



Youth in Action! - Participating in Internships and Work-Based Experiences

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/tip-sheet/internships-and-work-based-experiences>

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Do you ...

- Want to build work experience while learning about careers you're interested in?
- Expand and explore your professional network?
- Earn money or school credit while you work?

Yes? Then you should try participating in an internship or other work-based experience!

What Are Work-Based Experiences?

Work-based experiences are paid or unpaid opportunities to practice your skills and prepare you for success in your future career. There are many different kinds of work-based experiences, including part-time or summer jobs, service projects, volunteer work, or internships. Summer and part-time jobs are paid work experiences, while service projects and volunteer work are unpaid experiences where you use and learn work skills to benefit your community. Internships are opportunities to learn and gain experience working with an employer over a set period of time. They can be paid or unpaid and either part time or full time. Most internships are connected to education programs, either during the summer or school year, and last between four weeks and a year

Why Should I Participate in a Work-Based Experience?

Work-based experiences provide opportunities to learn and develop job skills and gain confidence. They can also help you to learn more about careers that might interest you to see if they'll be a good fit. When you apply for jobs, many employers look at prior work experience on your resume as a sign you are motivated and/or qualified. When you apply for college, some admissions offices may consider work experiences in their selection processes, so it's crucial to gain work experience early on.

Work-based experiences can also help you to start to build your professional network. A network is a group of people with whom you frequently interact, including your family, friends, classmates, co-workers, neighbors, and teachers. Information and experience are exchanged within the group for both social and professional reasons. Networking occurs all the time, from your participation in a school or social event, to conversations with your neighbors, to someone you chat with in line at a grocery store. Having a personal network can help you learn about potential jobs, and give you an edge in the hiring process. Many employers prefer interviewing candidates who come recommended from people within their own personal networks.

Ultimately, the best way to find out about internships and work experiences is by speaking with people in your network who have previously had work experiences, and are willing to share their experiences.

Steps for Finding an Internship or Other Work-Based Experience

1. Decide what kind of experience you want. Would you like an internship, part-time job, or other work experience? What kind of careers are you interested in? Try to align your work experiences with your career interests. If you're not sure what you want to do, take a career interest assessment like the one at www.mynextmove.org. It's good to not only think about what you're interested in, but how you want your experience to be structured. How many hours per week can you work? What times of day and what days of the week are you available? Are you looking for an experience just for the summer, or over a school semester, or longer? Are you able to participate in a work experience for school credit?

2. Look for work-based experience opportunities. A great way to start your search is to ask your friends and family if they know about opportunities that match your interests. Often, people connect to work experiences through their personal and professional networks.

If you're looking for a part-time or summer job, search the online classifieds section of your local newspaper. Some nonprofit organizations and local government agencies run youth employment programs, including short-term paid work experiences. These experiences are usually six to eight weeks during the summer. To learn about these programs, contact your local workforce investment board (WIB) and ask about youth programs and summer jobs. To find your local WIB, go to <http://www.servicelocator.org/wibcontacts>.

There are many different ways to find internship openings. If you're in high school, drop by the guidance counselor's office. If you're in college, make an appointment with the career services department. Schools often keep lists of employers that have internships available.

If you aren't in school, you can visit an American Job Center and meet with a counselor or case manager there. In addition to helping you find internships, these offices can also help to prepare you for successful work experiences.

If there are specific employers you'd like to work for, look for opportunities on their websites. Don't be afraid to reach out to the employers directly to find out more about what it's like to work for their business and what they are looking for in an employee or volunteer.

Check out the "Resources" section at the end of this Tip Sheet for websites with internship openings.

For information about service projects and other volunteer experiences, see [Tip Sheet: Getting Involved with Your Community](#).

3. Apply for work-based experience opportunities. To participate in a work experience, you will usually have to fill out an application. To increase your chances of getting a work experience, apply for more than one opportunity. When applying for internships or jobs, you

may be asked to provide a resume and cover letter. For help creating these, reach out to your guidance counselor, career services specialist, or a contact in your personal network. You can also look online for resume and cover letter samples and tips.

Interviews are an important part of the application process. You can prepare for an interview by practicing or conducting a mock interview. It is important that you answer all questions honestly and with a positive attitude. Remember your goal in an interview is to sell yourself, so don't forget to point out your special skills and why you're the right candidate for the position.

Interviewing well takes practice. If you don't feel good about how you did in a particular interview, take note of what you will need to do better next time and think of it as a learning experience.

Things to Think About:

Know when to apply. Whether you're looking for an internship, summer job, or other work-based experience, start your search early. Youth summer jobs programs can fill up by April, so try and begin your search at least one semester before you want your internship or work experience to begin.

Request accommodations to put yourself in the best position to succeed. If you have a disability, whether it's apparent or not, you should consider whether to tell your boss about it during a work-based experience or internship. Choosing to tell someone about your disability is called disclosure. If you disclose your disability, you can ask the employer to make reasonable changes to your duties, the physical space, or tools you use so you can do your job to the best of your ability. Disclosure is your personal choice. You're not required to disclose, but if you choose not to, the employer is not required to provide the accommodations you may need to help you do your best. For more information on disability disclosure, check out [The 411 on Disability Disclosure](#).

Be professional! No matter the job, professionalism is essential if you want to succeed and move ahead in your career. Professionalism does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather it means conducting oneself with responsibility, accountability, excellence, and integrity. You should ask about appropriate attire for your worksite. Don't use slang or inappropriate language. Avoid using your cell phone or making personal calls while working. Punctuality is very important, so remember to always communicate with your supervisor if anything comes up.

Start a task log. Keep track of all assignments you're given during your work experience. After your work experience, you can use this information to update your resume, prepare for interviews, and show potential employers some of your past accomplishments.

Expand Your Professional Network. Make sure to attend and participate in meetings and work-sponsored social events. Try to get to know as many of your fellow interns and coworkers as you can. You never know when you may meet someone who can help you find a job in the future.

Ask questions. You are participating in a work experience to learn new things. Don't be afraid to raise your hand and speak up if you need more information.

Get letters of recommendation. At the end of your work experience, ask your supervisor for a letter of recommendation. You can share these letters with potential employers to show off your strengths.

Show your appreciation. When your work experience ends, send a thank you letter to your supervisor and coworkers. They are references for future work opportunities, and you want to leave a good impression.

Resources:

[Workforce Recruitment Program](#) - The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal and private sector employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs.

[Pathways Program](#) – The Pathways Programs are developmental programs tailored to promote employment opportunities for students and recent graduates in the Federal workforce. The Pathways Program consists of the Internship Program for current students; the Recent Graduates Program for people who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs; and the Presidential Management Fellows Program for people who have earned an advanced degree.

[Internships.com](#) – Employers across the country post internship opportunities to this website. Click the “Search Internships” link at the top of the page to get started. This site has mostly college-level internships.

[Idealist](#) – On this website, nonprofit organizations list openings for jobs, internships, and volunteers. Click on the “Internships” link at the top of the page.

[Internships: The On-Ramp to Employment](#) – This guide is to help youth, including youth with disabilities, get and make the most of internships.

Taking action!

Now that you know:

- What work-based experiences are and why they are important,
- The importance of networking in finding them, and
- The 3 steps you can take to find and apply for them ...

... Go out and start participating in work-based experiences!