

Employer Guidebook

For Developing a Successful Internship Program

A successful internship program can serve many purposes and benefit all parties involved. As an employer, you are providing insight into your industry and a role within your organization. An internship is also a way for employers to develop a pipeline of talent. Having a solid internship program often leads to an employer transitioning the intern to an employee once the internship has concluded. Whether the internship is a paid or unpaid, the intern walks away with invaluable experience. Check out the data at [Internship Statistics](#)

This guidebook is a step-by-step resource designed to help employers establish and develop an internship program your organization. An internship program can be used to attract individuals who are transitioning careers, college students, and/or high school students.

Disclaimer

This information is intended to be a framework for putting together, or improving, an internship process. We recommend that all templates provided be customized to the specific needs of your business, then reviewed and approved by your organization's human resources or leadership team to meet your organization's needs in accordance with proper hiring practices.

What is an Internship?

“An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent.” – [National Association of Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#)

An internship:

- Has structured and supervised objectives/goals that will develop the intern's skills and experience relevant to their study and/or the industry.
- Promotes academic, career, professional, and personal development.
- Includes defined learning objectives, observation/supervision, and evaluation.
- Balances the intern's learning goals while meeting the organization's needs.
- Short term in nature and may be part-time or full-time capacity.
- Incorporates industry-related technical skills and work readiness development.
- May be part of an academic program for credit towards a degree program.
- Operates in a safe environment with adequate supervision, mentoring, and the necessary tools needed to perform the learning goals agreed upon.

An internship is not:

- Free labor or help.
- A replacement for an employee.
- Having a student on-hand for busy work (filing, phone calls, errands, copying, etc.)

Types of Internships

Paid Internship – A paid internship offers students monetary compensation for their work as an intern. Students may receive payment in the form of an hourly wage or a stipend (paid in one or more lump sums). There may be other compensation such as reimbursement for travel, housing and/or other living expenses.

Unpaid Internship – An unpaid internship is the same as all other experiences except there is no monetary compensation provided to the intern. To be supportive of the needs of students and employers, the internship should abide by the guidelines set forth in the [Department of Labor Fair Labor Standards Act](#).

Academic Credit – Internships allow students to earn academic credit for their experience. The student's university or college decides if the student is eligible to receive college credit or not. That decision is based on school policy as well as the criteria of the student's major. Students interested in earning academic credit typically must meet college specific guidelines and work with a faculty advisor. Interns receiving academic credit can be paid or unpaid.

The Importance of an Internship: Intern and Employer

Value of Internships for the Intern:

Discover and Focus on Career Direction – An internship helps to further explore interests and preferred work environments.

Strengthen the Resume – The intern gains industry-specific skills, knowledge, training, and professional experience in their industry of choice.

Establish Professional Network – Interning can provide an opportunity to establish relationships and a resourceful network. The intern can tap into their network for references, career advice, and potentially a connection to a job opportunity.

Improved Job Prospective – A valuable internship can expand employment opportunities and appeal to employers who are seeking applicants with related internship experience. Companies may also use internship programs as part of the recruitment efforts. An intern who makes a good impression may be given the opportunity to become an employee.

Value of Internships for the Employer:

New Prospective – An intern is usually a motivated individual who is driven to be trained and learn new skills. At the same time, they will come with a fresh prospective.

Build a Talent Pipeline – A successful internship program can be a great way to attract and hire talent. Companies commit to investing time into training interns and potentially building a pool of candidates. This can save time and money in the recruitment process.

College Partnership – Creating a partnership with local colleges creates more visibility for your internship program and your business.

Culture and Employee Happiness – A well-established internship program becomes part of your organizational culture. Interns can help contribute to the productivity of your organization and current employees may enjoy mentoring and collaborating with the intern.

Part 1: Planning and Development

Designing an Internship Program

Set Goals – What do you want to achieve with this program? (Maybe provide examples – Recruitment strategy, help with a particular function, or an Outreach Opportunity, etc.)

Determine Duration and Time of Need – What time of year is best for your organization to host an intern? How long can you support the intern, or do you need the support of the intern? Will they be part-time or full-time?

Build Support – Make sure the program has support at all levels. Buy-in and commitment from top of the organization is essential to create and sustain a successful internship program. Early involvement with leadership, human resources, and appropriate supervisory personnel in the planning will establish consistency and ensure seamless communications throughout the process.

Develop a Plan – To set the intern up for success

- **Work Environment** – A Safe working environment with all needed tools and resources.
- **Supervisor/Mentor** – This may be one of the most important factors of the entire program. Proper guidance and productive feedback will give the intern a chance to get the most out of the opportunity.
- **Compensation** – Determine if and how much the intern will be compensated. This may need to be worked into your budget well ahead of time.
- **Orientation and Inclusion** – Treat the intern like any other hire and provide them with a welcoming orientation. Also make sure they are included in staff meetings, professional development opportunities, work lunches, and other gatherings.
- **Duties and Goals** – Define the intern’s scope of work and duties. Set learning goals and regular check-in times.
- **Interact and Develop** – Keep in mind, this individual is part of your potential pipeline. Take time to interact, learn about their skills and interests, and work with them to create achievable projects and goals. Do not treat them like “free help.”
- **Evaluating Progress** – How will you evaluate the intern and when? Make sure you and the intern establish clear measurable benchmarks and deadlines for when their progress will be evaluated. Feedback should be open, often, and two ways.
- **Proactive explanation** – Explain policies and procedures up front. Do not assume the intern will know expectations or how/what to ask.

For more competitive fields, where internships opportunities are plentiful, be sure to consider what it will take to make your opportunity competitive. If interns are not local, you may need to determine if funding is needed for housing and/or travel. Additionally, the budget should consider the cost to the organization to administer the internship.

Create a Formal Job Description – A formal job description will provide an overview of your organization, intern duties, position requirement and qualifications, and any other information relevant to the position (duration, compensation, etc.).

Does the Program Qualify for College Credits? - If you are hiring Interns that in conjunction with an academic program, be aware of any requirements from the college/university. For example: The university may require students to schedule a monthly conference call with their supervisor and a representative from College Career Center, allowing all three parties to discuss the student’s projects, progress, and outcomes.

Dedicate a Champion – Identify someone to oversee the intern. Typically, this individual will be familiar with all facets of the company, they can be regularly available to the intern, and they are a driver of the company culture. If possible, identify any additional mentors if the intern is cross-training within the company.

Finding the Right Intern for Your Organization

Advertise – Identify job boards, colleges, and community partners where you can promote your opportunity. Utilize social media channels and your company website to share the opportunity and create visibility.

High School – Internships can provide valuable insight into their future career path after graduation. Internships also give students the opportunity to explore and determine if they want to pursue a career or continued education.

College and University – Internships provide college students with the opportunity to apply their coursework to the workplace. Many students participate in an internship to explore career niches and gain professional experience. An internship also gives the college student the opportunity to network, enhance skills relative to their industry of study, and possibly secure employment. Many colleges use a platform such as Handshake to help students find internship opportunities with businesses.

Career Changer – Career Changers can find internships exceptionally helpful to explore new career pathways. Already equipped with workplace experience and soft skills, Career Changers bring unique value. The internship provides an opportunity for the individual to expand their network, gain industry-related experience, and potentially transition to an employee.

Interview – HR personnel should conduct the initial review of the application and screen the candidates for any qualifications/preferences outlined in a job description. Once initial screenings are complete, HR can set up interviews with the top three to five candidates. HR can also assist with providing sample skill/knowledge assessment, behavioral and career aspiration questions which can be referenced in the interview.

Hiring and on-boarding – Treat hiring an intern as you would hiring a regular employee. Prepare an offer letter outlining the parameters of the internship. The letter should include the start and end date and any orientation information. If possible, create a welcome packet and on-boarding checklist.

Examples Templates

We recommend that you customize any of the following templates you use for your organization and remind you to ensure that they comply with proper hiring practices.

Planning Template – Attachment 1

Job Description Template – Attachment 2

Intern Application Template – Attachment 3

Intern Interview Template – Attachment 4

Internship Offer Letter Template – Attachment 5

PART 2: After Hiring an Intern

Preparation for Arrival

Set Up Ahead of Arrival – Set up the intern’s workspace, email, payroll, paperwork, and whatever else they will need to hit the ground running.

Communicate Leading Up to Arrival – Have a weekly or bi-weekly check-in to answer questions, provide information, and ask questions. This will also help build a relationship and rapport prior to the intern arriving. See if they need help with travel logistics, lodging, dining recommendations, and anything else that may make their transition as easy as possible.

Develop a Work Plan – Provide the intern with small, easy-win tasks and gradually build them up to more complex processes and larger projects. Be sure to incorporate regular check-ins and cross-team functions (if appropriate).

Orientation Day – You can either utilize the orientation packet and process you would for a normal employee, or you customize the process for the internship program. Either way, be sure to provide a solid orientation on the first day.

Administer

Onboarding – During onboarding, focus on the goals and objectives defined in the job description. Keep in mind that the intern may have limited experience in the workplace environment and too much information can be overwhelming. Having a clear picture of goals and learning objectives will serve as a guide for a successful internship experience.

Team Inclusion – One of the most important aspects of a successful internship is including the social element to the onboarding process. Create a feeling of collaboration between the intern and other members of team and/or organization. Be sure interactions are facilitated early and regularly.

Experience – Providing a robust and educational internship experience is key to achieving a lasting program and one that will serve as a pipeline. Interns should have the opportunity to engage in meaningful work that impacts the agency, and they should feel competent in the skills they obtained. While some administrative tasks may be necessary, be sure the intern’s goals and work focuses on developing their skills and gaining useful experience. Having a mentor as well as access to key staff and management is crucial to providing opportunities for learning.

Feedback – Your intern is using the internship to learn, grow skills, and gain experience. Regular feedback about their performance will be vital and helpful to their development and success. Ask the intern how they believe they are doing, about challenges they are facing, and how the internship is going. Be sure to assist and guide them through reasonable challenges they may bring up. Keep in mind feedback is a two-way street. This may be a good time to ask about process improvements they may see in your agency. They bring a fresh perspective, and you may be able to gain some insight about opportunities for improvement. Asking the intern can also make them feel that their opinion and work is valued.

Paying the Intern

Determining Wages – Wages for interns often varies by location, type of industry, size of organization, etc. You can utilize Labor Market Information to better determine what a competitive wage should be for your internship.

U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act – When deciding between paid and unpaid internships, it is important to know if the U.S. [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) applies to your organization. Check the [U.S. Department of Labor Fact Sheet](#) if you are planning to go the route of an unpaid internship.

Unpaid (Volunteer) Internships – Unpaid internship must meet the following six conditions below:

1. The training, while it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to that provided at a vocational school.
2. The training is for the benefit of the intern.

3. The interns do not displace regular employees but work under close supervision.
4. The employee that provides the training receives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern and, on occasion, operations may even be impeded.
5. The interns are not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the training period.
6. The employer and the intern understand the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in training

Hiring Leaders/Trainees – You don't have to pay interns who qualify as leaders/trainees. The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six criteria for determining trainee status:

7. Interns cannot displace regular employees.
8. Interns are not guaranteed a job at the end of the internship (though you may decide to hire them at the conclusion of the experience).
9. Interns are not entitled to wages during the internship.
10. Interns must receive training from your company, even if it somewhat impedes the work of your organization.
11. Interns must get hands-on experience with equipment and processes used in your industry.
12. Interns' training must primarily benefit them, not the company.

Conclusion and Evaluation

A successful internship program only provides a true learning experience when there is feedback offered to the intern. The evaluation should focus on the intern's learning objectives that were identified at the start of the internship. Supervisors and mentors should take the time to evaluate and provide feedback on the intern's accomplishments and areas of opportunity.

Identifying when and how evaluations will happen at the beginning of the internship to let the intern know that feedback will be provided. There should be regular opportunities for supervisors and mentors to receive and provide feedback regarding the intern's performance. During these meeting have the intern:

- Report on a project/goal status
- Learn the impact of their work and how it is contributing to the organization
- Participate in evaluating their strengths and challenges
- Discuss areas needing growth and development
- Get insight about what work lies ahead

There should be a formal structure in place to evaluate the overall impact and performance of the intern once they have completed their internship. The exit evaluation allows you to provide final feedback about their experience and impact. Highlight overall strengths, opportunities for growth, project/goal outcomes, and future prospects with the organization, if possible. The intern should also have an opportunity to provide feedback on:

- Suggestions for organizational processes
- Areas for improvement with the internship
- Things they enjoyed about the internship
- Recommended solutions
- Potential desire to transition to an employee

Examples Templates

We recommend that you customize any of the following templates you use for your organization and remind you to ensure that they comply with proper hiring practices.

Work Plan Template – Attachment 6

Outcomes and Goals Template – Attachment 7

Intern Timesheet Template – Attachment 8

Intern FAQ Template – Attachment 9

Evaluation (Intern Version) Template – Attachment 10

Evaluation (Supervisor Version) Template – Attachment 11

Resources

- [Frederick County Workforce Services](#)
- [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#)
- [Handshake – Employer Page](#)

ATTACHMENT 1

Planning Template

Current HR procedure for internships:

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Why do I need an intern?

--

Do I plan on paying the intern? If yes, how much will I pay the intern? and/or “How will I pay them... Wages? Stipend?”

--

What impact(s) will the intern have on organization? Example: Key projects, process support, etc.

--

Who is needed to support, supervise, and mentor the intern? This could be separate individuals or one person for all three positions)

Support -
Supervise -
Mentor -

Where should the internship opportunity be advertised?

•
•
•

Job Description Template

Job Title:	
Job Category:	
Department:	
Job Code/Req:	
Location:	
Supervised by:	
Salary Range:	
Position Type:	(PT/FT) Intern
HR Contact:	
Date Posted:	
Posting URL:	
Application Accepted By:	
Email:	
Subject line:	
Mail To:	
Company Address:	
Attn:	
Job Description	
<p>A. Your Organization (About Us)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a brief overview of your organization including a short history • What services and/or goods do you provide? • What are the duties and responsibilities of your organization? • How is your organization structured? <p>B. Job Title</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g.: Marketing Intern, Project Management Intern <p>C. Job Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a general description of the position. • Provide who the intern will report to, an overview of the team, how many hours the intern will work per week, the types of projects and processes the intern will assist, the impact to the organization, and the knowledge/skills the intern should obtain. <p>D. Responsibilities and Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will the intern do while employed? Be specific to set clear expectations. • Will they be working on a specific project? What will their responsibilities/role be, and what outcome will they be expected to deliver? <p>E. Required Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills (if any) do you want your intern to have before starting? Do they need a background in a specific field of study? Do they need specific skills? <p>F. Salary Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much will you pay your intern? 	

- If this is an unpaid internship, what benefits are offered instead? (Free parking, free training, company fitness center, etc.)
- Will you provide a housing or relocation stipend, if necessary?

• Reviewed By:		Date:	
• Approved By:	•	• Date:	•
• Last Updated By:	•	• Date:	

Intern Application Template

APPLICATION INFORMATION		
Full Name:		
Date:		
Address (Street, Apt., City, State, Zip):		
Phone:		
Email:		
Date Available:		
Desired Salary (if applicable):		
Position Applied For:		
If no, are you authorized to work in the United States?	Y/N	
Have you ever worked for this company?	Y/N - If so, when?	
EDUCATION		
High School:		
Address:		
Dates Enrolled:	From:	To:
Graduated:	Y/N	
College:		
Address:		
Dates Enrolled:	From:	To:
Graduated:	Y/N	
Degree:		
Other:		
Address:		
Dates Enrolled:	From:	To:
Graduated:	Y/N	
Degree/Certification:		
REFERENCES		
Full Name:		
Relationship:		
School/Company:		
Address:		
Phone:		
Email:		
Full Name:		
Relationship:		
School/Company:		
Address:		
Phone:		
Email:		
Full Name:		
Relationship:		
School/Company:		
Address:		
Phone:		
Email:		

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT		
Company:		
Address:		
Supervisor:		
Phone:		
Job Title:		
Responsibilities:		
Employment Dates:	From:	To:
Reason for leaving:		
May we contact your previous supervisor for a reference?	Y/N	
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION		
Please describe any extracurricular activities or community engagement:		
Please list any professional organizations to which you belong.		
Please describe any internships or other work experiences.		
What are your expectations for this internship?		

In addition to your application, please provide a resume and cover letter.

DISCLAIMER AND SIGNATURE

I certify that my answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

If this application leads to employment (an internship), I understand that false or misleading information in my application or interview may result in my release.

Signature:	
Date:	

Interview Template

Candidate Name:	
Date of Interview:	
Interviewer Name and Title:	
Position:	
Interview Question 1	
Interview Question 2	
Interview Question 3	
Interview Question 4	
Interview Question 5	
Do you recommend this candidate for hire?	Y/N

ATTACHMENT 5

Internship Offer Letter Template

Your
[Company Name]
[Street Address]
[City, State, Zip code]
[Date]

[Recipient Name]
[Street Address]
[City, State, Zip code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

It is our pleasure to confirm our offer of employment to you as intern [job title] at [Company Name]. In this position, you will report directly to [Manager's Name] beginning [date] and ending [date].

Your compensation will be \$[amount] per hour and you are expected to work [amount] hours per week. Paychecks are issued [frequency], beginning with your first paycheck on [date].

Please contact your supervisor if you need assistance with travel, lodging, or transportation leading up to your first day.

To confirm, your acceptance of this offer of employment, please sign below and return to me by email at [email address].

We look forward to working with you!

Signature:

Date:

Sincerely,

Your Name
Title

Work Plan Template

Intern Contact Information

Email:	
Phone:	
Notes:	

Intern's College Career Center Contact Information

Email:	
Phone:	
Notes:	

Supervisor's Information

Name:	
Department:	
Phone:	
Email:	
Notes:	

Possible Mentors

1.	
2.	
3.	

Available Workspace in the Office

1.	Need:
2.	Need:

Possible Work Plan

What on-going projects can the intern contribute to?

Any upcoming projects?

What impact do we want the intern to have?

What skills will the intern gain?

Learning Outcomes and Goals Template

At the end of the internship, the intern should achieve the following expected outcomes:

1. Insert outcome
2. Insert outcome
3. Insert outcome

To ensure your intern achieves these learning outcomes, the intern and supervisor should work together to identify the goals to accomplish throughout the internship. For example, to achieve Expected Outcome 2, the intern and supervisor could set a goal for the intern to spend two hours per week researching project and reporting on findings. Intern will identify potential project challenges and offer solutions.

Goals should be limited to two-to-three achievable goals with one to two learning outcomes for each goal.

Intern Identified Goals

Intern Name:	
Date:	
Department:	
Name of Supervisor:	
Intern Signature:	

Instructions: To be completed by the intern and supervisor at the beginning of the internship experience. Draft two or three professional development goals based on the areas that will be used to evaluate the intern's performance. The goals should be measurable, observable, achievable, and reflect areas for growth.

Goal One: [Insert Goal]

1.	
2.	

Goal Two: [Insert Goal]

1.	
2.	

Goal Three: [Insert Goal]

1.	
2.	

Intern Timesheet Template

Intern Name:	
Title:	
Department:	
Supervisor:	

Title	Start Time	End Time	Regular Hours	Overtime Hours	Total Hours
Totals					

Intern Signature:	
Date:	
Supervisor Signature:	
Date:	

Intern FAQ Template

Interns may be hesitant to ask questions. The following responses can be customized for your workplaces help your interns understand office norms and feel comfortable with your expectations.

1. What are my hours?
2. Who do I contact when...?
 - a. I need to request time off.
 - b. I have questions about my timesheet or paycheck?? I have questions about my computer or equipment?
 - c. I am having issues with a co-worker.
 - d. I do not know what to do.
3. What is the dress expectation, and does it change on certain days?
4. What should I do for lunch?
5. What is the cellphone policy?
6. What is the social media policy?
7. Do you have events outside of the office?
8. How often should I check in with my supervisor?
9. What if I am bored?
10. What if I am overwhelmed or faced with a challenge?
11. What happens when my internship comes to an end?
12. What happens if I break a rule or mess up a project?

Final Evaluation – Intern Version Template

Intern Information	
Name:	
School:	
Job Title:	
Department:	
Supervisor:	
Period Review:	
Date:	

Ratings					
	1 = Strongly Agree	2 = Agree	3 = Neutral	4 = Disagree	5 = Strongly Disagree
The orientation to the organization at the start of the internship was sufficient.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
I received thorough information on the job duties and expectations at the start of my internship.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
A supervisor was assigned to oversee my work.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
My supervisor was available to answer questions throughout my internship.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
My learning objectives and goals were clearly defined.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
A mentor was assigned to support and guide my work.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The internship was challenging.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The internship helped me learn practical skills for my future career.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
My educational coursework aligned and prepared me for this internship.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The internship provided relevant experience that can be applied to my resume for future career opportunities.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The work climate was positive and productive.					

<i>Comments:</i>					
I made contacts that will be useful to me in the future.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
I would recommend this internship to another student.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The projects I was assigned to work on were meaningful.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
My perception of the industry/occupation changed after interning with the organization.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
How did this internship help you grow in terms of knowledge and experience?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
What previous classes or experiences were most useful throughout your internship?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
What advice would you give future interns?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
What surprised you most about your internship experience?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
What would you say was the biggest challenge during your internship experience?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Would you consider working for this organization in the future? Why or why not?					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Please include any other comments or information you feel would be helpful.					
<i>Comments:</i>					

Verification of Review	
<i>By signing this form, you confirm that you have discussed this review in detail with your supervisor. Signing this form does not necessarily indicate that you agree with this evaluation.</i>	
Intern Signature:	
Date:	
Supervisor Signature:	
Date:	

Final Evaluation – Supervisor Version Template

Intern Information	
Supervisor Name:	
Intern Name:	
Intern Job Title:	
Department:	
Period Review:	
Date:	

Ratings					
	1 = Strongly Agree	2 = Agree	3 = Neutral	4 = Disagree	5 = Strongly Disagree
Intern was prepared for this internship.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern completed projects to a satisfactory level.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern worked collaboratively with others.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern adequately followed instructions from supervisor.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern responded well to feedback from supervisor.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern managed time and projects well.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
Intern applied knowledge from previous coursework to their work during the internship.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The intern sought help and asked questions when faced with a challenge.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The intern was reliable and professional.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
The intern had a meaningful impact on the organization.					
<i>Comments:</i>					
What were the intern's strengths?					
<i>Comments:</i>					

What were the intern's weakness?
<i>Comments:</i>
How did the intern respond to adversity/criticism?
<i>Comments:</i>
What advice would you give this intern?
<i>Comments:</i>
What was the biggest challenge the intern faced?
<i>Comments:</i>
What was the most meaningful impact the intern brought to the team/organization?
<i>Comments:</i>
Please include any other comments or information you feel would be helpful.
<i>Comments:</i>

Verification of Review	
<i>By signing this form, you confirm that you have discussed this review in detail with your supervisor. Signing this form does not necessarily indicate that you agree with this evaluation.</i>	
Intern Signature:	
Date:	
Supervisor Signature:	
Date:	