

INTERNSHIP SUCCESS: TIPS FROM CARDINAL QUARTER HOST ORGANIZATIONS

Do research before you start and take advantage of the Learning Plan.

“Do your research and be specific from the beginning about what you hope to get out of the internship so the employer can plan to provide exactly what you need. When creating the specific plan, make sure it is something that fits in with the organization's mission and work, otherwise it may be hard to fulfill your goals.” – The Battery Conservancy

“Your host organization will likely be overloaded with projects and priorities. As such, do your best to 1) Set clear project goals and timelines early, 2) Establish a network of contacts inside/outside the organization who can assist you in your work, and 3) Don't be afraid to request check-in meetings to follow up, ask questions, and re-calibrate project objectives as needs and contexts evolve.” — U.S. Green Building Council

Don't be afraid to ask questions and take the opportunity to build a professional network.

“To be an effective intern, you should ask plenty of meaning making questions in the beginning of the experience. You must consistently deliver on your commitments throughout the experience. Take this opportunity to contribute your ideas and learn from others. Be bold, take risks, and challenge yourself with the work you will engage in.” — California Education Partners

“The best suggestion I can make is to be open to different experiences and to ask questions to make sure you understand your assignments and how they might relate to the broader goals and mission of the organization. And be open to (and ask for!) feedback - it's meant to be a learning experience!” — Equal Justice Society

“Get to know your new colleagues, even ones you don't work with directly during your internship. Chat to people over lunch or in the break room/kitchen, and if you're interested in learning more about a specific professional career, ask your mentor to connect you with others at the organization who can speak to that experience. People want to meet you as well! So definitely tell your new colleagues about your interests and passions, too. More than anything, internships are such a rich opportunity to see the various pathways people can take to end up working at one place together. Rarely is there one dictated path to a job or career, so take the opportunity to be inspired by new possibilities for your own path.” – Kaiser Family Foundation

Be proactive, flexible, and take the initiative.

“We like our interns to be prepared to do a lot of self-directed work, while also knowing when to approach us about questions/concerns.” — ACLU National Prison Project

“Know that you are coming to a nonprofit where everyone chips in to help each other and roles are not always as cut and dry as they look on the job description. There is lots of room to take on new responsibilities, but also be prepared to help out in something you maybe were not expecting to work on.” — LifeMoves

Make sure you're familiar with technical and cultural knowledge

"We have always had successful internships because interns had taken CS classes related to the work they were doing at Quill - having that training and knowledge enabled our interns to hit the ground running on day one."— Quill.org (Empirical Resolution Inc.)

"...Be aware that your internship overseas will push you outside of your comfort zone. You will be exposed to attitudes and situations that are very different from what you are used to... In addition, despite your best efforts, your job may lack definition and your manager may not know exactly what to do with you. Learning to deal with and make progress in an environment of ambiguity is one of the big learnings from an overseas internship." — CARE

Maintain a learning and professional attitude.

"Be professional. The first week of an internship should be spent 'observing' the office culture and the day-to-day operations of the office you are working in. As an intern you should try and see how best you as an intern can fit."— U.S. Department of State

"In our experience, the key to a successful internship is to start with the attitude that the intern is there to learn and understand our work, and to contribute as part of our team. We've found that interns with that approach are more respectful, listen better, learn more, and end up contributing to our work in much more significant ways because they have taken the time to understand how their work could fit into the team's overall workload. Interns who focus on trying to prove themselves or are focused on what they can accomplish, rather than what they can help the team accomplish, can end up having their work more disconnected from the team's, and thus be less useful." — San Jose City Auditor's Office

Have a passion and an interest in the work of the organization.

"Choose what really interests you and what you are really passionate about. If you believe in what you do, you will succeed." — World Resources Institute

"Among our successful interns, I have observed a professional demeanor, an interest in learning, and empathy for the individuals and communities served by the office. And more on the academic side, strong research and writing skills. For all interns, I also emphasize the importance of asking questions and checking in on assignments when you need guidance/clarity." — Department of Justice

Take time for self-reflection and self-care.

"Be sure to take care of yourself... It's great to volunteer to lead a lot of things and to work hard and care deeply about our kids. But at a certain point it can become too much if you don't take care of yourself too, recharge your own batteries. Whether it's time with friends, exercise, other hobbies, or sleep... you need to raise your hand to select a break as well. Make sure there are some boundaries between work and the rest of your life."— Sequoia High School/ATLAS