



AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE NEEDS

This employer's walkthrough guide goes through the various things you need to consider when developing an experiential learning opportunity, **in order to create the best experience** for you organization and for the student.

THE FIRST STEP to developing an opportunity is to understand the different types of experiential learning opportunities that students participate, so you can then determine which is best for your organization.

TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES



There are a variety of experiential learning opportunities that are promoted throughout educational institutions, all coming with its' own benefits. No single opportunity is better than the other, what you need to consider is what is best for **YOUR** organization.

To determine what opportunities fit your workplace needs best, ask yourself these questions :

- Are you looking to expand your knowledge and skills through tapping into fresh talent?
- Hire and give meaningful experience to someone?
- Share your workplace culture and participate within the community?
- Are you a small organization or not for profit searching for additional help on projects?
- Are you having difficulty looking for motivated and committed employees for your fast and growing organization?
- Are you a not for profit with limited resources, but interested in providing a rewarding experience?
- Is your organization searching for employees and want to try out potential candidates through internships?

Potential candidates will most likely be a high school, undergraduate, graduate, transitioning (career change), or an international student. No matter where that student is from, they are all highly motivated and encouraged, looking to support your organization. As you are doing your research, ask yourself the questions above about the organization and understand what each of the opportunities entail. ***The perfect opportunity is the one that is perfect for your organization. Once you decide on an opportunity, be sure to check out our [funding and grants](#) page to see what resources are out there to help you.***

CREATING A PROGRAM PLAN

Throughout writing a program plan and job description, the most important thing to keep in mind are the **learning objectives of the student**, and what you can do or implement to help them achieve this.

WRITING A PROGRAM PLAN

Once you have decided what type of opportunity is best for your organization, the next step is writing a program plan. When creating a program plan, there are a few things you should consider:

- Plan out the opportunity description, outlining the desired outcome, which should be measured by your management team and others in your organization.
- Include any specific ideas, proposals, and logistics you need to consider.
- Consider the needs of your organizations, and what resources you can allocate.
- What kind of tasks, objectives, and deadlines will you be implementing? Remember to keep these realistic!
- Do you need a specific student for the project, such as someone with specific skills or background? Explore different post-secondary programs [here](#) to find your perfect student.
- What kind of work will you be giving the student to do? Do you need the student simply to provide general work such as photocopying, data entry? These should be kept minimal, and not the entire student's experience! Student's and educators do not value or encourage these types of experiences, and should be focused on student's learning development.
- Will the student be paid or unpaid? While some institutions support unpaid opportunities in exchange for an academic credit, unpaid opportunities are becoming very undervalued, and may cause you to receive fewer applicants.
- Who will be responsible supervising or mentoring the student, where will the student be working and what exact work will they be doing, will they be doing any work beyond that?

WRITING A JOB DESCRIPTION

Once the program plan is written, you now have to be able to convey that plan to students, and the student's program coordinators. This is done through a job description, detailing on what you have written in the program plan. In this description, you need to clearly state:

- The candidates duties, responsibilities, and qualifications.
- Purpose of the opportunity, and how it will contribute to the organizations overall mission.
- The job duties and activities that the student will be responsible for.
- All details as to where the location and the department where they will be working.
- What expectations you have of the student, and the tasks being performed.
- What is required of the student to succeed in this position, such as location, required major, GPA, and any other technical job skills needed.
- Details on length of the internship, and number of hours per week.
- Mention the supervisor responsible for mentoring, supervising, and evaluating the student's progress.
- List if any training will be provided and what it will consist of.
- Provide sample tasks of what the student will be performing.
- Challenging and enriching work assignments related to student's study will boost the position description.

RECRUITING & INTERVIEWING

RECRUITING STUDENTS

In order to get the best candidate for your organization, be sure to look through who is out there and what skills are available. Check out our connect to [students](#), [institutions](#), and [underrepresented groups](#) pages to see the different potential candidates there for you, and choose what fits best for your organization.

To begin the recruitment process, contact a career center for the campus of your choice, or any other recruitment resources. Once the recruitment process begins, we recommend the following tips:

- To get the best candidates, start the recruitment process earlier.
- Develop relationships with campuses and local recruitment resources.
- Choose students as carefully as you would permanent employees- keep in mind that they are looking towards you for their first experience.
- Consider all legal implications of hiring a student, and what rules and regulations they are subject to. Understand what work can and cannot be assigned, and also understand the legal benefits and opportunities behind it.
- Discuss any questions when contacting the opportunity coordinator.
- Openly advertise the placement through having it reached to multiple institutions, ensuring a broad pool of applicants. Keep this advertising interesting, by providing info about the organization, clear on deadlines and how to apply, and providing contact information.
- Paid opportunities always lead to a better response rate!
- Be clear on the type of person you want recruited and the type of work you want them to do, being clear on the desired outcome of the job.

INTERVIEWING PROCESS

Once you have gone over student applications and have found ones that you think would be a good fit to your organization, the next step is to meet them in person to further discuss any details. You can and should be critical to them as you would to any permanent employee, just keep in mind that these candidates are only students, and are coming with limited to no experience- looking at you to provide them with their first one. This can likely be their first interview, so give them a good experience, ensuring them confidence along the way. Ask them questions about any work habits, skills they may, and how they have demonstrated those skills in school, projects, etc.

Understand what questions are illegal to ask during an interview. These questions include anything regarding *age, marital status, home ownership, financial status, religion, ethnicity, political influences, or national origin*. Student's can refrain from answering these questions, if they do not feel comfortable to answer.

PROVIDING THE BEST EXPERIENCE

Once you have finished the recruitment process and have found the student's best fit for your organization and the opportunity you are providing, you now have to focus on providing the best experience. This experience should be beneficial for both you and the student, so we recommend the following tips:

WELCOMING THE STUDENT

- Provide the student with an orientation when welcoming them into the office, which can include a tour of their workplace. This will help adjust students into the workplace and make them feel comfortable. The student is not only new to the organization, but new to the professional workplace as well. In the orientation, be sure to include information about your organizations history, what your organization does and the people it deals with, the organization's objectives and mission, health and safety processes, confidentiality.
- If required, provide any training that will be helpful in the students work and their productivity.
- Ensure that the students are being supported and given regular feedback on their work and progress.
- Have them complete an assessment activity at the beginning of the placement and at the end, to ensure that they have kept up with your organizations goals and the students learning objectives have been met.
- It is always best to provide the student with a mentor, who are their to guide student's throughout their work period.
- Allow the student to participate in group activities and professional meetings. Have them meet with different people throughout the organization.

SUPERVISING AND MENTORING

Supervising the student is a given in any experiential learning opportunity, who will keep track of the student through weekly meetings and check ups. A mentor is an extra way of an organization to show their support for the student, and is valuable for both the intern and professional. As a mentor:

- You are a guide, counselor, and tutor. For the candidate, you will be there for the student every step of the way for any questions and support they may need. Be sure to consider their ideas and provide them with feedback.
- You are encouraging students to participate in events that are not normally open to entry level positions, including staff meetings, and any other work related events.
- Passes on their own experiences and knowledge to the student (and the mentor can also benefit from a fresh viewpoint and new ways of thinking!)
- You will take part in the students application and interview process, as well as conducting assessments before, after, and during the placement.
- You will help develop learning goals for the student, and make sure they are on track.
- Help the student with their professional growth, and leading them to the networking field.

MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES

To ensure that the opportunity you are providing is meaningful for both you and the student, consider the following:

- Provide the student with challenging projects and tasks aligning with their learning objectives.
- Give the students important work and roles to keep them motivated.
- Give them greater exposure to the organization and what you do.
- Set clear goals and objectives for the student to achieve.

CONCERNS OF STUDENTS

We have so far provided you with information on what to do to create a meaningful experience for both you and the student. In order to further optimize your opportunity to ensure it is successful, it is important to consider the main issues and concerns that students have shared with unsuccessful opportunities.

The main issues that students identified (and that you should steer away from) included:

- **They were not given real work.** Provide the intern with challenging work related to their academics- do not simply give them general office work and tasks! That is the opposite of what experiential learning aims to do.
- **Get them involved.** Make sure they are participating throughout the workplace to keep them motivated.
- **Stay true to the job description.** Make sure you are keeping up with the opportunities described, and provide them with any additional work that you feel will help their development.
- **Relate back to the classroom.** Don't forget they want to learn as much as they are working.
- **Give them feedback.** Student's want to know where they can improve, so constant feedback is important. This can be done through providing them with a mentor, or periodic check ups with the supervisor.
- **Be prepared.** Know what you want the student to do, and give them the necessary resources, time, and detailed explanations in order for them to successfully perform the job.
- **Benefits.** Provide them with any additional benefits (lunches, parking, etc.) If your company is in the position to do so.

COMPLETION OF THE OPPORTUNITY

FINAL ASSESSMENTS

In the opportunity job description, along with the length of the opportunity it should have clearly identified the end date. Once the opportunity has reached the end, we hope that the experience has been successful and beneficial to your organization and the student. In order to do this, completing a formal evaluation process should be completed in order to understand the students concerns, what you can do better, and bring closure to the experience. We have provided a few assessment questions on the next page to help you get started.

At the end of the term, we recommend that you:

- Provide the student with a letter of recommendation.
- Complete any required college/university evaluations to assess the student's progress and learning goal development (if required by institution).
- Evaluate the overall internship experience through the final assessment. This feedback is essential for improving your own program from future experiential learning opportunities, but also recognizing those who helped to create a successful opportunity. This evaluation should be given to the opportunity coordinator from the student's institution.

OFFERING FURTHER OPPORTUNITY

If the experience with the student was very positive for both the organization and student, you should consider the student as a potential full time employee. You have seen the student perform on the job, and have received positive evaluations from the mentors/supervisors, and if you feel that you want them to continue with your company, discuss further employment opportunities with the student, and whether they are interested in joining the organization. These offers should be made before the end of the opportunity, and be clear as to what the future role of the organization will involve, areas of responsibility, and anything that will be different.

ASSESSING YOUR STUDENT

It is important to assess your student both before and after the placement, to understand the student's original learning goals, and whether you have been successful in providing the experience they were looking for. These questions are to help you get started, so add any question you feel are fit for your organization.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Consider these criteria when asking questions at the beginning of a placement.

- What does the student hope to learn through this experiential learning opportunity?
- What specific skill sets would they like to develop through this experience?
- What course materials and classroom theories are they aiming to further learn and develop?
- Are they completing this placement for an academic credit? Understand what they will be assessed on based off the assessment criteria that you receive from the coordinator.
- What are their future career goals, and how are they expecting this opportunity to help aid in their development?
- What kind of mentorship opportunities are they expecting to receive in this position?

FINAL ASSESSMENT

This assessment should be conducted as part of the students final evaluation.

- Were you able to gain the skills they were hoping to gain? What skills and knowledge did you gain?
- Did this opportunity help you with your learning and career goals? In what ways?
- What aspects of the opportunity would you change for future students? What elements should we add/take away?
- Was there educational value in the work that you were given? Were you able to relate work back to your classroom content and theory?
- What accomplishments were you able to make throughout the placement?
- Was the mentor/supervisor able to help guide you, answer your questions, and encourage your ideas?
- Were you able to develop positive work habits?
- What was the student's overall contribution to the organization? How was their punctuality and dependability?
- What potential do you believe the student has in the field?
- How were the student's relationship with those in the office? What was their overall attitude?



For more information and resources, visit the [ELPH](#) site.
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