

Building a Successful Internship Program

Mechanical Contractors Education and Research Foundation (MCERF)

Internships are an opportunity to identify and evaluate potential full-time hires for your organization. Building a structured internship program will provide the opportunity for your firm to recruit talented students and provide a flexible, cost-effective labor force without a long-term commitment. Providing good internship experiences can increase your company's visibility when the intern returns to his/her school. An internship program should be considered a critical marketing tool to recruit and retain talented Construction Management (CM) and Construction Engineering (CE) graduates.

Students seeking internship experiences may be looking to satisfy graduation requirements (where applicable) and explore fulltime career opportunities for after graduation. These students are looking for a good cultural fit, a structured learning environment that provides competent skills, and sufficient earning potential.

Consider the following as you structure your internship program:

Leading up to the Internship:

- Build a sustainable relationship/partnership with the schools you are recruiting from. This could be done through establishing scholarships, speaking engagements in classrooms or for students clubs, sponsoring construction site/plant visits when appropriate, sponsor/mentor student competition teams, and get to know the faculty and staff.
- Provide interns with information about your company, the internship program, and expectations ahead of time.
- Inform interns of placement site/position as early as possible.
- Have a staff person assigned to welcome the intern to your company. Alumni from the same school is ideal.
- Provide a workspace, computer, and any other items necessary to be productive member of the team, ready when they arrive.
- Offer assistance with housing expenses, or if that is not feasible, offer assistance in locating housing for the intern that is affordable and in a safe location. Share the contact information of other interns and new hires in advance, so students have the opportunity to share the cost of living expenses.

During Internship:

- Each intern should have an assigned mentor. The mentor's responsibility is to serve as the "go-to" person for guidance and feedback.
- Schedule an orientation for all interns, managers, mentors, and others who might interact with the interns during their internship. The orientation provides a forum for all involved to get to know one another, company culture, and expectations.

- Create an opportunity for new interns to meet new hires to learn about their experience, the company culture, and to showcase your organization as a great place to work.
- Offer interns real-world work assignments relevant to their academic experience that will also set them up for success as future graduates. A good intern wants to work, learn, and gain construction experience and a great reference.
- Provide training for various technologies and responsibilities as appropriate.
- Provide periodic constructive feedback to all interns throughout their internship experience. This provides the interns with specific recognition and direction and shows how much your organization values the continuous improvement and learning of individual employees.
- Include the interns in your company professional meetings and social activities as much as possible. This will increase the intern's knowledge of your organization's culture and commitment to teamwork and inclusiveness.

Closing out the Internship:

- At the completion of the internship, provide the opportunity for the interns to present on their experience and what they have accomplished.
- Remember, interns have to return to campus to finish their education. While there, they serve as your company's ambassador for recruiting students and engaging with the program.
- Provide the opportunity for all interns to give feedback about their experience. Such feedback should be considered as you assess and update the internship program.
- Discuss future employment opportunities with interns and the process and timing they should expect. Do not pressure students to make a decision before they are ready. Ideally, formal offers are made in the semester they graduate and sufficient time is allowed for them to thoughtfully consider the offer.
- Stay connected with your internes during their final year at the school.

Successful internship programs provide a pipeline for hiring and retaining talented graduates from higher education. Building a partnership with CM programs in your area provides a great benefit to your organization's human capital. On average, 45-65% of Construction Management graduates accept full-time positions with the company that sponsored their internship.