

WORK CENTRAL AB

Internship Programs

Building a Program That Benefits Employer and Student

A Career Resource from Work Central AB

Building an Internship Program

A well-run internship program helps you evaluate future talent, build your employer brand with post-secondary students, and access wage subsidy funding. This guide covers how to design an internship program that benefits both your organization and the students you host.

1. Why Build an Internship Program

- Interns can contribute meaningfully to real projects while you evaluate them as potential future full-time hires, reducing hiring risk.
- Partnering with Red Deer Polytechnic and other regional institutions builds long-term relationships that support ongoing recruitment.
- Wage subsidy programs like the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) can offset a significant portion of intern wages, making programs more affordable than many employers expect.

2. Designing a Meaningful Placement

- Define clear learning objectives and real project ownership, not just administrative or menial tasks.
- Assign a dedicated supervisor or mentor who can provide regular feedback and guidance throughout the placement.
- Structure the placement with a beginning, middle, and end - an onboarding period, core project work, and a wrap-up presentation or review.
- Most work-integrated learning placements should run at least 6 weeks, aligning with typical wage subsidy program requirements.

3. Accessing Wage Subsidy Funding

Getting Started With SWPP

- Identify a specific student candidate and a defined role before applying - funding must generally be approved before the placement starts.
- Apply through one of the designated delivery partner organizations for your sector (industry associations often administer SWPP funding for their specific field).
- Funding levels are typically higher for placements involving under-represented students, including first-year students, women in STEM, Indigenous students, newcomers, and persons with disabilities.
- See our Wage Subsidies & Grants guide for more on funding levels and how to apply.

4. Converting Interns to Full-Time Hires

- Communicate early whether a full-time role may be available after graduation, so strong interns understand the potential path.
- Keep in touch with past interns even if you can't offer immediate full-time roles, since your team's needs may change.
- Ask for feedback from interns on their experience - this both improves your program and builds goodwill that supports your employer brand.

5. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Assigning interns only low-value administrative tasks, which limits both their development and your ability to properly evaluate their potential.
- Failing to apply for wage subsidy funding before the placement begins, which forfeits eligibility.
- Under-resourcing supervision - interns need meaningfully more guidance and feedback than experienced hires.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Common Questions

Do interns need to be paid? In Alberta, most work placements must be paid unless they meet specific narrow exemptions tied to formal academic co-op requirements - confirm current employment standards before proceeding.

How many interns can we host at once? This depends on your organization's capacity to provide meaningful supervision - quality of experience matters more than volume for both your evaluation of talent and your employer brand.

Can a small business access SWPP funding? Yes - SWPP is open to employers of varying sizes, including small and medium-sized businesses, through designated delivery partner organizations.

Internship Program Checklist

- ✓ Defined a meaningful project and clear learning objectives for the placement
- ✓ Assigned a dedicated supervisor or mentor
- ✓ Applied for SWPP or other wage subsidy funding before the placement began
- ✓ Built in a structured onboarding and wrap-up process
- ✓ Established a plan for staying connected with strong interns after the placement ends

Build Your Team With Work Central AB

Connect with post-secondary talent across the region by posting internship opportunities at **workcentralab.ca/employers**.