



STUDENT INTERNSHIPS FOR THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

Presented by the
National Association of Landscape Professionals

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An internship program is an investment that can yield rich rewards for all involved, or it can be a disappointment and ultimately detrimental to all parties. This document will provide guidelines any company can follow that will result in a successful internship experience.

The key element in failed internship relationships is most often *expectations*. The employer has one set of expectations about what the program will require, what work the intern will accomplish, and what the cost of taking on an intern will be, only to find the reality of the situation to be completely different. At the same time, the student has a set of expectations about what will be done and the opportunity available to increase skills, only to find nothing of the kind occurs. This scenario happens all too often and sours everyone — much to the detriment of both the individuals involved and the industry as a whole.

An employer who decides not to take on interns loses a valuable recruiting tool, misses an opportunity to develop coaching skills in their employees, and could weaken the long-term growth of the industry. The student who has a negative experience will convey that information to other students, which could hurt that employer's reputation. In fact, the student may be discouraged to the point of changing majors and making another career choice. The faculty of the college/university may also hesitate to steer their graduates to the company. The end result has far-reaching ramifications that were never intended and could have been avoided by commitment and planning.

NALP's mission is to cultivate and safeguard opportunities for its members — the dedicated professionals and companies who create and enhance the world's landscapes. There can be no more direct way to fulfill that mission than to lay the groundwork for college students to enter the industry fully prepared to be productive employees or successful business owners. By accrediting worthy two-year and four-year colleges and universities with landscape/horticulture programs, we have the mechanism to point students to a school where they will learn theoretical and practical knowledge from dedicated faculty. Following these recommended guidelines for an internship enhances chances for a positive experience that will benefit everyone.

INTERNSHIP DEFINED

Each party to the internship “contract” must be clear about what an internship is and what it is not. The employing company needs to know what work situation they are offering, and the student needs to know what work situation he or she is seeking before beginning an internship discussion.

Summer/seasonal work experience: Any summer job with no expectation of anything other than employment and pay. The student is on a par with every other employee, assigned to a crew, given work assignments, and supervised the same way every other crew person is. **THIS IS NOT AN INTERNSHIP, but may still be a valuable experience for beginning students.**

Student internship: A working arrangement of prescribed duration with a guarantee that the student will rotate among several different aspects of the company’s functional areas for one or two [+/-] weeks each, completing planned modules that cover the duties and responsibilities of that area. There may also be minimum requirements of school/student/company to be met.

Second internship with same company: A follow-up stint with the same company will typically be more in-depth in selected areas of interest with fewer modules included.

COMPANY CONSIDERATIONS

What can the company expect to gain from an internship venture?

- Long-term potential for loyal, reliable employees
- Investment in the industry by contributing to the education of new talent
- Employees with increased communication and coaching skills
- A positive internship experience means the student returns to his/her school as your best recruiter

What are the benefits to students?

- Explore areas of interest prior to graduation
- Gain skills and knowledge that are not available in the classroom setting
- Learn proper techniques in a safety-minded, friendly environment
- Earn income to help with tuition and other college expenses
- Have the competitive edge when seeking employment in the industry
- Develop leadership and resource management skills

What are the requirements of taking on an intern?

- **Commitment.** Commit to the amount of time and money the program will take. Interns are high maintenance and need a coach/mentor
- **Patience.** Be willing to deal with questions about why things are done “that way”
- **Judgment.** Match a mentor’s skill set and area of strength to the intern’s
- **Follow through.** Hold regular, frequent meetings with the intern to assess the relationship

CREATE A PLAN

- **Pay.** The rate of pay will probably fall in the range of \$14.00–\$20.00 per hour. The compensation range for students can be adjusted throughout the internship as modules are completed successfully, certifications achieved, etc. A company should base the beginning compensation on regional averages and consider the pay offered by competing opportunities, if that information is available. Compensation and any other intern-related costs (housing allowance, transportation, etc.) must be in the budget.

The biggest issue will be how to allocate the funds for the internship. You may find it works best to consider the intern-related cost as “Indirect Training Expense.” Assigning expenses in this way should help overcome a manager’s resistance to being given the responsibility of an intern when he has production goals to meet. You can also consider a 50/50 split between the training budget and job cost. Typically uniforms are provided free of charge, while students must bring or purchase small personal hand tools such as pruners and a pocket knife.

- **Housing and transportation.** If a company is recruiting interns from outside its geographic area, transportation and housing must also be considered. These two categories will make a significant difference in the overall cost of the program. For a company that wants to start on a smaller scale, we suggest beginning by identifying sources of interns — such as two-year or four-year college landscape/horticulture programs, agriculture business programs, etc. — in the nearby localities, before looking outside the area.

If you choose to provide housing for student interns, you will need to consider the following: availability of short term leases (3 – 4 months), roommate selection, furniture, utilities (electricity, water, cable, internet), house rules with a documented procedure for addressing issues, transportation, gas allowance, and payment of rent. Housing is often subsidized, with the employer paying some or all of the expense. If interns in company housing receive assistance with rent payments, you should consider providing the same stipend to those not in company housing. This ensures all interns receive equal benefits. It is also helpful to create a checklist to send to interns prior to their start date. An example is provided on page 13.

- **Schedule and duration.** The key elements of any internship are the training modules offered. It is crucial to identify learning goals in each module and outline the tasks to be accomplished. The time range for a module is two days to two weeks with multiple areas of learning. A typical internship is a 10-week program of two-week modules. Pages 8 to 10 of this document provide sample modules with suggestions for the subject areas to be covered in each. The list is not meant to be complete or exhaustive but to get you started in tailoring the internship program your company can offer. A sample schedule is included on page 11. All full-time employees that will be training and interacting with student interns should have a clear understanding of the program; it is helpful to have documented lists of training or work that each intern should complete while working with a branch/department.

HIRING PROCESS

- **Locating and selecting an intern.** Selecting the right person is very important to the company — like any hiring. An intern who has a bad experience or is disappointed in some way will relay that experience to classmates and hurt the company's chance of attracting other interns and future employees.

NALP's National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC) is held each spring and attended by hundreds of landscape students. The Career Fair offered during this event gives you an opportunity to meet students, promote your company, and arrange interviews. A list of NALP-accredited schools is available on the NALP website in the Accreditation section. You can contact the landscape/horticulture faculty of these schools directly for student referrals. Additionally, many schools hold on-campus career fairs and interview days during the Fall Semester. Contact faculty at each school directly to learn more and be placed on a mailing list to ensure you are notified of upcoming events.

- **Faculty Network.** Building any business is all about relationships. The network of relationships you build with the faculty of college landscape contracting and horticulture departments can be as important as any made with customers and suppliers. A professor (or the internship coordinator of the school) will likely visit his or her students a couple of times during the program. They will try to disrupt work as little as possible. Anything you, the employer, can do to be helpful during these visits is appreciated. This is a chance for you to showcase your company to a person who is able to steer highly qualified employees to you — make the most of it!
- **Qualifications and Responsibilities.** Just as you would with a full-time position, determine minimum requirements for internship applicants.

Commonly, hiring managers will require the following:

- enrolled in a horticulture or landscape-related 2 or 4 year degree program
- GPA of 2.5 or higher
- current resume and face-to-face interview
- positive attitude and willingness to learn
- use of personal vehicle to travel within the vicinity and to and from work each day

In addition, as mentioned previously, it is extremely important for the student to understand the type of work he or she will be required to do, with clearly defined working conditions.

- **Job offers.** Once you have narrowed down the list of applicants, you should send each intern candidate a written job offer that clearly displays pay, responsibilities, housing stipend, length of employment, etc. Interns should sign a copy and return it to the internship program coordinator or HR Manager. Applicants who have not been selected for an internship should be sent a written letter thanking them for their time, and encouraging them to apply again next year and continue to pursue a career in the landscape industry.

INTERNSHIP

- **Orientation.** As with full-time employees, student interns should complete new employee orientation prior to starting work. This often is scheduled for the first work day, and done alongside other interns. Orientation should include: review of company policies and procedures, tour of office and facilities, introduction to key staff members, and an introduction to their mentor. You may choose to include safety and equipment training on this first day as well.
- **Safety.** The employer's obligation is to provide a safe work environment that follows all established rules and regulations. Starting an internship program may serve as a catalyst to improve in areas where compliance has become lax, which will benefit all employees of the company. Basic training in the safe operation of all equipment is absolutely necessary. Your best course of action is to assume nothing. Take interns through a start-to-finish hands-on session with every piece of equipment and have them demonstrate the safe and proper use of the equipment before authorizing them to operate it. Before allowing any intern to drive a company vehicle, be certain he or she has a valid driver's license. Many companies will not allow interns to drive company vehicles, especially students from out of town who are not familiar with the roads and traffic flow. An exception may be made for interns who have returned for an additional summer.
- **Rules.** The interns you take on may not have the experience or maturity level to know how to conduct themselves in a business setting. You are teaching them about life in the "real world," so be prepared to give specific instructions about expected dress code, code of conduct, drug testing requirements, punching a time clock, where to park, and so on. This information may need to be more explicit than what is listed in your company handbook. You may provide an addendum to your company handbook that is specific to the internship program.
- **Assign a mentor with demonstrated coaching skills.** While the intern may be hired by the HR Manager or Recruiting Director, who will typically also manage the overall internship program, you will need to assign an individual to be the primary point of contact for each intern. Similar to a Big Brother/Big Sister relationship, the mentor will meet with the intern on a regular basis and be the first person the intern contacts with questions or concerns. The success or failure of the internship may rest on this decision — even though the intern will deal with different managers along the way. The mentor should have coaching and training skills and expect to explain the relationship and purpose of tasks at a level that may seem elementary to him/her.

What can the mentor/coach expect to gain for taking on this assignment? He or she will surely increase relationship skills through successful coaching and training that may be a part of his/her own evaluation and goals/objectives. The company could consider a bonus for the mentor if the student is hired permanently.

Be sure to thoroughly explain the mentor role to all parties, and set expectations for employees taking on this important responsibility. We recommend calling a meeting with all company mentors prior to the arrival of your interns. During this meeting, intern/mentor guidelines are reviewed, and each mentor could receive a folder with their intern's resume, notes, schedule, list of all mentors and interns, and an example of the evaluations that will be completed during the internship (page 14).

EVALUATION

- **Evaluation of performance and the program.** It is important to get feedback from the student on his/her experience during the process as well as afterward. You need to know the intern's attitude about the company and if expectations are being met, plus any recommendations the intern may have to offer. The optimum schedule would be to check in once a week (30 minutes to an hour-long meeting) to make sure things are going well. A cursory "How is it going?" does not meet the criteria. At the minimum, talk sometime during the third to fifth week and, at the end of the program, have a final review. An alternate plan is to have a meeting at the end of every module. Interim evaluations of the student done by the company should go to the intern coordinator at the student's school, and copies of the student's interim reports back to the school should go to the company for its benefit.

As an employer, you are in a position of great influence and responsibility. In many internship programs, the employer issues a grade that will become part of the student record. It is important to take that role seriously, to get forms back on time and to include useful comments. This student grading form is also a tool for evaluating the school program's success. Professors and department administrators will review employer comments with the goal of uncovering deficiencies in the student's education. The evaluations required by schools vary greatly; some schools require no documentation, only proof the student has completed an internship. Other schools require specific and detailed paperwork that may need to be submitted regularly throughout the internship, or only once at the conclusion of the program. Typically, internal evaluation forms are completed by each department after the student has completed their work days/weeks. The internship program coordinator, or mentor, should distribute and collect these forms (page 14), and the content of these evaluations should be shared with the intern. As with full-time employees, it may be helpful to complete an exit interview with each intern at the end of their internship; see pages 15 and 16 for an example.

- **Future.** The company's long-range strategy should be to stay in touch with the student after he/she goes back to school to cement the relationship. You can do this by assigning an employee, possibly his or her internship mentor, to touch base semi-regularly. Be sure to send the student the company newsletter if you issue one. You have an investment in that student that will yield dividends when he/she comes to work after graduation and plays a key role in taking your company to the next level of success.

Justification of the internship program will sometimes be needed as well as some type of evidence of success. Conducting exit interviews or final evaluations when interns leave will help determine whether the interns have had a good or bad experience. Some company's feedback from these interviews and evaluations helps employers evaluate where they can improve their internship program for the coming year and helps gauge their relative success.

- **Enhancements to an internship program.** If you want to set your program apart from those of other companies, consider some of the following suggestions. Be creative!
 - Include your interns in industry meetings, both state and NALP meetings
 - Sponsor a visit by a professor once during the session
 - Award a company-sponsored scholarship
 - Give a higher starting salary to graduates who complete approved internships
 - Ask the student to give an oral presentation to the company management team and to a seminar class or landscape industry club, etc.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM TIMELINE

Suggested timeline for summer internship program.

First Steps

- Create internship plan
- Get key company employees on board

Fall

- Identify pool of qualified intern candidates
- Conduct interviews (in person or via phone)
- Call references (recommend minimum of 3; 2 professional, 1 personal)

Winter

- Determine final list of candidates
- Send offer letters
- Research housing options

Late Winter/Early Spring

- Follow up with candidates; determine final number of interns
- Establish start and end dates for each intern, and develop schedules
- Identify mentors
- Secure housing and furnishings; determine roommates

Spring

- Conduct mentor meeting to review intern & mentor guidelines
- Send checklists to interns
- Narrow down dates for welcome party, group outing, farewell party

Late Spring/Early Summer

- Housing move-in
- Orientation
- Introductory meeting with intern and mentor
- Welcome Party

Summer

- Company evaluations distributed to managers
- Company evaluations received prior to 30-day meeting
- 30-day meeting with intern and mentor
- Group outing (baseball game, boat trip, etc.)

Late Summer

- Farewell Party
- Finish and submit school evaluation to faculty contact (if necessary)
- Final meeting with intern and mentor
- Housing move-out

SUGGESTED MODULES

I. Exterior Operations

A. Maintenance

- a. Equipment Operation
- b. Turf Care
- c. Shrub and Ground Cover Care
- d. Seasonal Color
- e. Irrigation Management
- f. Pest and Disease Identification
- g. Plant ID

B. Installation/Construction

- a. Layout
- b. Plan Reading
- c. Specification Detail
- d. Fundamentals of Irrigation Components
- e. Equipment Operations
- f. Tree Staking/Guying
- g. Grading
- h. Sod Installation
- i. Soil Preparation
- j. Planting
- k. Establishment Practices

C. Irrigation

- a. Design
- b. Sustainable Landscape Considerations
- c. Controller Programming
- d. Watering Schedule
- e. Water Allowance Consideration
- f. Water Auditing
- g. System Evaluation and Mapping
- h. Understanding Evapo-transpiration (ET)
- i. Troubleshooting and Repair

D. Pest Control/Chemical Application (licensing may be required)

- a. MSDS Awareness
- b. Product Labeling
- c. Proper Identification
- d. Integrated Pest Management
- e. Application and Handling Laws and Licensing
- f. Mixing
- g. Application
- h. Disposal
- i. Emergency Steps
- j. Public Posting

E. Tree Care

- a. Cable and Bracing
- b. Pruning Practices
- c. Problem ID
- d. Removal
- e. Deep-Root Fertilization
- f. Spraying
- g. Inventory Assessment
- h. Long-Term Care Program
- i. Climbing and Equipment Safety

F. Other Specialties

- a. Erosion
- b. Lighting
- c. Wetland Mitigation
- d. Snow Removal

SUGGESTED MODULES

II. Interior Operations

- A. Selection**
 - a. Plant ID
 - b. Lighting and Ventilation Requirements
 - c. Design Considerations
- B. Pest Control**
 - a. Pesticide Labels and MSDS
 - b. Beneficials and Other Alternatives
 - c. Federal Law/Safety
 - d. Application
 - e. Equipment
 - f. Physiological vs. Insect/Disease Symptoms
- C. Life Cycle – Replacement Decisions**
 - a. Pruning
 - b. Grooming
 - c. Replacement Scheduling
 - d. Potting/Repotting
- D. Irrigation/Sub-irrigation Systems**
 - a. Seasonal Changes in Plant Water Needs
 - b. Watering Schedules
 - c. Fertilizers
- E. Staging for Installation**
 - a. Scheduling with Client
 - b. Loading Dock Access
 - c. Building Schematics, Including Flooring
 - d. Equipment Needed
 - e. Security
- F. Customer Relations**
 - a. Communication
 - b. Follow-up
 - c. Conduct When on the Account Site
- G. Holiday/Special Event Decorating**
 - a. Lighting
 - b. Live Trees/Plan
 - c. Artificial Trees/Plants
 - d. Alternatives to Christmas Trees
 - e. Centerpieces/Table Pieces
 - f. Theme Events
- H. Handling Plant Stock**
 - a. Choosing Healthy Plants
 - b. Acclimation

SUGGESTED MODULES

III. Support Functions

A. Sales

- a. Estimation – Site Review
- b. Proposal Presentation
- c. Lead Generation
- d. Cold Calling
- e. Closing – Follow-up
- f. Contract Administration - Transition to Field Implementation

B. Purchasing

- a. Ordering Process
- b. Purchase Order System
- c. Collecting Information from Field
- d. Understanding Inventory System
- e. Material Requisition
- f. Sourcing
- g. Relationships with Vendors (visit, tour)
- h. Accounting Codes
- i. Receiving Policies

C. Management Practices

- a. Leadership Training
- b. Case Studies
- c. Problem Solving
- d. Employee Relation
- e. Employee Development
- f. Safety Training
- g. Mission, Vision, Values
- h. Management Information Systems
- i. Job Status Financial Tracking
- j. Best Practices Emphasis

D. Shop Operations

- a. Equipment Maintenance
- b. Equipment and Vehicle Repair
- c. Laws and Regulations
- d. Scheduling
- e. Fuel Management

E. Business Practices

- a. Banking
- b. Cash Flow
- c. Line of Credit
- d. Payroll
- e. Taxes
- f. Licensing/Permits
- g. Insurance
- h. Benefits
- i. Money Management
- j. Budgeting
- k. Strategic Planning
- l. Market Evaluation
- m. Expansion
- n. Diversification
- o. Structure

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Residential Landscape Installation Crew
WEEK 2	Residential Landscape Installation Crew (3 days) Residential Landscape Installation Project Manager (2 days)
WEEK 3	Residential Landscape Maintenance Crew
WEEK 4	Residential Landscape Maintenance Crew (3 days) Residential Landscape Maintenance Account Manager (2 days)
WEEK 5	Commercial Landscape Maintenance Crew
WEEK 6	Commercial Landscape Maintenance Crew (3 days) Commercial Landscape Maintenance Account Manager (2 days)
WEEK 7	Irrigation/Lighting Installation Crew
WEEK 8	Irrigation/Lighting Service Technician (3 days) Irrigation/Lighting Project Manager (2 days)
WEEK 9	Design/Sales/Estimating
WEEK 10	Accounting/Purchasing/Shop/Human Resources

SAMPLE MENTOR GUIDELINES

Intern Program / Mentor Program Guidelines

1. Intern assigned to you by HR Manager.
2. Interview your intern (1st week):
 - Verify focus of internship and student goals
 - Determine why the area of focus is important; make sure they are looking at all opportunities
 - Explain that training reports should be filled out each time they are trained on something new, and that intern must bring them filled out to the weekly meeting
 - Determine personal likes, hobbies, and interests; what do they want to see or do while they are here?
 - Explain that our goal is for them to experience not only our company, but everything the area has to offer
3. Mentorship:
 - *Weekly meetings:* Same day, same time every week; in person or via phone.
 - ◆ Discuss previous week of work, what they did, where they worked, and what they enjoyed the most
 - ◆ Have student bring training reports for week to meeting; review what was learned
 - ◆ Review upcoming week's work and what the intern's expectations are
 - ◆ Set up next week's meeting
 - *Work Schedule:*
 - ◆ Determine where student is going the following week; discuss with the team involved what they have planned for your intern in the upcoming week, where they will be working, and what they will learn/be exposed to
 - ◆ Make sure the intern will be involved in the weekly scheduling meetings, as well as have training on equipment use and supervisor responsibilities
 - *Evaluations:*
 - ◆ Written (filled out by each department): Internship Program Coordinator will distribute and collect
 - ◆ 30-day (student, mentor, Internship Prog. Coord.): review all work experiences, goals, housing, schedule changes, mentor interaction and communication
 - ◆ Final (student, mentor, Internship Prog. Coord.): review entire internship program; ask for ways to improve it
4. Monthly Entertainment:
 - The goal is to have the student enjoy not only the company, but the surrounding area as well, so that there is a big draw to come back for full time employment.
 - Try to focus entertainment around student's interests.
 - Most activities will be done in groups with multiple students and mentors.
 - \$50 per outing; alcohol not included; ensure no alcohol is provided to underage students

SAMPLE CHECKLIST OF ITEMS TO BE PROVIDED BY INTERN

SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR INTERNSHIP

- Construction work boots (steel-toe preferred but not required)
- Belt for work
- Pruners
- Photo Identification (Driver's License)
- Birth certificate *OR* Social Security Card *OR* other documents to certify you are a U.S. Citizen or authorized to work in the United States
- Rain gear for work
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses

If living in company housing, bring these additional items:

- Twin bed sheets, blankets, pillow, towels
- Bathing suit/towel
- Personal items/clothing, including "accepted business attire" for the office
- Wall decorations
- Health insurance card and information
- TV, Computer, other electronics *

*Please coordinate these items with your roommates

SAMPLE WEEKLY/BIWEEKLY INTERNAL INTERN EVALUATION

STUDENT INTERN EVALUATION

STUDENT'S NAME _____ DATE _____

BRANCH/DEPARTMENT _____

SUPERVISOR _____ WORK DATE(S) _____

INTERN'S DUTIES _____

Please check one box per line.	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Attendance and Punctuality					
Appropriately dressed and groomed					
Dependability (thorough, organized)					
Initiative (resourceful, self-starter)					
Communication Skills (oral and written, if applicable)					
Ability to Learn (comprehension of new concepts)					
Quality of Work (accuracy, completeness, neatness)					
Attitude (enthusiasm, curiosity, desire to learn)					
Judgement (decision making)					
Interpersonal Relations (cooperative, courteous, friendly)					
Overall Student Performance					

COMMENTS: _____

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

SAMPLE INTERN EXIT INTERVIEW

Internship Exit Interview Form

Intern Name _____

Region _____

School _____

Supervisor/Mentor _____

Hire Date _____

Exit Date _____

1. What were your original goals for this internship?

2. How did you feel progress was made on those goals (Rank 1 – 10)? Explain.

3. What did you like most about the internship?

4. What did you like least about the internship?

5. What improvements can we make to the internship program?

6. What did you think of your supervisor/mentor on the following points:

	Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Was consistently fair	()	()	()	()
Resolved problems	()	()	()	()
Was sensitive to employees' needs	()	()	()	()
Provided feedback on performance	()	()	()	()
Followed company policies	()	()	()	()

7. How would you rate the following:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Housing	()	()	()	()
Commute to office	()	()	()	()
Company's new employee orientation program	()	()	()	()
Personal job training	()	()	()	()
Equipment provided (materials, resources, facilities)	()	()	()	()
Physical working conditions	()	()	()	()
Rotating aspect of the program	()	()	()	()
Rate of pay for your job	()	()	()	()
Events (Welcome & Farewell Parties, Group Outing)	()	()	()	()

Comments: _____

8. Was the work you were doing approximately what you expected it would be?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments: _____

9. Was your workload usually: Too heavy () About right () Too light ()

10. Of all the different employees you worked with throughout your internship, who had the greatest impact on you? Why?

11. Would you recommend the company to a friend as a good organization to work for?

Most definitely () With reservations () No ()

12. What suggestions do you have to make the company a better place to work?

Human Resources Representative Signature / Date

Intern Signature / Date