



Retention Strategies

Career Internship Network Publications

The Career Internship Network (CIN), a program of the Youth Development Institute, comprises more than thirty New York City institutions with established internship programs for adolescents that provide exposure to, understanding of, and experiences in potential careers. As part of its services, CIN provides professional development workshops for members who run the career development programs. Resource guides and worksheets accompany each workshop to assist program coordinators in their work with interns. This downloadable publication is part of a series adapted from these workshop materials that we want to share with the field. We encourage you to use any of the materials, but please include copyright information on related pages.

Retention Strategies

Interns leave their programs for a number of reasons. Some find that they cannot manage school and internship commitments at the same time. Parents or guardians sometimes apply pressure on interns to spend more time on other after-school activities or require them for family commitments. And sometimes interns lose interest in the program. An important way to hold on to interns is to make sure that the program addresses their needs during this stage of their developmental process. The better your program, the more your interns will be committed to staying. The following information describes various ways you can create the best environment for your interns.

This packet contains:

- Research about Strategies for Retention
- Retaining Interns Challenge & Suggestion chart
- Tackling Intern Retention Staff activity
- Mentor- Intern Initial Work Plan form
- Program Components that Assist in Intern Retention

Research about Strategies for Retention

The following information comes from "Participation in Youth Programs: Enrollment, Attendance and Engagement," the No. 105, Spring 2005 issue of *New Directions for Youth Development*, edited by Heather B. Weiss, Priscilla M.D. Little, and Suzanne M. Bouffard. The book provides several useful and practical chapters on ways to improve youth recruitment, retention, and participation. The information can serve as a foundation for your program, which you can then infuse with specifics from "Retaining Interns Challenge & Suggestion" chart in the next section.

Internship programs must create a positive context that both encourages and supports retention. The chart below delineates these elements:

Best Practice Elements Characteristic of Effective Youth Development Programs¹	
<i>Program Elements</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Physical and psychological Safety	The program provides a safe haven both physically and emotionally.
Clear and consistent rules	The program has clear rules, expectations, and responsibilities that are enforced. Youth are involved in creating the rules, expectations, and responsibilities. Generally, those rules are embraced by youth when they have direct input in their development.
Supportive relationships	The program has adults involved in the program's activities and events. Through these activities and events, adults and youth are able to establish trusted connections.
Opportunities for inclusion and belonging	The program provides activities and events that foster friendships and provide youth with a sense of a positive group experience.
Positive social norms	The program's culture (e.g., habits and expectations) that governs behavior and daily interactions involves conventionally positive social norms.
Support for efficacy and mattering	The program provides youth, both individually and in groups, the opportunity to be useful and to make a difference in their social worlds.
Opportunities for skill building	The program develops skills and competencies through its activities and teambuilding experiences the program provides youth the opportunity build their skills (e.g., leadership skills, decision-making skills, cultural competence, communication skills, problem solving skills, civic responsibility, etc).
Active learning²	The program provides age-appropriate learning opportunities that are interactive, reflective, and engage multiple learning styles. For example, programs employ experiential learning opportunities and encourage young people to take positive risks. Youth are encouraged to try new experiences. Whether they are successful or unsuccessful, these attempts are viewed as part of the

	learning process. Indeed, youth learn how to take risks and also learn how to fail courageously.
Opportunities for recognition³	Youth are sincerely acknowledged for their contributions. The recognition conveys a positive view of youth.
Integration of family, school, and community efforts	The program coordinates its efforts and communicates regularly with families and schools to ensure similar norms and expectations across settings. The program offers a variety of activities and events that involve parents (e.g., social events, parental workshops, and volunteer opportunities).

Footnotes:

1 ó Adapted from material created by Daniel F. Perkins and Lynne M. Borden (April, 2003). Contact Dr. Perkins at dfp102@psu.edu.

2 - According to the book by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2002), this is a sub-feature of the Opportunities for Skill Building feature. However, given its direct relevance and importance to practice, it is included in this tool as a major feature.

3 - According to an manuscript by Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (In press). What is a youth development program? Identification of defining principals. In R. M. Lerner, F. Jacobs, & D. Wertlieb (Eds), *Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development: A handbook of Program and Policy Innovations, Volume 2: Enhancing the Life Chances of Youth and Families: Public Service Systems and Public Policy Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

The three strategies below are specific to enhancing participation and long-term retention that should be combined with the above characteristics.

Strategies to Enhance Regular Participation and Long-Term Retention

- **Provide a Clear Message that Attendance is Important.** Staff must continue to reinforce the importance to youth and establish requirements that are shared with them at the start of the program. Message that attendance is important also involves caring, involved staff who make youth feel that they are valued by staff and are missed when they are not present.
- **Set Realistic Goals to Promote Regular Attendance.** Teenagers have many demands on their time— work, homework, caring for family members— that program staff has little control over.
- **Keep Youth Involved with Opportunities for Leadership, community Service, and Paid Employment.**

Retaining Interns Challenge & Suggestions

The left-side column of the chart lists potential issues that relate to intern retention. The right-hand column contains strategies that might help retain the size of your intern group.

RETENTION ISSUE	SPECIFIC RETENTION STRATEGIES
<p><i>PRIOR TO PROGRAM</i></p> <hr/> <p>* Getting & maintaining a quorum</p> <p>(continued next page)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take the school calendar into consideration when you determine your application distribution & due-date. • Have a specific person for each contact on your mailing list—don't send into a school mail-box "black hole" to be lost in the pile of other unsolicited mail • Re-contact applicants from previous waiting-lists • Reconsider applications you were not initially going to take; talk to them on the phone to test the waters, they often turn out to be a surprising gem • Email alumni asking them to spread the word among friends and also school administration • Recruit on-site (with alumni, if possible) at targeted student locations • If slots remain, re-contact specific/likely school staff using a "last-chance, final-day-sale" approach." Dangle "A few positions left/first-come first-serve but specifically wanted to let you know...." "Scarcity" can spur desire • Expand your mailing list by requiring school contact person on the student application, and add the person's name to your mailing list regardless of final applicant status • Get the word out about your program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Contact existing networks . Inform colleagues/professional associations about your program • Modestly over-enroll to allow for attrition • If you lose interns funnel new students in up to the first one-third or so of the program, if curriculum allows for their seamless integration

<p><i>DURING INTERVIEW</i></p> <p>* Unrealistic about true time allocation (possibility of them becoming overwhelmed even if they don't know it)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask up-front what else applicant is committed to other than school (clubs, sports, theater, regular religious-community service, part-time job, family member care, planned travel, etc.) • Sense if intern is realistic about time/stress regarding ability to handle upcoming school assignments/tests (SAT, Regents, mid terms & finals, college applications, etc.) (Rising 11th and 12th graders often underestimate the potential impact of these additional demands) • Check with applicant's references and/or teacher about her or his perspective on student's ability to meet program, school, and after-school responsibilities • If still concerned, establish a short trial period prior to the program so you, intern, and mentor can assess whether the intern will be able to juggle everything • Listen to your instincts!
<p><i>DURING INTERNSHIP</i></p> <p>* Doesn't express displeasure— How to know before it's too late</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice clues in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . journal writings . regular mentor assessment form . frequent informal check-ins with mentors . regular intern group "debriefings" . deflection when questioned directly about the issue • In a private conversation, keep peeling back onion until you identify core cause; solicit intern's suggestions for solutions; establish a mutually agreed-upon action plan with frequent check-ins during a designated trial period
<p>* Asserts can't meet requirements</p> <p>(continued next page) continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed specific support mechanisms into the program to help students meet requirements. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Weekly check-lists of assignments due . Program calendar with meeting times and assignment due dates . Weekly list of missing assignments . "On-Track" Intern Teams (student pairs mutually establish plan for weekly check-ins and methods to help one another meet obligations) • Identify the specific challenge and determine if intern just needs coaching regarding focus/organization skills • If warranted, establish an alternative method, together brainstorming various options for intern to meet program requirements (terms should be different from but equal to requirements for the rest of the group) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . time requirement (can create alternative schedule making use of weekends/school breaks/after or before official program dates) . completing journals and other assignments (solution example: intern with

	<p>learning disability dictates to guardian; peer-editing teams) . personal/academic/home-life issues (referrals to professional outside resources)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify to intern that s/he is fully responsible for meeting any special accommodations regarding requirements—or contacting you immediately if problems continues to exist. You should not have to monitor the situation; that's the intern's responsibility
<p>* Disappointed with work — expectations unrealistic to begin with</p> <p>(continued next page)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During interview, orientation, and early program continually remind intern that virtually all jobs include repetitive/mundane aspects • Explain (and make sure mentors explain) the "why" behind every single task. Interns' always need to understand the larger context in order to recognize its significance and their relationship to it and the institution as a "whole." Have intern share her/his understanding to confirm comprehension • Make sure, starting at recruitment that mentors understand that interns are not just a pair of hands to do tedious administrative work. Reinforce that mentors are educators, and help them outline an experience that has both scope and sequence—and a maximum of about 10% repetitive office work. (e.g., See "Initial Mentor-Intern Work Plan" form that mentors complete with student on first day. The form helps mentors think about their "educational" responsibility in planning an experience with both scope and sequence that will give intern a preview of her/his work and reassurance that the nature of her or his work will change overtime) • Make sure mentors understand that they should incorporate intern's existing interests/skills/ideas into the work plan • Permit some but not all repetitive/mundane tasks ONLY if intern also has a set, long-term project and/or more meaningful tasks as well • Encourage mentor to "spice up" daily experience by taking intern to meetings and behind-the-scenes places (e.g., research library, storage rooms) Introduce anyone who comes into the department or you meet in the hall together, thus again providing a "bigger" and more varied picture • Ask alumni who worked through similar issues to share the solutions they discovered with current interns

<p>(continued)</p> <p>* Feels assigned work is irrelevant; undervalues own contribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide meaningful work that heeds intern's ideas and concerns (See Mentor-Intern Initial Work Plan form) • Require daily journal reflection, helping interns to recognize the value of their work, relationship to staff and the organization, and personal growth • Ensure regular formal and informal feedback from staff and mentors to help interns recognize accomplishments and value of their work • Support self-recognition by providing guardians, family, peers, and teachers with opportunities to observe, participate, and honor interns' work/contribution • Provide monetary and/or other compensation (school credit, certificates of completion, free transportation and/or meals, free passes, discounts, invitations to special programs, alumni support activities, connections to college-prep courses and information about other academic and financial assistance); only give benefits upon successful completion of the program
<p>* Lack of group cohesiveness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed numerous small and large-group activities/projects throughout the program, not just during orientation to deepen relationships among interns • Constantly have interns repeat their names during orientation and "test" group's memory at times (e.g., go turn to each person in the group and have all the interns call out the person's name) • Always require interns to sit next to someone they don't know well at each group meeting • Include a number of official "debriefing/sharing-of-department-work experiences" in early stages of the program • Have students "shadow" one another in their separate workplaces • Encourage interns to visit peers in their departments during off hours (with permission from mentor of intern host) • Be explicit about everyone's equal responsibility to and role in the group; one "piece" missing or not fully contributing creates a gap in the circle • Acknowledge group efforts (successful projects, lively participation during session, accommodating each other in the space, etc.) • Plan "down time" for socializing

A "Stickie" Issue

TACKLING INTERN-RETENTION CHALLENGES IN YOUR PROGRAM

A Staff Approach

Before You Begin

- Identify possible challenges to and solutions for retention before they occur
 - Analyze each sequential component of your program (i.e., application, interviews, orientation, during the program) ...and...
 - Look at the program holistically
 - Revisit retention issues throughout the program, not just after a session's completion
-

Step 1: Think Deep

- . See if any of the following questions stimulate ideas:

Why is it important to retain interns from beginning to end? What happens what happens if you don't?

Is there something inherent in your retention goal that might create problems?

How might your program's main goal affect retention?

How might your applicant pool possibly affect retention?

How might any of the following factors impact intern retention:

- Developmental stage/cognitive abilities
- Home, school, socio-economic context
- familiarity and/or comfort with program content and work-based skills
- Logistics—transportation time, time of day/week/number of days/weeks

Step 2: Throw em' out there—Brainstorm the Challenges

- . Gather program staff (and, if possible, include a mentor, school contact person, intern, alumni, and guardian) for the brainstorming process
- . Distribute medium-sized "stickie" pads and thick markers
- . Ask everyone to write down any potential issue that might contribute to retention problems on an individual "sticky;" randomly place each one a large board or empty wall

Step 3: Search for Connections—Sort the Identified Challenges

- . Peruse the "stickies" and sort them into logical groups

Step 4: Move to the Intern-Retention Worksheet

- . Examine the What You Do, What You Will Do intern-retention worksheet. List the issues you identified on the "stickies" in the appropriate "Prior to" and "During the program" in the left-hand column

Step 5: Now & Later—Move Across the Chart Columns

- . Fill in the next column: Existing Strategy
- . Move on to filling in the final column: Possible Strategies with your brainstorm
- . Remember that retention issues are interweaving octopus tentacles—so issues/ideas for solutions might apply more than once

Step 6: Making Sense

- . If possible, have everyone develop his or her own ideas for a plan of action as "homework" and then come together "fresh" the next day (or soon after).
- . Share suggestions, additional thoughts, and so forth until you have settled on an approach you want to try out

Step 7: Plan of Action

- . Together as a group, develop a plan of action that will implement the strategies you choose to pursue, and make sure to include an evaluation section where you will review how your plan is working

WHAT YOU DO, WHAT YOU WILL DO
Intern-Retention Worksheet

<i>List Issues</i>	<i>List Existing Strategy</i>	<i>List Possible New Strategy</i>
PRIOR TO PROGRAM		
DURING PROGRAM		
PLAN OF ACTION		

INSIDE VIEW:
NYC HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Mentor—Intern Initial Work Plan

Mentors, please fill out this form together with your intern on her or his *first* day. The initial work plan will probably change, but it is very important to try and map things out in the *beginning* to give you and your intern a sense of direction.

MENTOR /DEPARTMENT: _____/_____

INTERN: _____

1. Starting the Process—Answering Some Fundamental Questions

What You—the Mentor—Need

- Do you need work that is _____ (check one)
 - ___ directly connected to your daily work
 - ___ a project you have not had time for yet
 - ___ a project that will help the department in general
- Would you prefer that the work be _____ (check one)
 - ___ in-depth (project-based) experience
 - ___ series of tasks/work that provide an overview

Intern's Interests and/or Strengths

- What related skills/knowledge does your intern have?

- What skills will your intern need?

- How will your intern attain the new skill/knowledge?

2. DEFINING THE INITIAL INTERN WORK PLAN

It is vital to offer your intern a sense of what will be the overall structure and direction of her or his work. Please consider the following issues before actually mapping out the Work Plan—

- What will be the
 - . Scope (range of the intern's work over the course of the program)
 - . Sequence (flow of experiences over the course of the program)
 - . Indicators of Success (description of the desired result for each goal)

Phase 1

Goal: _____

Description of Work: _____

Timeframe (days/weeks/months): _____

Indicator of Success (describe result): _____

Phase 2

Goal: _____

Description of Work: _____

Timeframe (days/weeks/months): _____

Indicator of Success (describe result): _____

Phase 3

Goal: _____

Description of Work: _____

Timeframe (days/weeks/months): _____

Indicator of Success (describe result): _____

Phase 4

Goal: _____

Description of Work: _____

Timeframe (days/weeks/months): _____

Indicator of Success (describe result): _____

Does your intern clearly understand the overall context and, therefore, the importance of his or her work, regardless of the task?
 ___ **yes** ___ **unsure**

Please have your intern hand in a copy to us, and keep one for you both to refer to from month to month. Thank you for planning what we hope will be a mutually beneficial, meaningful experience. Please feel free to contact us for any reason

Program Components That Assist in Intern Retention

In order to retain interns, it is crucial to run a program that makes students really want to stay and work any difficulties out. All categories except reflection and critical thinking are related to youth development principles, which when in place help create an environment in which youth can thrive.

Consistency & Supports

- Be **clear & consistent** regarding program commitments and expectations from the very start and *reiterate* them *throughout* program (application, interview, student contract, orientation, group intern meetings) Reinforce program as a *real* work situation, helping them distinguish differences between *work* versus school *culture*. Remind them that the internship is a *privilege* and they need to earn the right to its benefits by meeting all obligations *without continual adult oversight*. Have interns *rephrase* requirements in own words to check for understanding
- Continually remind interns of **staff availability** to help interns address program-, life-, and/or school-issues. Assure anonymity and ability to *help* identify *appropriate resources*
- Embed **support structures/mechanisms** to help keep interns manage obligations (e.g., checklists with due dates for materials and running chronological *items missing* chart they can use to keep track of what they owe; On-Track intern teams *peer developed support plan with regular check ins*)
- Cultivate an environment of **support, recognition, and mutually beneficial exchange** by providing **families, schools, and local organizations** with opportunities to connect with interns during the program (e.g., attend presentations/events, *shadow* interns in the workplace, exchange site visits with other internship programs)

High Expectations & Accountability

- Nurture a **culture of high expectations** in which interns, not just staff, hold both **themselves** and their **peers** to standards of excellence
- Remain consistently **rigorous** about intern **accountability**, clearly defining **responsibilities** and potential **consequences** if unmet (e.g., *compensation* and/or equivalent only upon successfully completing all program obligations) Establish a systematic, multi-staged method of assisting any intern not meeting requirements (e.g., first *warning* in which you identify core of challenge, mutually develop a personalized alternative plan testing for a defined *probation* period; second warning with more discussion about support and plan of action; final warning; dismissal without compensation)

- É Reinforce *self-responsibility* and perseverance as *key* to success in work, school, and life (they, not adults, need to monitor themselves in the "real" world)
- Always *thoroughly* explain *purpose* of any requirement, gathering intern feedback to check for understanding

Caring & Trusting Relationships

- É Set time aside throughout the program for *staff, mentors, and interns* to *get to know each other* personally (e.g., set tenor with fast-paced, light-hearted icebreaker activities during orientation and early group meetings)
- *Personalize* the plan for how a struggling student can fulfill requirements, when necessary; *equal* accountability *doesn't* have to look *exactly the same*. Mutually develop an alternative plan of action and, if necessary, an adjusted timetable
- Communicate staff *dedication* to assisting interns *succeed* and eagerness/ability to *mutually develop* a *solution*. Make it clear that any problem can be solved if contacted immediately rather than intern doing nothing, hoping to slip by unnoticed
- Provide *regular* formal and informal *feedback* that helps interns recognize areas for improvement, accomplishments, and the value of their work; solicit intern response

Opportunities to Contribute

- Provide *authentic, meaningful* work; always explain the work's *context* and *value* to the mentor and organization as a whole
- É Incorporate opportunities for interns to *provide input* into how the program operates

Reflection & Critical Thinking

- Embed *continual deep reflection* to foster recognition of personal growth and expanding thought processes
- É Encourage *reflection* on *connections* between internship (skills and experiences) to *school, life, and future work situations*