



## Internships and Academic Based Volunteering Tips

Internships for Undergraduate and Graduate Students ~ High Quality Candidates Are Often Available for Interesting Projects with Non-Profit Organizations.

**Step One:** Determine whether you have interesting and challenging projects for undergraduate and graduate students – unpaid internships should be a win-win for everyone.

- There are many projects that would benefit both your organization and students seeking practical experience working with a grassroots organization ~ here are just a few ideas:
  - Web-based Resources and Fact Sheets for Youth and Families ~ ask an Intern to evaluate your Web site and to make recommendations for positive change;
  - Research and Writing Projects ~ Would you like a report done on a child mental health topic, how about translating research findings into family-friendly information?
  - Develop Email Groups and List Serves of Families, Youth and Other Stakeholders Who Want to Learn More About Your Organization's Activities;
  - Policy and Advocacy ~ Create resources and materials for legislators to help educate them about children's mental health. You could also have students help your organization develop election materials to ensure that children's mental health is on the minds of those running for local and state offices;
  - Build Your Communications' Capacity ~ Consider developing Opinion/Editorial Articles to raise awareness in your local newspaper about children's mental health, contribute blogs to the blogosphere, monitor the local newspaper to find opportunities to contribute letters to the editor about children's mental health and more;
  - Ask Interns to help with your organization's information and referral lines or help lines. If your organization does not currently provide this service, think about asking an Intern to set it up to assist families across your state and local community; and
  - Best to think about other areas of your organization that could benefit from the work of an Intern.

**Tips and Considerations:** It is important that you have projects that will be of interest and challenge students. They want to feel like they have learned something from the experience and you likely have much to share with them about running a non-profit organization. Of course you will need space and a computer for the Intern.

**Step Two:** Write a description for the Internship Position. You may wish to include the following information:

- A brief description of your organization;
- Indicate that it is an unpaid Internship and the time period for the Internship (summer position, fall semester, etc.);
- Indicate the focus of the Internship (e.g. policy, communications, information/helpline, etc.);
- Provide a brief description of the projects or focus for the Internship, along with the skills you are seeking from candidates (e.g. writing skills important, strong and empathetic communication skills needed, background or interest in mental health and/or healthcare policy helpful, etc.);

- Ask interested candidates to submit a letter, resume and writing sample, if applicable, to a staff member by including the staff member's name and email address.

**Tips:** The description for the Internship position can be quite brief, as long as it includes the information listed above.

***Step Three:*** Get the word out about your Internship Position. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Use your Web site to post the Internship position in the "Jobs" section, if you do not have that section, you may wish to create it;
- Contact local colleges and universities to inquire about their postings for these positions. It is a good idea to build relationships with local colleges and universities because they can be a wealth of information about students seeking positions with community non-profits;
- If there are community bulletin boards that are near a campus, consider printing and posting an announcement about the Internship position there; and
- Use your existing network to get the word out.

**Tips:** Even if you do not have a college or university in your community, don't let that stop you. Plenty of students return to their home town looking for work in the summer. Granted most want and need a paying position, but they may be willing to donate a designated number of hours to your organization each week to get practical experience and to strengthen their resume for post-graduation job seeking. They may also have a strong interest in children's mental health.

***Step Four:*** Interview, paperwork, orientation, training, and start.

- Always a good idea to check references for Internship candidates;
- You may wish to have the Intern complete a Notice of Commitment and Expectations document (see sample attached);
- You should share with the Intern your organization's policies and procedures that apply to Interns;
- Provide the Intern with training and supervision so that everyone is clear on expectations and feed back;
- Make the experience worthwhile for everyone by looking for opportunities to expose Interns to new experiences and challenges.

**Tips:** After a positive Internship, offer to provide the Intern with a letter of recommendation or reference. Offer to serve as a reference for the Intern for future job prospects.

***Other Considerations:*** Your organization may wish to consider offering Internships for College or Graduate school credit. Your organization may also want to contact local Colleges and Universities to partner with your organization on research.

- For credit Internships often require those supervising the student to have at or above the academic credentials being pursued by the student (e.g., M.S.W. or Ph.D.).
- Requires your organization to provide more oversight and complete more paperwork.
- If you would like to evaluate programs you have developed to help secure future funding or to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program, consider approaching academic centers to partner with your organization on research. Graduate students may consider doing this research as part of their studies. Visit the school of social work or psychology departments to build a relationship with the faculty.