



House Congressional Summer Paid Internship Guidelines

Overview

Thanks to FY 2019 appropriations bill, each personal office will have an additional \$20,000 available for use in paying interns. While these funds are not sufficient to pay for all your intern needs, they can help open the door to students who otherwise would be unable to apply.

We recommend that you prioritize providing financial support to students who need help. In addition, we recommend that you highlight the availability of compensation in your employment announcements and on your website to increase the volume, quality, and diversity of the applicants.

The following guide describes how to operationalize these recommendations. Specifically, it discusses how to identify students with financial needs, how to set pay levels, and what costs to cover.

Identifying Financial Need

We recommend each office use Pell grant eligibility as a way to determine whether a prospective intern has demonstrated financial need. This is a standard already in use by the federal government, and dozens of offices on the Hill already require applicants to have received a Pell Grant or be Pell Grant-eligible prior to qualifying for a paid internship.

The applicant can show proof by:

- Including a copy of their FAFSA statement or another document stating they receive/and or are eligible for a Pell grant.
- We recommend providing an optional prompt on the application for the application to confidentially state the financial circumstances that would prevent them from taking an unpaid internship, with the understanding that whether or not they receive funding would be at the discretion of the Congressional office.

Interns should also be asked to disclose any other programs they may be a part of, what these programs entail, and if these programs allow applicants to receive additional compensation. For example, CHCI fellows receive a stipend from the fellowship and are not eligible for other payments.

We understand that some offices may feel uncomfortable with having paid and unpaid interns. However, evenly dividing the funds or setting a low stipend amount can have inequitable results and undermine the purpose of a paid internship. **We recommend providing sufficient assistance for an intern to be able to live in D.C. for the time they are in your office**, even if it means that others interns are paid less or go unpaid.

How Much To Pay

It is important to remember that low-income students will have additional costs to cover beyond living and working in D.C. For example, they may need to purchase professional clothes, cover travel costs, professional food-related expenses (such as going out with the team from work for lunch), and so on.

Interns also have different costs depending on the time of year they are working due to term models that each office utilizes. Some offices have two summer sessions with each intern class in DC for about 6-7 weeks. Other offices have a full summer term that can start in late May or early June and lasts until late July or early August.

At a minimum, our suggestions for a baseline Summer session salary are:

- **Short Summer Term: \$2,500-\$3,500+**
- **Summer Long term: \$3,000-\$5,600+**

These amounts should be considered a fair starting point but must be recognized as not enough to cover students with true financial needs. **One metric some may consider is using the Washington, D.C. minimum wage, currently \$13.25.**

The Nuts and Bolts of Paying Interns

Congressional staff is paid on a once-a-month basis. Give close consideration to how you structure when interns are paid, keep in mind the costs they must carry, and make it clear in advance when the intern can expect to be paid.

Enroll the intern in transit benefits, when appropriate. While unpaid interns are ineligible, paid interns are eligible for these benefits. Interns must purchase transit fares with their own funds and submit receipts for reimbursement. The employing office must submit information to the Office of Financial Counseling in B215 Longworth. For more information, visit the HouseNet Transit Benefits Page or contact house.transit@dot.gov (202-225-1435).

College Credits

One of the main values of internships is that they can be educational. As such, the last two decades have seen a steady rise of employers who offer college credits in lieu of payment. Pay Our Interns is generally against this practice because it means that not only are interns working for free, but they usually have to pay thousands of dollars in tuition to receive this credit.

However, we understand some higher education institutions require internship experience or actively encourage it as part of degree requirements. If there is an applicant who needs college credit and qualifies for a stipend, we encourage offices to allow for both. Keep in mind that it may not always be possible to provide credit and receive compensation due to some university specific policies, so offices should consider it on a case to case basis. Our team is actively meeting with institutions to ensure they're doing their part to not create these barriers as well.

Additional Items

- Please ensure you are transparent and note that compensation is available. Young adults who cannot afford to intern without pay will not apply for your internship if it does not explicitly mention it is a paid opportunity.
- While every office can pay their interns with MRA funds, this additional pool of appropriated money is only available for interns who work in the D.C. office.
- The costs for a constituent to intern for your office can differ depending on which states the interns are from, i.e. the difference in travel fare from Idaho to D.C. and from Maryland to D.C.
- Target diverse institutions. It is not unusual for prospective applicants to rule themselves out of an internship because of fear of the cost. It is worth making special outreach to historically underrepresented communities. If you have a historically black college or university, tribal college, community college, state school or Hispanic serving institution in your district, they are excellent places for targeted outreach. Please note that these schools often do not have the same career resources as private institutions and may not know about the new funding.
- If there are receptions that are also open to interns, let your interns know. The money that they save on meals can go towards another expense.

Conclusion

Every office will have different resources and needs, but we believe this guide will help create and expand office intern programs with the best practices possible. We look forward to working with offices to work towards increasing the number of resources available and to amplify existing paid programs. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please do not hesitate to contact our office at info@payourinterns.com.

Best,
Pay Our Interns