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State of Tennessee Internship Program

The Department of Human Resources (DOHR) administers the State of Tennessee Internship Program (Internship Program), which provides interns the opportunity to experience the value of employment with state government, while gaining on-the-job training that integrates education, professional development, and public service. The Internship Program provides value to the State of Tennessee and state agencies through promoting the work of state government and developing potential future employees.

Agencies shall treat interns with the same respect and professionalism as employees. Interns shall not be discriminated upon on the basis of race, color, national origin, age (40 and over), sex, religion, creed, disability, and veteran’s status or any other category protected by state and/or federal civil rights laws. Internships may be terminated at any time at the discretion of the agency’s Appointing Authority. There is no appeal procedure for termination of an internship.

Agencies who plan to hire an intern (paid or unpaid) shall notify DOHR’s Executive Director of Recruiting at least ninety (90) days in advance of the start of the internship. Agencies shall also comply with DOHR requirements regarding performance metrics and other reporting requirements throughout the internship.

Definitions

Advanced Degree Student Intern: An intern who is currently working on their Master’s or PHD at an accredited college or university.

Community College/Technical School Student Intern: An intern who is in their second year of their educational program at an accredited community college or technical school including The TN Rehabilitation Center-Smyrna.

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.

Intern: There are three (3) types of internships within the Internship Program: (1) Paid and not receiving school credit, (2) paid and receiving school credit, or (3) unpaid and receiving school credit. Interns who are unpaid and not receiving school credit are not eligible to participate in the Internship Program.

Mentor: The mentor serves as the supervisor for the intern. The mentor supports, directs, and oversees the activities of the intern during the internship.

Recent Graduate Intern: An intern who recently graduated within one (1) year of the internship start date.

Undergraduate Student Intern: An intern who is currently enrolled (full-time or part-time) in either a two-year program or a four-year undergraduate program as a degree-seeking student in their third or fourth year of study within an accredited college or university.

Veteran Intern: A veteran of the United States Armed Forces who possesses a high school diploma or its equivalent and has served on active duty -- for any length of time -- in the two years preceding the internship program start date.

Intern Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in the Internship Program, interns must meet the criteria for a Student Intern, Recent Graduate Intern, or a Veteran Intern.

Interns must also meet the following criteria:

1. For Student Interns, must be in good academic standing;
2. Must be at least 18 years of age at the outset of the internship;
3. Must be authorized to work in the United States;
4. Must sign the Intern Handbook at the outset of the internship and abide by its terms;
5. Must complete Respectful Workplace and G.R.E.A.T. Customer Service training within one (1) month of the internship start date (this requirement only applies for internships lasting longer than thirty (30) days or a duration over 80 total hours).
6. May be subject to background check, consistent with particular agency's policy); and
7. May be subject to drug testing pursuant to the employing agency's policy.

Mentor Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a mentor, potential mentors shall successfully complete mentor training through DOHR prior to the start of the internship.

Paid Internship Requirements

A paid internship may be full-time or part-time. Paid interns shall have a set pay that is at least minimum wage, which shall be documented prior to the internship start date. Paid interns shall have set work hours, which shall be tracked by the intern's mentor. Such hours shall not exceed forty (40) hours per week. Paid interns are not employees, and are not eligible for employee benefits or paid leave.

Student Interns may also receive school credit for the internship without reduction in pay. It is the intern's responsibility to consult their school prior to the start of an internship and become informed on requirements for receiving school credit. It is the intern's responsibility to provide proof to the agency that he/she is receiving school credit for the internship and work with the agency to ensure credit requirements are met.

Unpaid Internship Requirements

Unpaid Student Interns must receive school credit from a college or university for the internship. It is the intern's responsibility to consult their school prior to the start of an internship and become informed on requirements for receiving school credit. It is the intern's responsibility to provide proof to the agency that he/she is receiving school credit for the internship and work with the agency to ensure credit requirements are met.

The agency and intern shall understand and document prior to the outset that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

Additional Requirements for Paid and Unpaid Internships

Internships shall meet the following criteria:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the agency, must be similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience must be for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern shall not displace regular employees, but shall work under close supervision of his or her mentor;
4. The agency that provides the internship shall derive no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern, and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded; and
5. The intern shall not be entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship.

The internship shall be of a fixed duration, established prior to the outset of the internship.

Proof of School Credit

To demonstrate that a Student Internship was for academic purposes, agencies must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Obtain official documentation from the school prior to the outset of the internship period. Documentation should confirm that the intern will receive course credits toward completion of a degree or certificate if the student successfully completes the internship. Documentation should also indicate that the work involved in the internship has been approved as relevant to the intern's course work.
2. Identify the learning objectives before the outset of the internship period. The goal of the internship shall be to learn and not to make money for the intern or the employer. The focus of the internship should be teaching work skills or providing knowledge about the business or industry. Agencies should understand the kinds of course work the intern is taking and tailor assignments so they directly relate to the intern's studies.
3. If the school requires the intern to prepare a report on the work experience and submit it to a faculty member, agencies shall request a copy for their own records.
4. The internship relationship should have a defined beginning and end, as documented at the outset of the internship.
5. The internship may require supervisory critiques, such as the completion of brief questionnaires furnished by the school. Agencies shall comply with school requirements regarding internship documentation.
6. Interns should spend no more than 50 percent (50%) of their time performing work ordinarily done by regular employees. Interns shall not be subject to the same job descriptions used for employees.
7. Agencies shall not guarantee unpaid interns a job upon completion of the internship or graduation from school. Interns shall understand in writing at the outset of the internship that they are not guaranteed a job at the conclusion of the internship.
8. Agencies shall provide to the intern a Final Progress Report in addition to any report required by the educational institution the student attends at the conclusion of the internship.

Questions about this Policy should be directed to the Recruiting Division.