# SO YOU WANT TO HIRE AN INTERN OR CO-OP?

A "Quick Start" Guide to Starting and Growing a Co-op or Internship Program

Starting an internship or co-op program can seem intimidating, especially for smaller companies where everyone wears a lot of hats and there's not always an official policy or procedure for how things get done. Partnerships with local colleges and universities are the best way to start connecting with candidates – beyond that, here are some field-tested best practices to help you get up and running in no time!

MANUAL
COOP / INTERNSHIP
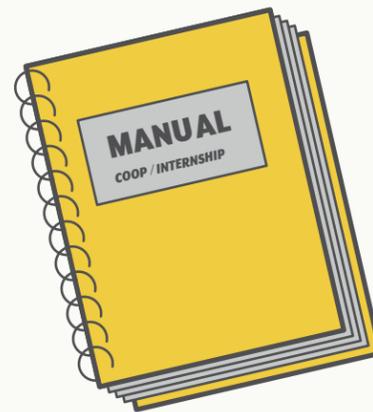
For the purposes of this study, we're talking about:

Definitions
*(Just so we're all on the same page)*

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION (CO-OP) =
Full-time (35 hrs. per week), paid, supervised, rotational professional experiences for students; ongoing rotations of semesters or quarters dedicated to school or work

INTERNSHIPS =
Part-time or full-time, supervised professional experiences for students, often completed while simultaneously taking classes; may be paid or unpaid if working for a non-profit organization

Methodology *(Best practices according to who?)*

4
WORKSHOPS IN

4
CITIES ACROSS OHIO

OH-IO!

65
CO-OP/INTERNSHIP EMPLOYERS FROM MORE THAN

15
UNIQUE INDUSTRY SECTORS

FUTURE EMPLOYER

50
COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY FACULTY/ STAFF REPRESENTING

24
UNIQUE INSTITUTIONS
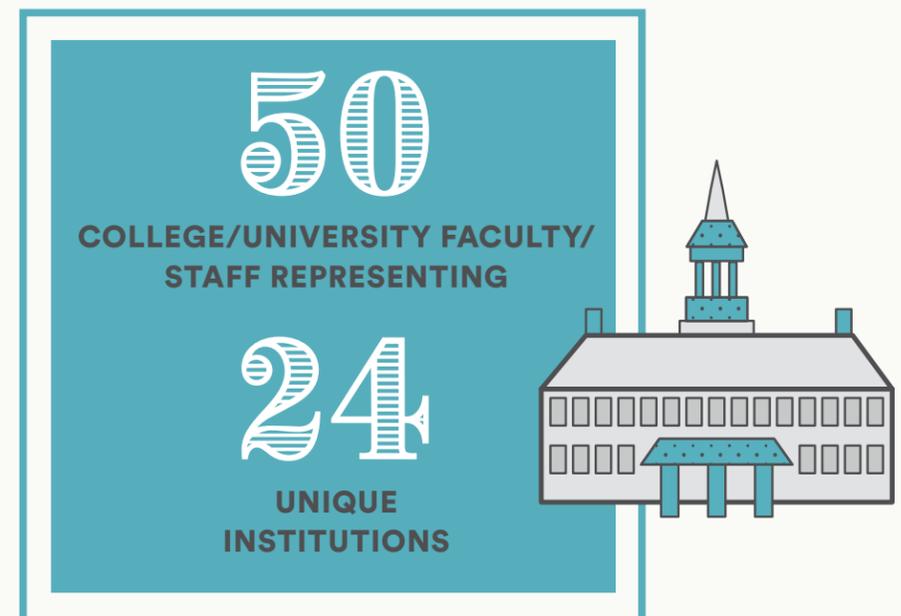
More than **1,250** qualitative responses

Bradley, Damschroder – University of Cincinnati, 2016

BIG IDEAS for QUICK WINS:

1 Define and articulate what your organization hopes to accomplish by building a program – what does success look like?

2 Organizations report a higher ROI with hiring co-ops and interns when adopting the mindset of building a recruitment pipeline (rather than sporadic or overload hiring)

RECRUITMENT PIPELINE

3 Academic calendars and timelines don't always directly align with those in industry. It's typically best to be thinking about and planning for co-op/intern hiring at least 3 months prior to the season you plan to hire for. Recruitment, hiring, and evaluating is an ongoing process, so it's possible to build in reoccurring or cyclical activities.

4 Onboarding and training are often underserved – companies/organizations usually offer something short on day one, but "ongoing onboarding" or training in small segments throughout the semester can have a stronger impact.

5 Building an impactful relationship between universities and companies that hire co-ops/interns requires ongoing brand-building and multiple touchpoints beyond a career.

BUILD YOUR BRAND HERE

6 A well-written company and job description are the most effective first line of initial "screening" to get the right candidates.

7 A standard "welcome packet" with general policies, expectations, program goals, and a company map or seating chart for all co-ops/interns can be a simple but powerful tool for getting them up and running quickly.

8 Assigning both a supervisor AND a mentor (with different roles) is a great way to increase on-the-job performance throughout the term; students may informally develop mentorship from other sources, but an assigned mentor creates a "safe-space" if informal mentorship doesn't happen organically.

MENTOR

9 Conducting simple "exit research" with co-ops/interns (formal or informal) to measure how the experience met their expectations can be a great tool for continuous improvement of a company's program.

10 Staying engaged with former co-ops/interns between semesters has a strong impact on their potential to return for another semester (and re-integration when they return).

EXIT SURVEY

BAD — GOOD
BAD — GOOD
BAD — GOOD
BAD — GOOD
BAD — GOOD
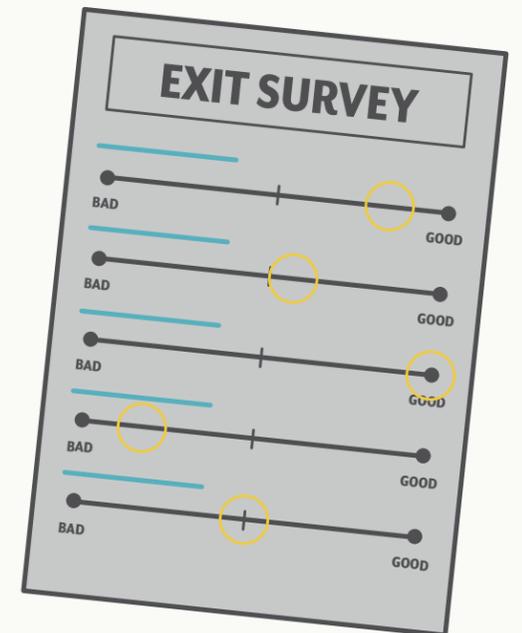
STAY ENGAGED!

SECTION 1:

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First Things First

Envision Your Program -

Tell me your hopes, dreams, and goals...

1 Start with Why – what does your organization hope to accomplish by hiring co-ops/interns? What would it take for you to end the semester saying it was a success?

2 Try to set realistic expectations based on the hours a student will work, the level of students you're recruiting, and the learning curve of your particular industry or company.

3 Titles can be interchanged, but not always - define and articulate what your organization considers a co-op vs. an intern. If you plan to have both, what are expectations and requirements of each, and what makes them different?

> **When thinking about who to recruit, an emphasis on student skills (not just their major) can translate a stronger pool of candidates.**

4 Does your budget allow you to hire more than one student per semester? Having peers with shared experiences can increase their productivity, job satisfaction, and the attractiveness of re-locating to a new city.

START WITH WHY

San Fransisco
I <3 NY
L.A.
CHICAGO

№1 PRO TIP

> Hiring a less experienced candidates and a more experienced candidate at the same time can help create the ongoing "pipeline" of students who return for a second semester, and allow the more experienced student to serve as the mentor to a less experienced student.

Build Your Brand on Campus –

Tell (sell) your story

1 Put faces with names - build relationships with the people sending the candidates resumes (professors, career services staff, etc.). They'll be better equipped to promote your company to students, and you'll feel more comfortable asking questions or reaching out if there's a concern.

2 Career fairs are an obvious choice for on-campus recruitment and dates are usually published well in advance. If possible, send multiple reps from different departments and levels (HR, department management, a current co-op/intern, student, etc.)

CAREER FAIR!

> **Students report that the appearance of a company's table or booth, promotional items, etc. has a strong impact on their perception of your brand.**

3 Don't be a stranger! When visiting campus, multiple touch points is more valuable than one "big" visit. Consider engaging with events on campus beyond career fairs – such as:

- *Visiting classes as a panelist or guest speaker - provide students with tips for getting a job anywhere (especially your company)*

- *Offering lunch and learns related to trends or current events in the industry (not just your company)*

- *Etiquette dinners with juniors and seniors*

- *Serving as a mock interviewer for a professional development class or student organization*

4 Get social! Join/follow schools and programs on LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media platforms; engage in or start conversations online.

5 Online presence = first impressions.
Make sure your company website is up to date!

Nº2 PRO TIP

Club sponsorship of an event, or offering scholarships (even small ones) goes a long way to build goodwill and word-of-mouth brand awareness among students.

Job Descriptions and Interviewing –

Let's meet the candidates!

1 A well-crafted and engaging company and job description can be your most powerful first line of screening to attract the right candidates. If your boilerplate descriptions haven't been updated in a while, it might be time to draft a new version that tells just how awesome your company is!

2 Consider "pre-testing" (something to complete beyond the application and resume), especially if it's a highly technical role or requires specific software proficiency.

3 When screening candidates, remember that on-campus and involvement and extra-curricular activities can often paint a better picture of the student than GPA alone.

4 Don't forget to mention potential challenges in the interview, not just the "fun stuff" – paint a realistic picture so students can self-evaluate their fit.

5 Involve representatives from multiple departments or roles in interviews, not just the supervisor(s); former or outgoing interns/co-ops are great at this!

6 Skype or Facetime can be more personal and effective than a phone interview for a first round or remote interviewing.

7 Think location - On campus interviewing is easier for students, but on-site at your organization gives them a chance to experience company culture first-hand, and may be easier for involving multiple interviewers

A dedicated "hiring event" or day can help you streamline and block employees time.

Pre-Hire Engagement –

They said "yes"! ...but they don't start until next semester...

Engaging with students prior to their start date can help them build anticipation and begin the process of feeling like part of the team. A few simple touch points can make their actual first day a lot smoother, and their first week a lot more productive. Some ideas include:

- *Sending a "welcome pack" with company information, first-day paperwork, and a branded company gift to their home via mail prior to start date.*

- *Invitations to an on-campus or on-site lunch with current co-ops or interns and/or their future supervisor.*

- *Sending a list of "standard software" or office tools that the co-op/intern will be using on daily basis (such as MS Outlook, design programs, etc.) before they start will give them a chance to start practicing if they don't already have experience.*

WELCOME
TO OUR COMPANY

NEW HIRE PAPERWORK

Section 1 CLOSING THOUGHTS

The first steps of any project or journey are always the hardest, but once you've got the ball rolling with campus recruitment, interviews, and making offers, you're ready to start thinking about actually putting your new hires to work. *Let's move on to Section 2: Let's Get to Work!*

SECTION 2:

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LET'S GET TO WORK!

On-Boarding –

Welcome to the Family!

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Treating a co-op or intern's first day as you would a new full-time employee is any easy way to communicate that they're a valuable part of the team.

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1 Make it obvious that "we knew you were coming", this includes:

- *Simple things like having a designated place to sit (including a chair and a desk that isn't littered with outdated copies of employer manuals or promotional materials from the 1990's).*

- *If a computer is required to do the job, make sure there's one ready for them, including a working login, access to necessary files/servers, and a designated e-mail address (even if it's an alias like "intern@ yourcompany.com").*

- *Make sure the student's supervisor has been determined BEFORE they arrive, and knows they'll be the supervisor...*

- *Send a company or department wide e-mail introducing the new co-op(s) or intern(s). Including their school, year and major, where they're sitting or who they'll primarily be working with, and a few "fun facts" about them to help start conversations when meeting new people.*

- *A free set of simple office supplies like a notebook, colored post-its, and fancy pens can be pretty exciting to a financially strapped college student...*

SUPERVISOR

1

YOU'VE GOT MAIL!

2 Seating logistics are often overlooked, but can play a major role in morale and connectedness; try to avoid the "intern corner" or closet – let students sit with other employees on the team so they can integrate more effectively.

3 Some kind of formal orientation is an obvious first step to getting started. If hiring multiple co-ops or interns in a semester, coordinating a common start date can help streamline the orientation process.

4 High value orientations for co-ops and interns include a discussion of "unwritten" policies like dress code, company culture, and lunch time habits, along with traditional orientation topics like formal policies and procedures.

№4
PRO TIP

Consider creating a "Welcome Binder" with universal information for any co-op or intern; building and updating this could be a great project for an outgoing co-op or intern

WELCOME BINDER

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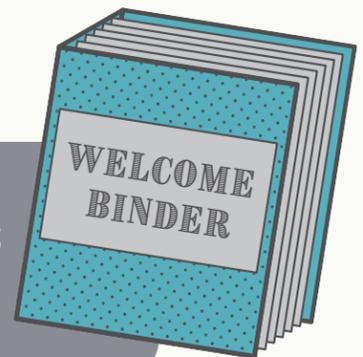
"I'm supposed to take this to Dan, but there's 5 Dan's on this floor..." Help students avoid embarrassing moments by providing a seating chart or office diagram with everyone's name at their work areas.

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ON-BOARDING!

5 Welcome to town! Some students will be relocating for co-op or internship positions, and might need some help with basics like where to find grocery stores, gas stations, and restaurants. Beyond that, some suggestions of "what to do for fun", and maybe even a gift card as a welcoming present can be a nice bonus.

6 Have a lunch or small "welcome reception" with breakfast or late afternoon snacks on the first day; invite anyone that will work with the student(s).

7 Assigning both a supervisor AND a mentor (with different roles) is a great way to increase on-the-job performance throughout the term; students may informally develop mentorship from other sources, but an assigned mentor creates a "safe-space" if informal mentorship doesn't happen organically. Returning co-ops/interns have potential as formal or informal mentors.

8 Provide students with a simple explanation of "billable hours", or the basic business model for how your organization makes money - It helps them see how their time translates to the company's profitability. This may be the first time they've had a job where "time is money".
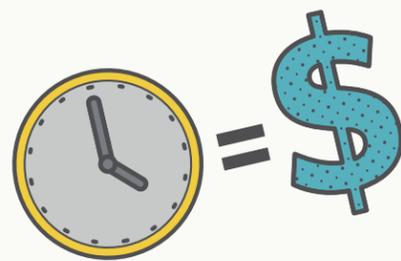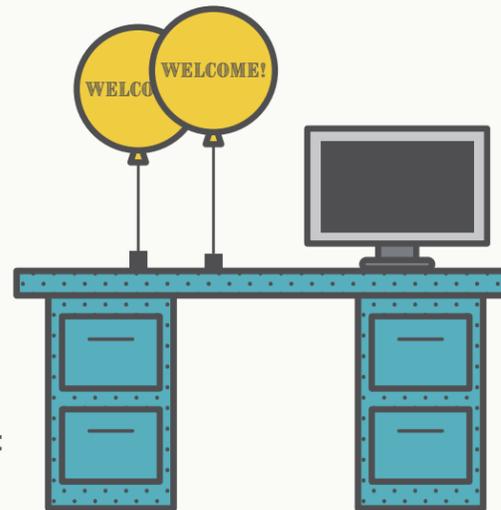
Maximize Productivity –

Working Smarter

1 Take time early in the semester to set and articulate expectations of a student's work. The more clearly they know what you're hoping for, the easier it is for them to meet the bar. Specific examples of final documents, visual work, presentation files, etc. can be great tools for getting on the same page.

2 Most university programs will require the student to set a few goals for their own personal growth or accomplishments throughout the semester, and you will probably have some company goals. Discuss these early, but consider waiting a few weeks to finalize them to help the student better understand the organization and their role, and help you determine what's realistic.

MY GOALS
1. BE AWESOME
2. LEARN STUFF
3. DO GREAT WORK
4. HAVE A GREAT INTERNSHIP

>>>>>>>>

Students need some positive reinforcement and a chance to see the fruits of their labor, and a semester can come and go pretty quickly when a long-term project may not come to a close for several years. Be sure to set a few goals or "small wins" for the student that are attainable within the first half of the semester, even if they're incremental goals towards a larger project.

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3 A daily (or at least a few days a week) 5 minute "standing meeting" (literally...meet standing up so it's short) at the beginning of the day can help to set the tone for accountability and prioritization of tasks.

№5 PRO TIP

Consider a central repository of ongoing projects that co-ops or interns can work on in between major assignments or deliverables.

4 Exposure to multiple facets of the company, even if a short shadowing experience, helps students see the big picture and better understand how they fit into it. It can also be helpful for them to see a different area of the company that interests them for the future if their initial experience doesn't end up being what they anticipated.

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Special/Additional "Intern Projects" - The jury is still out on having students complete a specific "Intern Project" that isn't directly useable or related to something the company will actually use. In cases where work is covered by non-disclosure policies, these projects can be helpful to give the student work they can share in a future interview or portfolio. Beyond that, special projects (even if they're "cool") that don't actually get used by the company can feel like busywork.

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INTERN PROJECT

№6 PRO TIP

Consider creating a "passport" or scavenger hunt style activity that interns have to complete throughout the term, requiring them to meet with a variety of people in the company

PASSPORT

TO OUR COMPANY

5 Students generally report that they enjoy giving presentations to groups at the company – it's one of the most commonly cited "most valuable experiences" in reflective meetings and when answering questions in future interviews.

6 Who's the Boss? Set clear expectations of who the co-op or intern is ultimately accountable to from a supervision and work priority standpoint; who gets the "last word" on what should come first if multiple people ask them for help on something .

- *Defining a back-up or "number 2" can be helpful for occasions when their primary supervisor is out of the office, especially if the supervisor frequently travels for extended periods. As a bonus - Serving as the secondary supervisor can be a great training tool for future managers!*
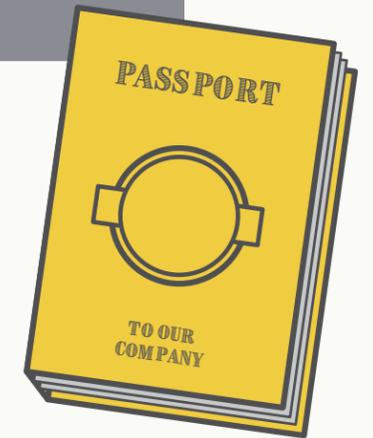
Real-Time Feedback-

How's it Going?

Negative feedback at the end of the semester without prior awareness of an issue is a common frustration voiced by both students AND employers

- *Weekly or bi-weekly briefings and/or "mini-assessments" can help both parties track progress, and make the end of semester evaluation much easier!*

- *Regular check-ins to for formal and informal feedback makes it much easier to have a mid-semester course correction if expectations aren't being met (on either side).*

☐ BI-WEEKLY MEETING TODAY 2:30 PM
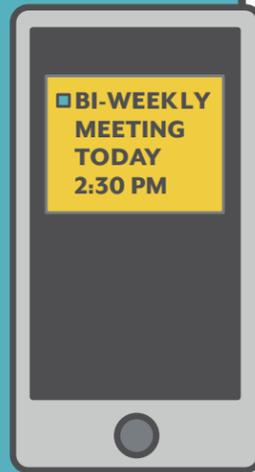
№7 PRO TIP

A formal mid-semester evaluation can be beneficial for the academic portion of the student's experience, and the perfect time to start the informal conversation about their interest in returning for future co-ops/ internships or full-time positions if offered.

Get Connected –

All work and no play makes Jack a dull intern...

1 Regular lunch & learns across the company (both on and off sight) are any easy way to facilitate connections, and foster professional development for both the students and full-time employees.

LUNCH & LEARN

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Free food brings people together... consider organized lunches with other co-ops/interns, new hires, managers, and others 2-3 times throughout semester to expand professional and networks and build personal connections to the company. Need help with table conversation? Start by having current employees share their backgrounds and how they ended up in their current roles.

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2 Establishing a "cohort" of recent hires and co-ops/interns can build a sense of camaraderie and informal sharing of experiences.

3 Setting up regular opportunities for social events or gatherings that connect students to others in the company, their industry, and city can be a powerful stimulant to their professional growth. Consider group outings to explore the city and culture, introduce them to professional organizations, or engage with community service projects.

End of Term Evaluations –

Does this count for a grade?

1

An end of term summarizing/capstone presentation to company leadership can benefit everyone involved. With the right guidance and invitations:

- *Students reflect on and articulate what they've accomplished and gained. Bonus – presenting to this audience is another great step in their professional growth!*

- *Co-op/Intern supervisors have tangible evidence and reminders of accomplishments to help inform the final evaluation.*

- *Senior management, HR, and others in the organization can see first-hand what an asset co-ops and interns can be to the organization.*

Some companies prefer to use the same review documents and procedures they would for a full-time employee – some prefer a simple exit interview with a few questions about what the student liked/disliked the most, their biggest "takeaways", their perception of culture, etc. Some use both!

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Having students complete a self-evaluation is an effective way to identify potential gaps between their expectations and your perception of their experience

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2

Direct supervisors will probably have the best picture of a student's performance, but getting feedback from other employees can take off some of the pressure and avoid having an entire review off one person's experience. A simple survey (electronic or physical) with can facilitate quick and consistent gathering of documented feedback.

№8
PRO TIP

Evaluations can be a two-way street; some organization have students complete a formal evaluation of their experience to inform potential program improvements.

← STUDENT

EVALUATIONS

EMPLOYER →

Section 2 CLOSING THOUGHTS

Time flies when you're having fun – before you know it, both you and your intern or co-op will look at the calendar and realize it's almost time for them to head back to campus. Hopefully it's been a great fit for everyone and you can't imagine life without their contributions to your team. Or maybe it's been a good learning experience, but you're headed in a different direction. Either way, having a plan to address what's next will avoid an awkward last day. *Let's move on to Section 3: Future Planning*

SECTION 3:

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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Future Planning -

So Long, or See You Next Time?

1 A formal exit interview provides the perfect forum for feedback (both ways), and a more serious conversation about the potential of future opportunities.

EXIT INTERVIEW

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Sometimes things are "up in the air". If there's a potential for a student to return in the future but you're not quite able to make it a formal offer, be transparent and honest about the timeframe for a decision. If the student needs pursue other potential jobs, waiting too long to start can put them at a disadvantage amongst their peers.

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2 Be sure to verify the student's contact information before leaving so you can stay in touch between terms or follow up if anything is left outstanding. Some students use their school e-mail address exclusively, some use a personal address, phone numbers may change, etc.

3 If possible, scheduling a few "transition days" with overlap between the outgoing and incoming co-ops/interns can make for a much smoother hand-off, even if they're just a few hours of part-time work before or after the term from either party.

YOU'RE INVITED
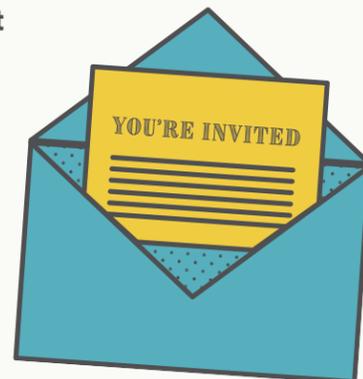
4 Invitation to company events (holiday party, company events, etc.) after the student returns to campus are an easy way to stay in touch if you see a future for the relationship.

5 Direct supervisors will probably have the best picture of a student's performance, but getting feedback from other employees can take off some of the pressure and avoid having an entire review off one person's experience. A simple survey (electronic or physical) with can facilitate quick and consistent

FINAL EVALUATION

COMPLETE!

FINAL CLOSING THOUGHTS

While there's no formula for building the perfect co-op or internship program, leveraging the best practices and tips from this report should help to de-mystify the process and provide some actionable ideas for building or refining a program that works best for your organization. Maintaining a strong program is a continuous process; invested relationships with the schools you recruit from, and on-going feedback from the students you hire can help you stay ahead of the curve. Consider this guide as a starting point, or another "tool" in your toolbox for building the ideal program; share it with human resources professionals in your organization, co-op and intern supervisors and mentors, and the academic intuitions you partner with. And if you're hungry for more resources, consider checking out some of the sites listed on the next page:

WANT MORE RESOURCES?
YOU MIGHT LIKE THESE!

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Ohio Cooperative Education Association (OCEA)

Cooperative Education & Internship Association (CEIA)

US Department of Labor – Criteria for Unpaid Internships

InternQube - An extensive set of resources compiled and edited by Michael True, Internship Center Director, Messiah College

University of Cincinnati Division of Experience-Based Learning and Career Education