

12. Steps to organize an internship program for young people in partnership with SMEs

The tool

The main actors of an internship program are the following:

The interns - the young people (high school, university students or unemployed and not in study or training young people - NEETs);

The host organizations - the companies and *the mentors* assigned to the program by the host organizations;

The initiator/organizer of the program - the organization which sets the program for both the young people and the companies, providing services to both parties and bringing their interests and motivation together.

During the program implementation, you might need to decide on which specific groups of young people or host organizations you want to focus. For instance, you might think to address only high school students, or only university students or only NEETs. This focus depends on your community's needs, on your organization's mandate and interests, but also on the financial resources available for implementing the program and on the interests of these potential funders. Also, you might need to make the decision on what types of host organizations you want to focus on, based on how do you want them involved in the financial sustainability of the program, but also based on the categories of young people you want to support - what kind of working experiences would be relevant for them.

The steps of an internship program are:

1. Promotion of the program and application process for companies and young people
2. Matching between the young people and the companies
3. Preparation of the interns and the mentors
4. The internship program delivery
5. Monitoring and evaluation of the program

The internship program steps explained

Promotion and application

Promote the program to the companies/host organizations, get their commitment, collect the information about the internship positions they have available for young people;

Promote the program, and the internship positions to the young people;

Collect young people's applications through an online platform, in a given time period (two-three weeks), with a fixed deadline;

You could also organize a promotion event, in which companies/host organizations come and present the internship positions they have to the young people that apply to the program.

Matching

Evaluate young people's applications;

Organize pre-selection group interviews with the applicants, and select 2-3 young people for each position available;
 Organize the final interviews or tests young people will take with the companies/host organizations;
 Based on the companies' preferences, select the interns and announce the final results to the young people; confirm the young people's involvement to the companies.

Preparation

Sign an internship contract with each young person selected for the program, through which they commit to follow the whole program and respect the rules and procedures of the program and of the hosting organizations;
 Sign a program contract with each company/host organization, through which it commits to provide the internship program to the young people, assign mentors, and financially support the program;
 Provide a preparation workshop or other training courses to the young people, with a special focus on labor market and entrepreneurial initiatives, in accordance to their needs, but also in agreement with the companies' requests and interests;
 Provide preparation materials or workshops to the mentors assigned by the companies/host organizations.

The internship program delivery

We would recommend that the length of the internship program to be at least six weeks and no more than three months (after three months, the internship looks more and more like a working relation, and both young people's and company's expectations change towards the direction of an employment contract);
 We also recommend that young people spend 4-6 hours/day, and maximum 20 hours/week in the company, so that they can also dedicate time for their education;
 Each intern together with his/her mentor prepare a work plan/work commitment, establishing together the learning objectives, the activities and tasks, and the estimated results relevant for both parts;
 The internship should follow the work plan/work commitment made, and if it is needed, the intern and the mentor can agree on adding or adjusting some of the objectives and tasks in accordance to their needs that could change during the implementation of the program. Still, we would not recommend any changes in the length of the program.

Monitoring and evaluation

During the implementation, you are responsible to monitor both young people's and mentors' activity, by staying directly in contact with both parties;
 Be ready to intervene in conflict or dropping out of the program situations, as the impartial actor in the program, following both actors' interests;
 At the end of the program, you are responsible to collect feedback and evaluation forms from both the young people and mentors, and prepare an evaluation report to be shared with all the stakeholders;
 Provide certificates to the young people finishing the program, but also recognition certificates for the mentors/host organizations who supported the development of the young people.

All these steps should be put in the calendar of each edition of the program. This calendar should be shared with the companies/host organizations from the very beginning, when you invite them in the program. Also, if you would choose to work with high school or university students, we would recommend to adapt your internship program to the school year structure, so that you can ensure the students' presence in the city, but also their involvement in the program.

How to use an internship program?

The steps presented here were developed based on CoOp project Romanian partner, Fundatia Danis, which runs the Internship Cluj program since 2006, and served in 13 years almost 1400 university students and 100 host organizations.

Internship Cluj is a program that brings together university students and companies from Cluj-Napoca (Transilvania, Romania). Cluj is a city that hosts approximately 90,000 students every year, also it is a city interested in keeping this educated workforce once it graduates. For that, Fundatia Danis decided to focus its program on supporting university students to gain working experience and get committed to the city that hosts them for at least 3-5 years. Moreover, the organization focused the program on providing internships mainly in the private sector, in order to be able to financially support the program - the companies showed from the very beginning their interests in supporting the program and the students, as a corporate social responsibility activity, but also as a human resources and employer branding strategy. Fundatia Danis started the program in times that there were no public funds available for such opportunities for young people, for enhancing their employability, thus the companies became the natural supporters of the program once they were approached them.

From Internship Cluj experience, here are some values that an internship program could provide to companies and one organization could use in getting business support for such a program:

- Direct access to potential future employees of the companies;
- Enhances companies' profile and employer brand in the community;
- Promotion and recruitment services to the companies;
- Prepares the interns on specific skills, reducing companies' costs on training the interns or potential future employees;
- Workforce to the companies, most of the times for activities and tasks the current staff cannot find the time for;
- Efficient and win-win corporate social responsibility opportunities to the companies;
- Valuable workshops/preparation sessions for companies' mentors, enhancing their work motivation and commitment to their employers, but also leadership/mentorship/coaching knowledge and skills;
- Networking opportunities with relevant stakeholders for companies: students/young people, universities, student unions, and other companies;
- A low-risk and low-cost opportunity to learn more about the new generation, and to help the young people to develop those specific knowledge and skills they ask from their future employees.

The program, as it could be observed, has two main clients: the young people and the hosting organizations, the companies. The young people, in many countries, do not have the financial power to support the program - usually they are students or unemployed young people searching for a working experience, and eventually for a job, with no financial constant resources. Thus, the business

model can be developed only having in mind the financial resources coming directly from the companies.

The revenue streams from the companies can take at least the following forms:

The companies pay a fee for each student that is selected as an intern and who stays committed to the program at least a certain period of time (agreed between the organizer and the company) within the program duration;

The companies would sponsor from the CSR / promotion / advertising budgets the program (bulk money to be given and one company can be promoted as “main sponsor”, “main partner”, “sponsor”, etc. - different sponsorship packages can be planned in advance);

The companies could pay for specific package of services from the program, the services they could choose as relevant for them (for instance, they could have their own interns and ask the organizer to train only their interns and mentors).

All these revenue streams can be implemented in one program or only some of them, but also other ideas can be added depending on the country or community context. The business model could also include compensations for interns’ work and involvement. Depending on the country’s legislation, this compensation could be done, for instance, through monthly stipends, program fellowships or, finally, working contracts, all supported by the companies.

Read more about how to develop an internship program in the guide prepared for youth organizations by Fundatia Danis: [ENPower Mentorship Program](#).