

## ACRA GUIDELINES FOR INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

### I. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The development of future professionals in our industry is dependent on a multi-pronged approach involving cooperation between our industry, universities, professional organizations, and government agencies. However, ACRA, as the trade association for the Cultural Resources Management industry, should take a leadership role in promoting internship programs that develop professionals who understand our industry and who will be the next generation of leaders. It is good business for each firm to promote the education of future professionals, for that intern may eventually be a manager within your own organization. There are numerous success stories among ACRA members already; some are the result of informal relationships with local university programs, while others have developed a more formal relationship. Either approach is acceptable if they support the career goals of aspiring CRM professionals.

The role of ACRA in this process is to provide guidelines and best practices for internship programs. Although many ACRA member firms have been involved with interns, this approach to developing professional positions within our industry has not been consistently utilized. Neither has there been any consistency in the internship programs administered by member firms. The objective of these guidelines and best practices is to provide a baseline for such programs.

### II. INITIATING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

How does one initiate an internship program? It is not a difficult process, but it requires planning and commitment on the part of the firm. Thinking about your internship needs in advance is necessary for a successful internship program. Things to consider include employee workload and the availability of intern projects, staff support, office space and financial resources. In most cases, you should advertise internships at least seven to ten weeks prior to your expected start date. This will allow sufficient time to screen and select appropriate candidates. This process is facilitated by an ongoing relationship with a local university or college. A formal relationship with the university or college which allows the student to achieve credit for the internship will involve more planning, time and effort. Nevertheless, even an informal relationship requires the establishment of a relationship between your firm and one or more professors who may encourage students to consider an internship either for credit or experience or both.

If you need assistance, contact the career center at one of the private colleges, community colleges or universities in your area. Career centers can provide assistance with:

- Internship job description
- Guidelines for posting internship positions to the website
- Internship agreements with the educational institution
- Assistance in developing a job offer for the intern

- Assistance in evaluating the intern's work

Contact lists for the career centers at the community colleges, private colleges and regent universities can be found at [http://www.iowalifechanging.com/business/ic/internship\\_program.html](http://www.iowalifechanging.com/business/ic/internship_program.html).

### III. TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for an internship role in your firm can vary greatly. You may be approached by high school students who are interested in what your firm does, but they are uncertain about a career choice. Undergraduate students may face the same uncertainty about a career choice as they approach graduation. The graduate student, however, is likely interested in an internship as a means of gaining real world experience and possibly gaining an entry-level position or positioning himself/herself to compete successfully for a limited number of potential positions.

#### a. High school students

An internship for a high school student should focus on basic skills within the sub-fields of our industry so that the student may make informed choices regarding his/her future education path. It is important to note that "basic skills" should go well beyond "copying reports", "washing artifacts", or other menial tasks. These individuals should be included in planning and management discussions as appropriate.

#### b. Undergraduate students

The undergraduate student may be facing the same dilemma as the high school student or he/she may have made a career choice and is intent on gaining valuable experience. The initial interviews with such candidates should be designed to reveal the needs and sophistication of the candidate. You need to develop a program relevant to the individual.

#### c. Graduate students

Graduate students will likely enter the internship program with a focus on preparing themselves for a future position. They wish to gain real-world experience that will increase their competitive stance within the workplace. Your program for such students may be focused on a particular research topic that is relevant to the student or it may focus on a more broad-based experience designed to acquaint the student with all aspects of being a professional within our industry. Research, management, and budgeting skills are likely important to such candidates.

Some college and university programs offer an internship track in lieu of a thesis track. In such programs the graduate student must report on the projects in which he/she is involved during the internship. Documentation on the part of the intern and the firm is essential for such programs.

### IV. TYPE OF TRAINING OR EXPERIENCE

The focus of the training or experience needs to be developed in concert with the candidate so that the internship experience is of value to the candidate and to your firm. The training may involve technical

skills, management skills, exposure to multiple disciplines, very specialized research that is of interest to the candidate, or all of the above. Whatever the decision, the experience must be meaningful for the candidate and your firm. Gone are the days of using interns as simple "go-fers". Students have many talents and traits that benefit employers: enthusiasm, dedication to learning, and an eagerness to work and do a good job. They are seeking opportunities that will stimulate them and provide real experience. A good internship program will ensure the assignment of challenging projects and tasks. Effective assignments are coupled with adequate supervision to provide an information resource and ensure interns are engaged. An internship is a partnership between the employer, the student, and their school. While there are many aspects to establishing a successful work-learning experience, the work assignment is a key element in the planning process. Here are some tips for creating a successful work assignment:

- Review current job descriptions of employees and determine what types of work can be expanded or augmented. Develop a student assignment from that information and provide a thorough job description.
- Involve the manager who will be responsible for supervising the student in the development process.
- Develop positions that will challenge students. Don't underestimate their abilities.
- Remember that students learn quickly and want to contribute meaningful work to your organization.
- Ensure that infrastructure is in place to support the intern(s). Sufficient workspace (desk, computer workstation, access to phone and fax, company email if necessary, etc.) is necessary.
- Be prepared to discuss "learning objectives" with your student workers. Many students will need to develop clear objectives for the learning they want to achieve while working in an experiential learning position.

## V. SELECTION OF INTERN CANDIDATES

The students you hire for internships should be chosen as carefully as other employees. These are individuals in whom your organization is making a significant investment. They may well be your future permanent employees. To recruit students successfully, consider the following points:

- Determine in which academic majors you will find students with the course work, interests and career goals that fit well with your organization's experiential learning assignments.
- Contact the career services department at the private colleges, community colleges or universities for assistance in developing and advertising your positions.
- Once you have received resumes from interested students, interview them in-person at your organization, if possible, so that they can meet potential co-workers and see the actual work environment.

- Try to elicit information from students about their immediate work interests and career goals to develop a good match between the student and your work assignment.

## VI. ROLE OF INTERN WITHIN ACRA FIRM

A major question for most firms is whether an intern should be paid or not. According to the Department of Labor (<http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>), the following six legal criteria must be applied when making a determination if an intern is required to be paid. If your internship program does not meet all of these criteria, the intern should be a paid:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment.
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern.
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff.
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded.
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

Most ACRA firms provide consulting services to governmental or commercial clients. Unless an intern is specifically assigned to an independent research topic that is of no direct benefit to the firm, it is extremely unlikely that the intern's efforts would be of no benefit to the firm in relation to ongoing contractual obligations. ACRA firms are encouraged to make an appropriate determination concerning compensation for interns. Contact your legal counsel or your Human Resources department for more detailed information.

## VII. RELATIONSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE

The relationship of your firm with the college or university may be as formal or informal as you and the college or university decide. A formal relationship would likely result in credit for the intern and documentation on the part of the firm concerning the program and the intern's performance. Each college or university will have specific documentation and reporting requirements for internships in which credit is earned. An informal relationship would be based on a cooperative effort between selected faculty and your firm in providing internships for interested students. Assessment of candidates and their potential is conducted in one-on-one sessions with the candidate and with the supporting faculty member.

## VIII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ACRA FIRM

An ACRA firm has the responsibility to provide a meaningful learning experience for an intern. That responsibility requires a commitment to the program. This commitment involves the following:

### a. Statement of Expectations (Firm, Intern, University [if formal relationship])

It is advisable that an employer and intern *execute a formal statement of expectations which includes mutually agreed upon learning objectives, the internship period, and standards for evaluating performance*. Documentation is very important for effective learning to take place, whether there is a formal or informal relationship with the college or university. It is strongly advisable that an employer and intern create mutually agreed upon learning objectives. Well documented learning objectives provide clear direction and targeted goals for the intern. This ensures both parties envision the same experience and reduces the possibility of misunderstanding and disappointment. Effective learning objectives are concise and measurable.

Equally important is an expectation of the period of performance and performance standards for both parties. Given the schedules of students, some flexibility on the part of the employer will be necessary. For those working for credit, part-time hours during the school year may be feasible. Those not gaining credit may prefer a period of performance during the summer or between semesters. Expectations regarding performance and evaluation must be established prior to the initiation of the internship. Formalization of these expectations provides critical guidelines that ensure a successful internship.

### b. Provision of Supervisor or Mentor

Students seek supervisors who are available, can answer questions, and who treat them professionally and respectfully. Supervisors should be selected carefully and have the ability to communicate and relate to students.

Providing quality supervision is an essential element in establishing a successful learning opportunity. Considerable time investment will be needed, especially on the front-end, to plan for and implement necessary training. It is also recommended that the supervisor plan ongoing weekly meetings to stay up-to-date with the intern's progress. Use care in identifying a seasoned staff member who understands the value of an internship program. Consider the following points:

- Place interns with carefully selected supervisors.
- Be sure that supervisors provide interns with detailed information about the work they will be doing.
- Have interns and supervisors meet at least weekly to address students' questions and provide them with feedback on their performance.
- Provide an orientation to your organization (by the supervisor or student program coordinator) so that interns will learn about policies, benefits, the facility, etc.

- If possible, have supervisors encourage interns to participate in your organization's training programs as well as cross-department assignments.
- Involve supervisors and interns in a formal evaluation process. Be sure that interns know how and when their performance will be evaluated.

c. Evaluation of Program

Evaluation of a firm's internship program should take place regularly, particularly following the completion of an intern's program. The evaluation should be conducted by the firm, the intern, and the associated college or university. Such an evaluation provides critical feedback for continued improvement of the program. Evaluations are essential for those programs in which a student has chosen an internship track rather than producing a thesis.