and Georgia Tech examples cited above, integrating or alternating academic coursework with actual employment. One of the better examples of this is the Christo de Rey network of private high schools that operate a fee-for-service business model in which companies pay a fixed annual fee in exchange for student interns. Fees offset the operating costs of the school, and students get hands-on, real job experience each year. Denver's Arrupe Jesuit High School is part of this network, and is featured later in this paper.

### Public Workforce System

At the public workforce training level, there is less variation in work experience programs, yet there are promising models that demonstrate partnerships between training programs and the private sector. Most Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded one-stop career centers use their WIA youth funding to support internships for youth ages 16 to 21. A handful of centers also offer internships for adults.

- Workforce Central Florida's Re-Employment Connection: This program targets unemployed adults, placing them with businesses for an eight week subsidized internship that pays participants \$12 per hour for up to 40 hours per week.
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Training Grants: In 2009 a number of U.S. Department of Labor (U.S. DOL) American Recovery and Investment Act (ARRA) grantees that focused on serving the unemployed, and in some cases the long-term unemployed, found that the Great Recession required them to do everything possible to keep jobseekers actively connected to the world of work. Some used subsidized internships; others actively encouraged volunteering. Some healthcare-focused grantees, such as the Maine Department of Labor, reacted to demand from employers for new nurses with more floor experience by creating a nurse residency program. Nursing residencies, also known as transition-to-practice programs, provide new nurse graduates that have already passed their licensing exams with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience with the support of mentors in clinical settings.

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on the Georgia Tech program, see <http://www.coop.gatech.edu/index.html>.

<sup>18</sup> *What is Career and Technical Education?* Association for Career and Technical Education. Retrieved from <https://www.acteonline.org/cte/>.

- Washington State’s Workplace-Based Learning Initiative: One of the more recent, innovative efforts for hands-on, applied learning at work is spearheaded by Washington’s Workforce Education and Training Coordinating Board (the state’s Workforce Investment Board). The Initiative used a grant from the U.S. DOL to fund three pilot partnerships between community colleges and industry, testing the concept of offering for-credit, classroom and applied learning in the workplace. The program targeted existing workers in low-wage, low-skilled jobs for advancement to higher-level jobs. Employers offered flexible schedules, onsite computers and classrooms, and mentors. Colleges provided curriculum, instructors and academic advisors.<sup>19</sup> Early assessments indicated that participants were more likely to continue their education and receive better paying jobs, and employers prefer to advance existing workers from within their companies because they bring experience and familiarity with the jobsite, have a reduced learning curve and lower recruitment costs

*While many individual programs exist across the country, success in implementing work experience programs at the scale employers need cannot depend solely on individual institutions implementing their own programs. Success depends on state policy makers’ leadership and action to support work experience programs as a critical link between jobseekers and employers. The following examples represent the type of state legislative and gubernatorial leadership that can be instrumental in taking work experience programs to statewide scale.*

- **InternNE:** In 2011, Governor Heineman of Nebraska signed legislation to launch InternNE, a program that connects college students with employers for paid internships.<sup>20</sup> Employers must be based in the state, and students must either be enrolled in a Nebraska-based college or university, have graduated in the previous six months, or if studying outside the state, must be Nebraska residents. The program aims to provide interns with real world business experience while encouraging more students to stay in the state or return after receiving their degrees elsewhere. Internships require 200 hours on-the-job training within one year. The program, administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NEDED), provides a 40 percent match—up to \$3,500 per internship—for eligible businesses hiring eligible student interns. NEDED may use their discretion to provide up to 75 percent of the cost of the internship per business. A business may apply for funding for up to 10 interns per year, with a maximum of five per company location per year. Since its launch in 2011, InternNE has placed more than 445 interns with over 288 employers, approximately one-third of which are small businesses with less than 10 employees. Over 50 percent of those interns were offered a full-time position with the company where they interned, and more than 25 percent were hired on

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Findings from the Washington Workplace-based Learning Initiative. Retrieved from [www.wtb.wa.gov](http://www.wtb.wa.gov).  
Sparks, E., Waits, M., *Growing State Economies: Twelve Actions*, National Governors Association Chair’s Initiative 2011-2012. For more information on InternNE, see <http://neded.org/business/talent-a-innovation-initiative/internne>

full-time with another company.<sup>21</sup> In January 2013, the InternNE web portal ([www.internNE.com](http://www.internNE.com)) was updated, making it easier for students and businesses to connect with one another.

- **Rhode Island Apprenticeship:** Rhode Island Governor Chafee signed a bill in 2013 that will allow high school students (16 years and older) to engage in pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and internship experiences during school hours in approved manufacturing career and technical education programs. The legislation, administered by the Rhode Island Department of Labor, also calls on the state to establish manufacturing standards for pre-apprenticeship programs.<sup>22</sup>
- **Operation Intern:** In North Dakota, lawmakers committed an additional \$1.5 million to their seven-year old Operation Intern program. The program's primary focus is employers in the state's targeted industries: energy, advanced manufacturing, value-added agriculture, tourism and technology-based businesses. The program reaches approximately 200 students per year. Employers are awarded \$3,000 in matching funds to hire a paid intern, with a limit of 10 interns per biennium.<sup>23</sup>
- **Minnesota Tax Credit:** In an effort to spur rural internships, Minnesota lawmakers approved a new tax credit as part of the state's Omnibus Tax Bill, rewarding companies for hiring college interns by paying up to 40 percent of the intern's salary, up to a maximum of \$2,000 per intern. The state allocated \$2 million per year for the program. Internships must be for-credit and last at least 12 weeks. Employers must demonstrate that the intern is not replacing existing employees.<sup>24</sup>

In each of these examples, states indicate that a major motivator for supporting internship experiences is to keep students and jobseekers in-state after graduation.

These examples represent actions that governors and legislators can take to expand work experience programs to statewide scales, but they are still limited in scope. All target college students—a critical population of future workers, but a narrow slice of the total jobseeker population. In fact, in Colorado, X percent of today's workforce and the workforce of 20XX are adults, many of them out-of-school. The challenge therefore remains: how can Colorado replicate proven work experience models and take them to address the needs of all jobseekers?

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21 Press Release: Nebraska's Internship Program, Governor Heineman, February 1, 2013. Retrieved from [http://www.governor.nebraska.gov/columns/2013/02/01\\_internship.html](http://www.governor.nebraska.gov/columns/2013/02/01_internship.html).

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23 For more information, see [www.operationintern.com](http://www.operationintern.com).

24 For more information, see [http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/billsumm/summary\\_display\\_from\\_db.php?ls=88&id=1696](http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/billsumm/summary_display_from_db.php?ls=88&id=1696)

# Colorado's Pockets of Innovative Programs

Like the nation at-large, pockets of innovative work experience programs can be found across Colorado's systems and programs. Colorado is most certainly not at square one: many of its existing work experience programs generate positive outcomes for participants and employers. In fact, many programs in Colorado mirror outstanding national models. This section provides a snapshot of the work experience programs currently available to Colorado students or jobseekers. These programs represent models of work experience serving multiple population groups (youth to adults, as well as the long-term unemployed and Unemployment Insurance recipients), various types of organizations (private, public, non-profit), and an array of government programs (workforce development, public universities, public school districts and others). They are not intended to reflect the full inventory of work experience programs or work experience program components across the state. Rather, they are a sampling that may serve as a starting place for a full inventory.

For the purposes of this paper, one program is highlighted from each of the following types of entities: a public secondary institution, a private secondary institution, a nonprofit community based organization, a workforce development center, a public university, an industry association and a private sector company.

*These programs have one strong commonality: positive outcomes for participants in terms of job placement or advancement in an educational career pathway. They also share a set of elements that interviewees identified as crucial to their success, including:*

- Setting clear expectations upfront for employer sponsor and intern candidate roles and responsibilities;
- Offering paid internships as much as possible, versus unpaid, to set the tone for interns that the experience is a real job with real responsibilities, and to encourage employer sponsors to value intern positions;
- Playing the role of intermediary, facilitator and connector between students or jobseekers and companies, including careful assessments of employer needs, student interests and fit for specific placements; and
- Offering other supports and job preparation training before and during internships, including mechanism for mentoring and feedback, to ensure that students and jobseekers are successful in their internships.



## Findings from the Field

### **A Public Secondary Institution: Aurora Public School District**

Each year, approximately 15 to 20 high school seniors from across the seven high schools in Aurora Public Schools (APS) participate in the APS High School Internship program. APS works closely with the Chamber of Commerce and the APS CTE Pathways Advisory Council to identify company sponsors each year. The unpaid High School allows students to earn credit (0.25 – 1.0 credits depending on the number of hours served) while serving as special assistants to professionals in the community. The Interns' academic schedule includes out-of-school experience scheduled by the interns in coordination with employer sponsors, as well as travel to the internship site. Interns also participate in seminars on leadership and communication, either in a formal classroom setting or online. The student intern, the parent/guardian, an APS designee, a school counselor, the high school principal and the employer sponsor each sign a Memorandum Of Understanding to guide the cooperative education program, and each have unique responsibilities to make the intern experience a success. Students are coached on work ethic and soft skills, attend staff meetings and participate in specific company projects. Students must also keep a journal of their experience, which culminates in a final reflection report and presentation.

### **A Private Secondary Institution: Arrupe Jesuit High School**

Arrupe Jesuit High School is a private college preparatory school that serves economically disadvantaged students from Denver's inner-city neighborhoods. Nearly 82 percent of its current students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. The school is a member of the Cristo Rey Network ([www.cristoreynetwork.org](http://www.cristoreynetwork.org)), a national association of Catholic high schools that provides college preparatory education to low-income families. The school served 334 students in the 2012–2013 school year. Every student, starting as freshmen, participates in the school's Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP), one of the nation's more sophisticated secondary school cooperative education programs. Students work in over 100 organizations, including law firms, hospitals, banks, oil and gas corporations, and nonprofit organizations. The school enjoys a 92 percent employer partner retention rate. Firms pay a flat fee for service (currently \$22,500 per year) and in return get the equivalent of one full-time employee, split four ways by four students. Student's work 4.25 days per month at these businesses, earning enough to cover 65 percent of their tuition. Four Arrupe staff members handle payroll, W-4, I-9 and workers compensation paperwork, in addition to acting as job developers, employer outreach specialists and job coaches for the students. Arrupe's Work Study staff have no academic responsibilities. The summer before their freshman year, Arrupe students participate in an intensive four-week training institute to prepare them for their CWSP experience. Employers volunteer to help staff the workshops. Topics include customer service, office equipment use, confidentiality, teamwork and team building. Since starting the CWSP program in 2007, 100 percent of Arrupe's graduating classes have been accepted into a college or university of their choice. The class of 2013 earned more than \$5.5 million in merit-based scholarships. This is particularly impressive considering the fact that 50 percent of Arrupe graduates are the first in their families to graduate from high school, and 87 percent are the first to be accepted into college.

### **A Nonprofit Community Based Organization: PlatteForum<sup>25</sup>**

PlatteForum is an artist residency and youth development program in downtown Denver. The organization hosts artists from around the world for two-month residencies, giving them time and space to create and install unique art exhibits. A diverse group of investors funds PlatteForum, including community and national foundations, corporate and individual company sponsors, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The program is far more than an artists' studio. It is a

hub for youth and young adults to explore the world of art, gain hands-on experience outside of school, increase critical team building skills and navigate their way into post-secondary education. PlatteForum operates two distinct programs for K-12 youth: ArtLab and the College Access Mentoring Program (CAMP). Fifteen youth per year are accepted into the 12-month, intensive ArtLab program, which started in 2005. Each youth is paired with a professional artist mentor, participating in workshops with visiting artists, creating and presenting their own art, partaking in community service projects and mentoring younger at-risk students during “Learning Labs” (six to eight week sessions of workshops and art experimentation). The program is intensive, and requires group struggles and teamwork to complete art installations and community projects.

CAMP, started in 2009, is an 18-month mentoring and internship program for high school students. CAMP is highly competitive, generating 80 applications per year, typically for students referred by PlatteForum’s partnering high school guidance counselors. Only accepts five to seven interns are ultimately accepted into CAMP. Students work onsite for half days each Saturday during the school year and receive a small stipend. During the summer, they work 20 hours per week earning minimum wage. All interns:

- Work on long-term, in-depth community art installation projects (from concept to research to design to final set-up);
- Develop projects and programs (including curriculum) for younger students in Learning Labs;
- Participate in intense career and college preparatory workshops, covering résumé writing, interviewing skills, networking, filling out college applications, accessing financial aid and other topics.

PlatteForum staff members have backgrounds in family counseling and youth development. The staff work directly with students, and coordinate and train volunteer adult mentors to pair up with each intern. In the last two years, 100 percent of CAMP interns have moved onto college; approximately half became the first in their families to graduate from high school.



*Growing up in an area where the idea of art is something that is completely unaffordable, ArtLab opened doors for me that I never thought existed. It has given me the essentials to compete in this world and also interact with society due to the people skills I have acquired.”*

**~ Ruben, ArtLab Alumnus**



#### **A Workforce Development Center: Larimer County Workforce Center**

The Larimer County Workforce Center operates an impressive and comprehensive internship program that targets multiple populations and draws on multiple funding streams. A Training Resource Team (TRT) coordinates the program. The TRT is made up of staff persons from the Workforce Center’s Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker unit, WIA Youth unit, and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) unit (funded by the Department of Human Services and co-located with the Larimer Workforce Center). The TRT is responsible for developing internship opportunities for WIA youth and adults, TANF adults and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) clients (by co-enrolling them in WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, because TAA does not authorize work experience as an approved expenditure). The TRT and Larimer County Workforce Center’s fiscal department handles all administrative requirements such as payroll and unemployment insurance taxes in-house.

From January 2013 through July 2013 alone, the TRT of Larimer secured internships for 104 individuals, 52 percent of which transitioned into unsubsidized employment. Internships vary in type and length, but are capped at 32 hours per week for up to 16 weeks. Larimer County draws on multiple funding streams to subsidize temporary internships, including WIA and TANF. The TRT was formed in March of 2011 as an offshoot of a successful Hire Colorado work experience initiative, a unique partnership funded by the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment that targeted work experience opportunities for TANF adults. Larimer County sustained and expanded the program by re-purposing portions of staff members' time to cultivate relationships with employers that resulted in the current TRT.

For youth and young adults, the Workforce Center's WIA Youth unit partners with local high schools to target graduating seniors for a specific "fast track to graduate" program involving three tiers of activity:

- 1 Eight to 10 hours of job search workshops including résumé writing, interviewing, networking, soft skills and role playing;
- 2 A customized, internship of up to 300 hours developed through the TRT support team; and
- 3 Navigation and support to move into post-secondary education, a certificate or license training program, or unsubsidized employment upon the completion of the customized internship.

Building on a 20-year relationship with the Larimer County Conservation Corps (LCCC), which is co-located with and supported by the Larimer County Workforce Center, four additional opportunities for hands-on learning are available:

- 1 The Agri-Corp, for 14- to 16-year-olds, subsidizes youth work on organic farms for 20 hours per week for four weeks;
- 2 The Land Corp targets 16- to 19-year-olds for field conservation projects;
- 3 The Forestry Corp is a partnership with the forest land managers for 18- to 24-year-olds to complete fire mitigation activities; and
- 4 The Water/Energy Corp, a winter program for 18- to 24-year-olds to be trained on and conduct energy audits and install energy efficiency home equipment.

LCCC is a supporting employer of youth work experience placements, supported by WIA Youth funds. For adults participating in WIA, TANF and TAA, the TRT identifies specific skill upgrades or training programs to improve employability, often leading to internship placement as a transitional tool for securing unsubsidized employment.

#### **A Public University Program: University of Colorado at Boulder's CleanTech Program**

At the University of Colorado (CU) Boulder Leeds School of Business, a full-time CleanTech internship coordinator places approximately 50 interns per year in a growing network of more than 75 energy and technology businesses. Launched in 2011, CU CleanTech has three goals:

- 1 To ensure the transition of CU's research from lab to market;
- 2 To enable industry to access and integrate with leading researchers; and
- 3 To provide business engagement opportunities for students.

The third goal prompted CU CleanTech to develop their Student Placement Program (SPP), using seed funding from Colorado's Green Jobs Advisory Board, a partnership between CDLE and the Governor's Energy Office (now the Colorado Energy Office). The grant provided subsidized internships in a cost share model with employers. Today, the internships are completely supported by employer sponsors that set their own wages and number of hours. CU CleanTech engages with the cleantech industry to identify opportunities for student involvement, and employs a matching process to find the best fit for each employer and student. CU CleanTech partners with a variety of employer organizations, from non-profits to local startups to multinational corporations. Student interns are sourced from graduate and undergraduate programs across CU Boulder's campus, including engineering, business, law, and arts and sciences students. The placement program has opportunities for the academic year and summer, in addition to full-time positions for recent grads.

Key to SPP's success is its full-time manager. Fundamentally, she functions as a job developer, taking time to get to know each employer sponsor, including their company's size, products and services, culture and specific needs. She spends equal time understanding the interests, proclivities, skills and abilities of CU CleanTech's intern candidates. By integrating these two functions into one role, the matches between companies and students almost always hit the mark. (X number of interns successfully complete their experience; X number are hired by the company; X number transition to employment in related companies).

#### **A Private Sector Company: Navigant Research**

Navigant Research is a repeat customer of the CU CleanTech Student Placement Program, expanding from one intern in 2011, to two interns in 2012 and five interns in 2013. Navigant Research is a market research and consulting firm that provides in-depth analysis of global clean technology markets. A small global company headquartered in Portland, Oregon, Navigant has about 20 staff in Boulder. For a small company, hiring interns (called "research associates" at Navigant) is simply the best way to test and recruit talent. They feel fortunate to have such a strong partnership with the CU CleanTech program because it serves as a first level of quality assurance in their hiring process. Through SPP, student interns are pre-screened and have demonstrated an interest in the cleantech field. The internships allow students to fully understand the day-to-day activities of the firm, hone the needed skills and abilities to do the job well, and gain familiarity with the work culture of Navigant. For the firm, an internship approach allows a solid assessment period that allows them to answer important questions. Will this person be a good long-term fit? Will this person be able to act as a team player? Will he or she be able to perform the functions required of them?

Navigant acknowledges that as an employer sponsor, there are certain roles and responsibilities they must take on to ensure a successful internship placement. Each CU Boulder student intern is paired with a staff mentor. The mentor provides ongoing assignments and feedback, acts as a resource and guides their mentee throughout the internship (typically one semester, sometimes two). Beyond that, however, interns are treated as an "analyst in-training" with real responsibilities and projects. They conduct research, analyze data and deliver presentations. They participate in project meetings and interact with clients. For longer internships, the intern takes on more responsibilities. Some interns stay for the long term. Of the seven total interns placed over the past three years, Navigant has hired three full-time. Others have taken jobs with related firms. Navigant sees no problem training potential workers for competitors or other companies. The investment and payoff is worth it to them. John Gartner, Director of Navigant's Smart Transportation Division, offers this advice to other companies: "Do this. It's better than hiring someone full-time that you don't know. With interns, you've got someone you trained, who knows your culture, your process, your business."

#### **An Industry Association: Colorado BioScience Association**

The Colorado BioScience Institute, operated by the Colorado BioScience Association, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides biotech education, workforce and career development, innovation support and resources for life science professionals, companies, students and educators in Colorado's biotech industry. One of the Institute's cornerstone programs is the internship program, operated through extensive partnerships with companies and local academic institutions with the Institute serving as the intermediary to facilitate internship placements. The intermediary is a unique and critical role in the placement process between academic institutions, which already have some capacity to recruit and refer students as intern candidates, and bioscience companies that are prepared to hire interns. The Institute provides employers with a "How to Set Up an Internship" checklist and equips students with an "Internship Preparation Checklist." It also maintains an online job and internship site with postings for employers and students. Academic partners include Arapahoe Community College, Colorado School of Mines, Colorado State University, Regis University, University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Denver and University of Northern Colorado. Last year, the program placed 50 student interns with bioscience companies in Colorado.<sup>26</sup>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Next Steps for State Leadership

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1

Address the gap in providing work experience for adult jobseekers, including the long-term unemployed, unemployment insurance recipients, dislocated workers and re-careering adults.

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This is a gap nationally and in Colorado, despite the fact that close to two-thirds of Colorado's 2025 workforce were already working adults in 2010, putting them well beyond the traditional high school-to-college pipeline.<sup>27</sup>

- The CWDC should convene a conversation across its state-level partners and engage local workforce centers in discussion on two key questions: 1) What barriers exist at the individual and systemic level that hinder adult job seekers' participation in work experience programs? and 2) What strategies are proven to work for adult jobseekers, and how can we collectively employ those strategies to expand work experience opportunities, quickly and using available resources, for this population specifically?"
  - Information gathered from this conversation should be put into an action plan to determine how to best address this gap.
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2

Explicitly integrate work experience opportunities into relevant state initiatives across education, workforce development and economic development.

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One possible lesson learned from the recent groundswell of interest in work experience programs on the parts of industry and other stakeholders may simply be that it is time for action, not just dialogue, to scale up internships and other similar programs.

- Continue to expand the inventory of existing work experience programs from across the state;
  - Brainstorm existing state initiatives and programs that could be adapted to incorporate additional work experience opportunities or expanded work experience components;
  - Identify a few targeted state-level actions that could support the addition or expansion of work experience opportunities across existing programs.
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3

Create a statewide Work Experience Community of Practice to highlight promising models around the state that target unique and diverse populations of students and jobseekers, serve different industries, are driven out of different systems and programs, and draw on a variety of funding streams.

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The Work Experience Community of Practice should include an online clearinghouse for information, webinars and face-to-face workshops that feature promising programs, and a discussion forum on policy actions that could bring promising models to scale. It should target educators at all levels, workforce development centers, training partners and community-based organizations engaged in work experience efforts.

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# 4

Involve the Governor and Legislature, and encourage them to find ways to provide seed funding for institutions to partially subsidize internship programs for employers.

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Require employer matches and develop a long-term sustainability plan that will replace the need for subsidization over time. The lesson learned from models in Colorado is that work experience opportunities should be a joint venture between employers and programs, in which employers provide wages and programs provide assessment, recruitment, matching and job coaching services.

- Create a variety of messages to make the case to leadership, including: Let's keep Coloradans in Colorado; This is about growing companies here, now; Give students a real opportunity to explore their potential; Let's take advantage of the best ready-to-go training entities available: employers!; Let employers "try before they buy"; etc.

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# 5

Create a statewide online clearinghouse for internship programs that industry, students and jobseekers can access to connect with the programs in their region or industry that best meet their needs.

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A possible pitfall: Trying to create the one, big statewide database and job posting site that will be all things to all interested parties. Instead, design an online database of existing intermediary programs (such as those highlighted in this paper) that can be searched by region and target industry. This honors existing programs by showcasing them and lets employers easily navigate the variety of programs in their industry or region that they can access to sponsor an intern (and vice versa).

## Ideas for Action for Education and Training Programs

1. **Replicate the Colorado examples in this paper;** there is something here for every type of organization and target population.
2. **Set clear expectations on roles and responsibilities from the outset** for both employer sponsors and intern candidates.
3. **Offer paid internships as much as possible,** versus unpaid, to set the tone for interns that the experience is a real job with real responsibilities, and to encourage employer sponsors to see value in intern positions.
4. **Play the role of intermediary,** facilitator, and connector between students or jobseekers and businesses, carefully assessing employer needs and student interests to ensure the best fit for both.
5. **Offer support and job preparation training** before and during an internship placement to ensure that students and jobseekers are successful, including mechanisms for mentoring and feedback.
6. **Fill the exact gap that is needed.** For example, sometimes just an intermediary is needed between companies and post-secondary education institutions with existing internship programs (like the case with the Colorado Bioscience Institute). Other times a full-time job developer and manager is needed for an internship matching program, as is the case with CU's CleanTech program. Other times, a comprehensive team that targets multiple populations and public and private partners is what is needed, like that used by the Larimer County Workforce Center.
7. **See this as your job.** Whether you are an educator, workforce developer, economic developer or community based organization, helping students and jobseekers secure gainful employment and a rewarding career, or helping companies build the skilled workforce they need to grow, should be part of your mission.

## Steps for Employers

1. **Reach out to colleges, universities, workforce centers and other programs to recruit jobseekers and students.**  
Take the first step if you think your company can benefit from an intern.
2. **Be clear about the value-add of an intern** to your team, and create space to ensure the placement is effective, including being clear about the job description and providing ongoing support.
3. **Be willing to invest time and wages**, knowing that this is an extremely effective way to assess and recruit talent.

## Appendix A: Acknowledgements

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## Appendix B: Tools to Use Now or Adapt as Needed

- Employer Guide to a Successful Internship
- Student and Jobseeker Guide to Successful Internships



# EMPLOYER GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP

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Note: This guide is intended to assist employers in developing successful internships. It is intended to be customized as needed. Users in the education and training fields may find it helpful as they work with employers to place students or jobseekers in internships.

Please note that the term "internship" is used loosely to include any work or service experience where an individual participates in work tasks on the jobsite on a temporary basis.

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## Why Hire an Intern?

An internship is a work or service experience in which a student or jobseeker of any age or experience level participates at a worksite as an active team member contributing to meaningful projects. The internship should be designed by an employer to accomplish the following goals:

- **To provide the employer with a competent, temporary individual** who can add value to projects and tasks during their internship tenure;
- **To provide the employer with an opportunity to gauge the knowledge, skills and work habits** of an individual, and to assess the individual's fit as a long-term employee;
- **To familiarize employers with the training and instruction that potential employees are receiving in schools, colleges and training centers.**
- **To provide the student or jobseeker with meaningful tasks and responsibilities** so that he or she learns from the experience and applies his or her own knowledge and skills to benefit the employer; and
- **To provide the intern with an opportunity to understand the industry, the company, work culture,** expectations, and day-to-day tasks and responsibilities of a job, so that he or she can make an informed decision about pursuing a career in the field.

## Internships Offer Many **Benefits** to Employers, Including:

- **A "try before you buy" advantage:** Get to know potential job candidates before hiring them, and take advantage of the opportunity to train them to your specific company culture and expectations;
- **Reduced turnover and need for re-training:** Entry-level workers who are hired as interns come into full-time positions "ready-to-go" and fully aware of the expectations and responsibilities of the job. This is a cost-saver for employers who otherwise may hire new employees who may not a good fit over the longer term.
- **Immediate, focused time on specific projects:** Interns can bring new energy and insights to your team. They are perfect for projects that need to get out the door, or for the longer term projects that need focused time.
- **More time for senior staff to devote to advanced projects:** Interns can play a key role in allowing senior staff to focus on big sales or higher impact, more advanced projects.
- **Supervisory and management experience for your existing staff:** Interns need mentors and supervisors. This is an excellent opportunity for your existing staff to gain management experience.

**Finally, keep in mind that hiring an intern is easy.** If you are hiring an adult jobseeker as an intern, it is no different from hiring a temporary employee. If you are hiring a student intern, find out whether there are any school requirements that must be met as part of their work experience, and whether their school covers costs such as workers compensation.

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## Designing Your Internship Position – Five Design Features

You will get the most out of your interns' time and talents if you plan ahead. Think about the needs an intern could fill at your organization, and design positions accordingly. Here is a checklist of design features and questions to consider:

### 1 Develop a strong job description that addresses the following decision points:

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- What does the organization hope to achieve from hiring an intern? Will the intern work on a specific, high-need project, or will the work cover a variety of projects? What specific duties will they assume?
  - Internships that fail generally do so because the intern was not given enough work, or provided work that allowed them to sufficiently show their skills.
  - Consider mixing up their workload with the types of work any good employee might do, including specific responsibilities on unique projects, day-to-day general support work, and assignments to handle the unexpected, immediate needs that come up in any business.
  - Incorporating a variety of work allows them to demonstrate diverse talents and abilities, and allows you to see how they react to different tasks and responsibilities.
- What specific skills, talents and knowledge are you seeking in an intern?
  - Will this person be working with a team, on their own, or both? Will they be doing research and analysis, direct client relationship management, or hands-on technical work? Will the work require a high degree of creativity, or will it require an ability to follow precise instructions?
  - Are you seeking someone who already has knowledge in the field or job type, or someone you can train up to your unique needs and culture?
  - Create high, yet realistic, standards in your job description. You are hiring an intern, not an experienced, advanced worker. Look for interest areas, skills, talents and knowledge that can be developed and expanded.
- How long will the internship be? Are you looking for a student for a summer internship, or someone who is available during the school year? Would you prefer someone (such as an adult jobseeker or dislocated worker looking to transition into your industry) that is available full time for a short period, or part time for a longer period?
  - You have choices in internship length. You do not want an internship to be too short (one month offers little time to get to know the intern, and is probably not sufficient time for the intern to add real value to your business) nor too long (more than one year may leave your intern with a sense of missed advancement opportunities).
  - Summer internships can often mean a full-time intern since student schedules are more flexible, but they generally are shorter, between 10 to 12 weeks.
  - Consider a project-focused internship if you know you will have an intern for just six to 12 weeks.
    - ◊ For example, an intern may help develop and complete a new product launch, or do specific research. Set a clear end date, with specific accomplishments that must be completed.
    - ◊ Do allow them to also engage in other general support work and staff meetings. This will keep them motivated and allow them to see the full workings of your business.
  - Year-long or longer-term interns generally require more flexibility in scheduling, but have the advantage of providing more time to develop long-term projects, engage in multiple types of work, and demonstrate their skills and abilities.

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## 2 Make a plan for onboarding or orientation, as well as ongoing engagement of your intern in staff meetings and team networking.

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- Cover the basics: office tour, introductions to all staff, dress code, hours, other relevant policies of your organization, where they'll be working exactly (their desk), pay period and payment information, access to email and servers, resources and secretarial assistance available to them, staff meetings, etc.
- Review the internship job description together: discuss tasks, projects, expectations, responsibilities, supervisor/mentor, timelines, etc.
- Talk culture: describe the organization's culture, and make a specific appointment for the intern to talk individually with key team members he or she will work with, including his or her supervisor/mentor.

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## 3 Set expectations up front about what could happen post-internship?

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- Be clear about where this might go: a full-time job? A part-time job? No jobs available, but something may open up in the near future? Or simply be clear that this is a great opportunity for both of you right now, and that the experience gained by the intern may position him or her well for jobs with other companies in the field.
- Assure him or her that if the internship works well for both, at a minimum, you will serve as a reference for real, hands-on work experience.

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## 4 Identify and assign a supervisor or mentor.

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- Someone needs to be clearly assigned the role of supervising and mentoring each intern, including assigning work tasks and projects, providing on-the-job training and mentoring, acting as the "go-to" resource if the intern has questions, and offering regular, constructive feedback along the way. Let this person assist with developing the job description and interviewing candidates.

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## 5 Establish benchmarks and performance criteria to assess progress.

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- Interns will look to their mentors/supervisors for feedback. Effective supervisors will provide regular, formal feedback in addition to informal feedback on a variety of issues, including: quality of deliverables; timeliness of deliverables; ability to work with others; communication style and effectiveness; and ability to be creative, resourceful and independent, while also following direction.
- Effective mentors/supervisors will assess an intern's performance by asking them specific discussion questions. This type of back-and-forth dialogue is often the best way for interns to self-reflect and learn about how their work applies to the organization more broadly. It is also an effective way for supervisors to understand how the intern thinks, interacts and applies their talent.
- Discussion questions might include: Tell me about the status of X project. What is going smoothly? What is posing the most trouble? Can you see how your work is contributing to the overall organization? What do you see as particular strengths that you are bringing to X project? Where do you feel you could improve? What do you see as a next step on this project, or what do you see as future development opportunities for us related to this project?

## Recruiting an Intern

There are a number of avenues you can pursue to recruit an intern. Consider the following options:

- **The do-it-yourself approach.** Post the position on your website; access job posting sites at universities, colleges or workforce training centers; use your own employees to spread the word that you are looking for an intern; use any existing connections you have with education faculty, training or workforce organizations to spread the word; be a guest lecturer in high school and college classes (contact their career service offices to find out how to do this); or speak with your Workforce Center about opportunities to reach jobseekers and expose your business to potential candidates.
- **Connect directly to high school or college career service departments, Career and Technical Education instructors, pre-collegiate program managers or other points of contact in college programs related to your field and industry.** Ask whether they have an existing internship program, and how you can get involved as a sponsor. If no formal internship program exists, tell them you are seeking an intern and would like their assistance. Share your job description so they can help screen and recruit appropriate internship candidates.
- **Call your local Workforce Center.** These organizations typically work with employers to place youth and young adults in short-term or summer internships. Some also place experienced, re-careering adults in short-term internships. Share your job description with them so they can help screen and recruit appropriate internship candidates.

## The Costs of an Internship

- **The financial costs:**
  - **Wages are not required, but highly recommended** in order to set the expectation that this is a serious work experience. Your intern candidate pool will improve if you offer some kind of compensation. A wage also increases ownership in the experience for both the business and the intern. Interns are more likely to take the work seriously if they know they are valued.
    - ◊ **If you do not pay compensation to your intern,** make sure you follow the Fair Labor Standards Guidelines for unpaid “trainees”: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>.
  - **You can also offer additional benefits and compensation,** including working with an educational institution to ensure academic credit is provided, if the individual is enrolled in an education or training institution. Depending on the length of the internship, consider limited paid vacation and/or holidays. You may also consider allowing time worked as an intern to accumulate and apply toward benefits if the intern becomes a full-time employee.
  - **Expect to cover the costs of workers’ compensation.** If you are hiring a student intern, check to see if their school covers the costs of workers’ compensation. If they do not, you will need to cover these costs just as you would with a temporary employee.
- **The in-kind costs:**
  - **Assign and train a mentor/supervisor** to each intern in order to provide a “go-to” for interns to ask questions, use as a resource and guide, report to and submit assignments and projects;
  - **Give them an actual space to do their work,** such as a desk, cubicle or office;
  - **Assign an internship coordinator** who can screen, recruit and manage the onboarding process. This may be your existing human resources director, or someone else.

## Other **Legal Questions** and Issues

- **If you choose to hire an unpaid intern** and you are a for-profit organization, make sure you understand the six criteria established by the Fair Labor Standards Act for an unpaid intern to qualify as a “trainee.” See Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs under the FLSA, at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm>.
- **To limit exposure to liability**, it is generally a good idea to cover interns under your workers’ compensation policy, even if they are unpaid. Some high schools, colleges or Workforce Centers are able to include interns in their own policy, but this is not always the case.

## What Happens **After an Internship?**

- **Conduct an exit interview.** This should be to the benefit of you as the employer, to help you improve future internships, and to the intern, so he or she leaves with constructive feedback about their performance. Discuss questions such as:
  - What did you like most about your internship? What tasks or responsibilities were the most satisfying? Did you understand what was expected of you? What specific strengths do you think you brought to this position? What are some of the most valuable skills and new information that you learned? Are there any areas where you think you improved significantly?
  - Did you feel supported by your supervisor/mentor and other staff colleagues? How could future internships be improved? What kinds of projects do you think are best for interns?
- **Clarify hiring expectations before the internship ends.**
  - If you want to transition an intern to a position of employment, make the offer before the internship concludes so you can discuss transitions and new roles and responsibilities in-person.
  - If you know you want to maintain contact with this person for possible future hire, tell him or her, and verify that you have all their current contact information. Connect on LinkedIn or another site in case his or her email or phone number changes
  - If you are not in a position to hire or not interested in hiring, let them know you will provide a reference as needed.
- **Provide letters of recommendation, if appropriate**, and if you can, make immediate recommendations to your exiting intern on potential employers they should consider as a next step.

### References:

This guide was developed based on information gathered from interviews with high schools, colleges, nonprofits, workforce centers and employers in Colorado that engage in either placing or hiring interns, as well as the following existing guides:

1. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development *InternNE* Employer Guidebook: [http://neded.org/files/businessdevelopment/internne/EmployerGuidebook\\_DevelopingSuccessfulInternshipProgram.pdf](http://neded.org/files/businessdevelopment/internne/EmployerGuidebook_DevelopingSuccessfulInternshipProgram.pdf)
2. Rutgers University Internship Program Development 101: <http://careerservices.rutgers.edu/interndev.shtml>

# STUDENT AND JOBSEEKER GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIPS

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Note: This guide is intended to help students and other jobseekers get the most out of their internship experience.

Please note that the term "internship" is used loosely to include any work or service experience where an individual participates in work tasks on the jobsite on a temporary basis.

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## Why Choose Internship?

An internship is a work or service experience in which a student or jobseeker participates at a worksite as an active team member contributing to meaningful projects. An internship should be monitored and designed to accomplish the following goals:

- **To provide you as the student or jobseeker with meaningful tasks and responsibilities** so that you learn from the experience and apply your own knowledge and skills to benefit the employer.
- **To provide you with an opportunity to understand the industry, the company, the work culture, expectations, and day-to-day responsibilities of a job** so you can make an informed decision about pursuing a career in the field.
- **To provide the employer with a competent, temporary individual (that's you!)** who can add value to projects and tasks during the internship.
- **To provide the employer with the opportunity to get to know your knowledge, skills and work habits, and to assess your fit for potential long-term employment.**
- **The opportunity, if you are a student, to earn academic credit while gaining real world experience.**

## Internships Offer Many **Benefits** to Students and Jobseekers, Including:

- **Being exposed to the actual tasks, responsibilities and work culture** of an industry and a specific company or hiring organization;
- **Developing on-the-job skills, abilities and knowledge** that cannot be learned in a classroom setting;
- **Applying classroom concepts and training theories, and integrating them** with field experience;
- **Cultivating confidence and professional contacts in the field** that will lead to good job opportunities during school and after graduation; and
- **Boosting your resume with real world experience and strong references.**

## A Twelve-Step Program to Making the Most of an Internship

Ultimately your connection to a job—whether during school or training, after graduation or upon completing training—depends on you. Today, employers in almost every industry rate job experience in their field as a top priority when hiring new employees. To make sure you have a competitive edge in the job market, you must find ways to acquire job experience. Volunteering is one way to accomplish this; internships, apprenticeships and other work experience opportunities are another way.

Below are 12 steps that can help you gain valuable work experience and make the most of the opportunity. If you are in school or a training program, first find out whether they can help you secure an internship, and then use these steps to secure a placement with an employer. If you are seeking work, connect with your local Workforce Center to see if they can assist you.

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## Step 1: Define Your Interests

You know *you* best. You know your interests, your proclivities, your skills and abilities, and the type of work you might find most engaging.

- Take the time to write what you know about yourself in terms of interests, skills, abilities, knowledge and work styles. Talk to your parents and friends about your interests.
- If you feel unsure about your interests and skills, start by reviewing your past experiences. What past jobs have been most engaging to you? Why? What did you do? What classes or trainings have you found most interesting? Why? What were you learning? What have you always thought you would be good at, but never had the chance to try? Why that particular activity or job? Do you know someone who has a job that sounds intriguing to you? Find out more about that job, and do a self-assessment: would you be a good match?

## Step 2: Be Realistic

Be careful not to limit yourself too early, but also be realistic about the kinds of jobs that might be open to you in your field of interest. If you are a high school or college student, an out-of-school youth or young adult, a re-careering adult, or an unemployed adult who has been out of work for more than a year, you will need to consider jobs that help you get your foot in the door of an industry or company, not a mid- or high-level job that is more likely to be filled by a more experienced worker.

## Step 3: Create Your List of Potential Employers

Once you have determined your interests, start identifying places of employment that might be a good fit. Leave no stone unturned in this process. Talk to your teachers, professors, instructors, case manager or counselor. Who do they know that might offer an internship that would be a good fit for you? Search job posting sites, and do not be discouraged if they do not post any open intern positions. At this point, you are looking for types of companies or employers where you might want an internship. Talk to your local Workforce Center, and ask them if they arrange internships or assist you in your search. Search websites of industry associations, chambers of commerce, the Better Business Bureau, community-based organizations like museums and arts centers, and even community organizations like Rotary or Kiwanis whose members are often business owners or executives. Once you've developed a list of specific potential employers, find out the following:

- Who do you know that might know someone in that company or organization? Ask around, including your teachers, instructors, advisors, Workforce Center staff, etc. What do they know about the company? Can they help you connect with the company?
- The name and number of the human resource director, or the name of the person responsible for coordinating internships. If no one is assigned this duty, find out who would be the best person to talk to about a potential internship. How do you find this out? Call the main number of the company or organization and ask. *Note: It is best to do this by phone instead of dropping by unannounced, potentially interrupting a busy work day.*

## Step 4: Polish Your Résumé

If you have not done this already, you'll need to refresh your résumé. Once you've researched on the types of companies you are interested in, you can customize your résumé.

- State your objective clearly somewhere, including for example: "To secure an internship in X industry, in order to understand the types of skills and abilities needed to succeed and gain a clearer understanding of the types of day-to-day tasks, responsibilities and work culture of an entry-level job."
- Highlight any relevant skills or training you have received that might be particularly applicable to the type of work in the company or organization.

## Step 5: Develop Your Own Learning Objectives

If you are seeking an internship as part of an academic requirement, your advisor or internship coordinator on campus is likely to have a set of specific learning objectives for you to consider.

Be clear how this experience will contribute to your Individual Career Advancement Plan (ICAP), and if there is anything you will need to communicate with your future job supervisor or mentor related to your ICAP or requirements to receive academic credit. *Remember, this is not the responsibility of the employer. It is your responsibility.*

If you are doing this on your own, you will want to be clear about what you want out of this before going in for an interview with an employer. Consider:

- What strengths can you apply to this place of work?
- What areas of knowledge do you specifically want to gain if given the chance at this place of work?
- What specific skills do you want to build that are relevant to this place of work?
- What knowledge or skills can you transfer to this industry? Workplace?

Thinking ahead about these questions will help you answer the inevitable question that you will get from an employer during an interview: Why do you want to work here?

## Step 6: Get an Interview and Be Prepared

You have your list. You have your résumé. You know what you want out of an internship. Now network and do the outreach. Use every connection you have to introduce yourself. Where you have no connection, pick up the phone yourself and talk to the human resource director or, in the case of a small employer, talk to the owner or director. Be extremely respectful of their time. They are busy. Ask directly if you can send your résumé to them and if you can set up an interview for a potential internship. If they say no, ask them if they would be willing to set up an “informational interview” so you may learn more about their organization and the industry. *Do not be discouraged if you hear “no” more than “yes.” That’s normal. Keep trying.*

There are two essential elements of preparing for the interview.

- **Find out everything you can about the company or organization.** Look at their website, talk to people who know them or are employed by them. Write out a list of questions you have about the company based on this research. It will demonstrate that you are taking their company seriously.
- **Practice.** Use your school’s career service office, your local Workforce Center, and your friends and family as resources to help you. Prepare for questions like:
  - Why do you want to intern here?
  - Why did you choose this field?
  - What specific skill sets and knowledge make you a good fit?
  - What do you hope to gain from this internship?
  - When are you available to start? How many hours will you work per week? How long do you expect the internship to last?
  - What level of compensation are you expecting?

## Step 7: Follow Up

Send a thank you note. Why? Because most applicants do not bother with this step, so it will help you stand out. Write a short note or email thanking the interviewer(s) for their time. Tell them you really enjoyed the conversation, reiterate



that you would like to work for them, and briefly summarize why. Wrap up by saying that you look forward to hearing back from them and that you will call in one week to answer any additional questions they might have.

If you get more than one offer, assess which one is the best fit for you. Let the employer know you are interested as soon as possible. Let the others know that you appreciate their time and that you have opted to take another position. Be courteous, grateful and respectful. You may want to work for them later.

## Step 8: Take Care of all Needed Paperwork

This is the first real task-oriented impression you will make on your new employer. As soon as you get the offer, ask them what your next steps should be. Should you come in to fill out paperwork and forms? Should you discuss work schedule and start date? Let them guide you, but take the initial step and ask how to proceed.

## Step 9: Understand Your Responsibilities

Either before or on your first day, make sure you know who your direct supervisor or mentor will be. Ask to sit down with them as early as possible to go over the job description, specific tasks, types of projects and overall expectations that they have for you as an intern. Ask them about your work space and when you might be introduced to other staff that will be colleagues on specific projects. Finally, ask them: What have I not asked that I should know?

## Step 10: Your First Week: Learn and Communicate

You have two main objectives during your first week on the job:

- **Learn your job:** Know the expected projects and deliverables, the day-to-day tasks you are responsible for, who you report to and how to share your progress; and
- **Communicate:** Connect with others to help you succeed.
  - Greet everyone you meet and ask them questions about their job. Get to know everyone in your department or division.
  - When possible, offer to help others as long as it does not interfere with your core responsibilities.
  - Ask for help when you need it. Everyone knows you are the “new kid on the block.” Be okay with that.
  - Ask for clarity on protocol when needed (if you are unclear how to clock in or clock out, when you should take breaks, whether you are welcome at staff meetings, whether you should greet clients, or anything else that surfaces during your first week). This is the time to ask.

## Step 11: On the Job

Every job will be different in terms of work culture (laid back vs. suit and tie, for example). No matter the job, two basic rules always apply:

- **Be a professional employee all the time:**
  - Be prompt (never show up late, never leave early);
  - Dress appropriately (take cues from your boss, supervisors, others in the office that are in middle to high positions);
  - Ask questions that will help you learn how to do your job better, but be respectful of everyone else’s time (they are working full time and have tasks to complete just like you do);
  - Give your opinions and insights but remember that you are the learner in this situation; and
  - Be okay with the menial, day-to-day tasks in addition to the bigger projects or deliverables you may be responsible for completing. Every job is a mix of both.

- **Go Beyond Expectations:**
  - Never do the bare minimum. Always go above and beyond, even just a little bit. For example, show up to work five or ten minutes early. It tells your employer that you are interested and engaged. Stay a little later at the end of the day.
  - Put a little extra effort into documents or reports that you are working on.
  - Before leaving, ask your supervisor or others if there is anything else that you can do before you leave. This will get noticed.
  - Finally, as your internship proceeds, assess your workload, and ask for more projects or more responsibility as time proceeds. Be realistic with what you can achieve, but do not be afraid to take on more if you are able.

Keep a journal. This might be a requirement if you are doing an internship for academic credit, but if not, consider keeping a journal anyway. This will be something you value at the end of your internship when you need to reflect on what you learned, or when you need to cite specific skills and knowledge that you gained during your internship. It can also come in handy if you decide to ask your employer for full-time work after your internship is over.

Include the following in your regular journal:

- Describe your duties and responsibilities, including anything you did not expect to be doing or learning.
- Comment on the work culture and general behaviors of professionals in the company and field.
- Create or obtain a copy of the organizational chart, and pinpoint where you are on the chart. Make notes about specific jobs or positions that interest you. Which position would you want to hold in two years? Five years?
- What, in your own words, is the purpose of this company or organization? What does it achieve? What outcomes and impact does it have? What gaps does it fill? What are you learning about this industry each week?
- What is the company's business model? How is it funded? What new things are you learning about the business model each week?
- What has been your most positive experience so far? What has been your least? Why?

## Step 12: Conclude Your Internship (but Leave the Door Open for Hire)

As the official end date of your internship approaches, consider if you want to work for this company or organization full time. If so, schedule a meeting with your supervisor to discuss this option. If they say no, do not be discouraged. Let them know that the experience has been valuable to you, and if they are in a position to hire in the future, ask them to keep you in mind.

At the end of your internship, ask for an exit interview and, if possible, a letter of recommendation. Ask specifically for feedback on your strengths and areas for improvement. They may ask you questions, too, regarding your observations on their strengths and areas for improvement. Be ready with answers that are honest but respectful, and that leave a positive impression on them. Finally, if you are interested in working for them in the future, express that desire again, and be sure to ask them if they know of other companies in the field that are hiring. Ask whether they would be willing to provide a reference for you.

Take the time to reflect overall on what you learned, and how to articulate what you learned in terms of new skills, hands-on experience and increased knowledge of the industry or field. Immediately, while this is fresh in your mind, update your résumé.

