



Best Practices for Lead Educators

SUMMER INTERNS

Having summer interns in an Extension office can be an incredibly valuable experience—for both the interns and the educators who supervise them. Here are best practices to help supervising educators create a successful, enriching, and organized internship experience.

BEST PRACTICES

BEFORE THE INTERNSHIP BEGINS

1. Define Clear Goals & Outcomes

- Determine what you want the intern to learn and accomplish.
- Create a position description with roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes.
- Identify one or two major projects and smaller recurring tasks.

2. Prepare the Environment

- Arrange for workspace, computer access, name tag, email, and any needed credentials.
- Plan an orientation packet or guide with office procedures, policies, and contact info.

3. Build a Schedule

- Include major events (fairs, camps, field days), learning opportunities, and office hours.
- Leave flexibility for spontaneous Extension activities and learning moments.

DURING THE INTERNSHIP

4. Start with a Strong Onboarding

- Introduce them to the team and the role of Extension in the community.
- Review the internship goals, office expectations, and how their work connects to the mission.

5. Provide Meaningful Work

- Involve them in planning and delivering programs, writing articles, developing materials, or engaging with community partners.
- Offer opportunities to shadow multiple educators across disciplines (4-H, ANR, FCS, Community Development).

6. Weekly Check-Ins

- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings to check progress, offer feedback, and address questions.
- Encourage reflection on what they're learning and how it aligns with their interests or career goals.

7. Mentorship Mindset

- Be approachable and available.
- Share your own career path, challenges, and joys of Extension work.
- Encourage networking with other Extension professionals.

8. Build Professional Skills

- Provide training or experiences in communication, teamwork, time management, and community engagement.
- Help them practice writing impact statements or giving presentations.

WRAPPING UP THE INTERNSHIP

9. Create a Capstone or Final Reflection

- Have them give a presentation or write a report on their summer experiences and learning.
- Include a reflection on how the internship influenced their career goals.

10. Offer Constructive Feedback

- Do a final evaluation together: what went well, what could improve, what's next for them.

11. Keep the Connection Going

- Write a letter of recommendation if applicable.
- Invite them to future events or stay connected on professional networks.

BONUS TIPS

- **Celebrate success:** A small potluck, certificate, or recognition during a staff meeting goes a long way.
- **Balance productivity and fun:** Interns should feel like part of the team, not just assistants.
- **Include them in the “why”:** Help them understand how Extension makes an impact and why their contributions matter.

SUMMER INTERN ONBOARDING CHECKLIST (FOR SUPERVISING EDUCATORS)

BEFORE ARRIVAL

- Position description finalized and shared
- Workspace arranged (desk, computer, phone, supplies)
- Email and login credentials requested
- Office access details arranged
- Schedule draft created with major events, meetings, and office hours
- Welcome packet prepared (office map, Extension overview, key contacts)
- Staff informed of intern's arrival

FIRST DAY / WEEK

- Office tour and staff introductions
- Overview of Extension's mission, local programming, and structure
- Review position description, schedule, and expectations
- Discuss dress code, timekeeping, and office protocols
- Review safety procedures and emergency contacts
- Provide access to shared drives, calendars, and resources
- Assign a mentor or point-of-contact (if not you)
- Begin initial training or shadowing opportunities

ONGOING

- Schedule weekly check-ins
- Engage intern in team meetings and community events
- Provide opportunities for cross-discipline learning
- Encourage journal or log of daily experiences
- Offer feedback and encouragement regularly

END OF INTERNSHIP

- Final presentation or project wrap-up
- Evaluation meeting with feedback
- Collect intern's feedback on their experience
- Write a recommendation letter (if appropriate)
- Celebrate their contributions (potluck, thank-you note, certificate)

WEEKLY REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INTERNS

Use during check-ins or as a written journaling prompt.

Week 1-2: Getting Settled

- What have you learned about Extension that surprised or inspired you?
- What are you most excited about doing this summer?
- What support do you need to feel successful in your role?

Weeks 3-5: Digging Deeper

- Which experiences have challenged you the most so far? Why?
- What skills are you developing through your work?
- How have you seen Extension make a difference in the community?

Weeks 6-8: Reflecting on Growth

- What project or activity are you most proud of?
- How has this internship influenced your career thinking?
- In what ways have you grown personally and professionally?

Final Week

- What advice would you give to a future intern?
- What would you like to learn more about if you had more time?
- What does “making an impact” mean to you after this experience?

TOP TIPS FOR WORKING WITH TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS (GEN Z)

1. Be Purpose-Driven

- **They want to make a difference.** Help them see how their work matters.
- Link tasks and projects to real-world impact, especially in communities.

"This project isn't just paperwork—it helps families make healthier choices."

2. Communicate Clearly & Often

- Use direct, transparent communication. They appreciate honesty and clarity.
- Break large tasks into clear steps, and provide regular feedback.
- Don't ghost them—timely responses help build trust.

3. Leverage Their Tech Skills

- They're digital natives. Involve them in social media, data visualization, or tech-based projects.
- Invite them to teach you a new app or platform—build mutual respect through shared learning.

4. Create Opportunities for Autonomy

- They value independence. Let them lead a piece of a project, design an activity, or present ideas.
- Provide a safe environment for taking initiative—even if it means learning through mistakes.

5. Show Flexibility

- A rigid 8–5 schedule doesn't always align with their productivity rhythms.
- When possible, offer flexible work options or hybrid opportunities that prioritize outcomes over clocking in.

6. Offer Frequent Feedback & Encouragement

- Gen Z craves feedback—but not just criticism. They want to grow and know what they're doing well.
- Use both formal (check-ins) and informal (quick praise or redirection) feedback.

7. Be Real

- They value authenticity and vulnerability from mentors.
- Share your own challenges and learning moments—it builds trust and relatability.

8. Support Mental Health & Wellbeing

- They're more open about discussing mental health—and appreciate when you are too.
- Promote a culture of grace, check in on their stress levels, and normalize self-care.

9. Encourage Collaboration Over Competition

- They often prefer teamwork and shared success over hierarchy.
- Facilitate group work or peer learning and celebrate collective wins.

10. Make Room for Their Voice

- Ask for their input—and take it seriously.
- Invite them to debrief programs, suggest improvements, or co-create outreach strategies.