



Local Government Internships in Florida – A Brief Toolkit

A publication of the Florida City and County Management Association

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Introduction

In 2018, The Florida City and County Management Association (FCCMA) first envisioned a resource for local governments to launch, maintain, and/or grow their internship programs. Drawing upon the resources and members of FCCMA's *Professional Development Committee* and *Membership Committee*, the Internship Toolkit Subcommittee convened in 2019. Through this collaboration, the Subcommittee chose to develop an approximate 10-page quick-reference toolkit to highlight best practices and examples from Florida-based organizations, while also providing links to other resources, such as the ICMA Internship Guide, for supplemental information (See Appendix).

To execute this, a questionnaire was developed and sent to FCCMA members, requesting City and County Managers to provide details regarding their internship programs, touching on various topics. With overwhelmingly positive feedback, the Committee reviewed all the responses and highlighted some of them here for the benefit of the reader, à la carte study style. All responses and materials provided by questionnaire respondents will also be made available online.

It is our hope that this toolkit can serve as a springboard to those looking to launch an internship program within their municipalities, or to help improve existing programs throughout Florida. ■

Why You Should Have Interns

Fresh Ideas and Perspectives / Energy / Giving Back to the Community / Outreach Mechanism

Internship programs offer many benefits, not only to the interns gaining dynamic local government experience, but also to the local government organizations themselves, who host and mentor interns and engage emerging and young professionals in meaningful projects with a valuable end-product. Host communities have reported fresh perspectives and renewed energy within their community as a result of their internship programs. There are so many new opportunities that are brought about with the launch of an internship program, and it is our hope that your organization will take advantage of the invaluable advice from your peer communities in this guide.

Sarasota County:

Q: How has your organization benefited from hosting interns? Welcoming interns into our organized forced us to re-evaluate and get creative with recruitment efforts and targeting specific demographics. Having the interns here introduced talent to our workforce that brought in fresh, new ideas, perspective and energy.

Q: How has your community benefited from having interns in the organization? As employees of local county government, all of the work we conduct affects and benefits the community in some way. One example is the work completed by our Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources interns. They mapped the mangrove trails using kayaks which had never been done before in our area and they also cleared invasive species from popular trails used by citizens within our community.

Collier County

Q: How has your organization benefited from hosting interns? Interns have participated in a variety of projects within the County, enabling those projects to be completed in a shorter timeframe. It also gives our employees the opportunity to enhance their training, coaching, and communication skills while helping the interns learn more about the different kinds of jobs available in county government.

Q: How has your community benefited from having interns in the organization? An internship

provides students with an experiential learning opportunity. For many students, the internship is their first job experience, so it gives them the opportunity to develop basic work ethic, customer service, and professional skills. These skills will be helpful as students graduate and become working members of the community.

Q: How have interns benefited from participating in your organization? The objectives of the internship are to provide each student with an opportunity to develop their academic, career and personal development skills and provide them with an opportunity to develop networking skills. The program objectives include:

- To provide each student with an opportunity to engage in the practical experiences found in the operations of Collier County and its various programs while helping the student to increase his/her knowledge and skills at the face-to-face, supervisory and executive levels of leadership.
- To create experiences that help each student to understand the duties and responsibilities of Collier County team members.
- To assist each student in identifying his/her professional strengths and weaknesses.
- To assist the college, university or high school in evaluation of the student's performance.

- To promote an environment in which Collier County team members and the students exchange information, which includes new and updated concepts.

Punta Gorda

Q: How has your organization benefited from hosting interns? We have used interns in multiple areas within City operations, including Police, Water and Wastewater Treatment, City Administration, Finance, and the CHNEP (Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Program). Each department has used them in various roles, generally as special projects specialists, or as on the job training with an intent to eventually hire them, if they choose to apply. We have had great success in hiring interns who have served at the Police Department and at the Water Treatment Plant.

Those that have been assigned to project activities have produced high quality products, ranging from research related to the environment (CHNEP); whether or not the City should allow smoking in its parks; and consideration of whether or not the City should partner with local government agencies in health clinics for our employees.

When an intern is hired by the City, this person already knows how our organization works; and we know the individual. They assimilate and adjust to being a part of City operations much more quickly and smoothly.

Q: How has your community benefited from having interns in the organization? The most direct community benefit has been enabling our organization to “get” to things that would otherwise have taken up regular staff time. This, in turn, allows regular staff to continue to provide excellent customer service to the community without additional duties tying them up from their regular jobs.

Q: How have interns benefited from participating in your organization? In many cases interns have been able to secure employment with the City. Those that worked on special projects were able to use the projects for school credit, in one case as a capstone project for his Master’s degree. ■

Finding Interns

One of the most important steps in developing your internship program is attracting qualified talent with an interest in public service and/or local government. The good news is that interns come in all types! Local governments have hosted high school, undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate interns and have yielded success at all the various levels of qualification. Ultimately, the goal is to attract talent that will best suit the needs of your community. Next steps will be to develop your recruitment strategies based on the type(s) of interns you want to attract to your organization.

There are many recruitment strategies available to assist in attracting the best talent to your internship program. Many local government entities have demonstrated success in utilizing online job boards and web-based portals as well as partnering with local schools and universities to form relationships that will foster greater success in recruitment.

High School

Cutler Bay

For the last six (6) years, the Town has hosted an iPrep Executive Internship Program with our local

high school Juniors. Each year, the Town benefits from the tech-savvy business talents that these students acquire from the iPrep Academy. They

assist with developing special event flyers, virtual presentations and announcements (i.e., newsletters, brochures, etc.) and their subsequent distribution at special events, Town Hall meetings, etc. The Executive Interns also unite their skills and work together to create the Town’s Relay for Life of South Dade Team, where they’ve successfully raised over \$1,000 in funds supporting the American Cancer Society every year.

Q: Which techniques does Cutler Bay use to recruit interns?

A: Prior to the end of every academic year, the iPrep Executive Interns are required to produce a presentation, describing the Department they were assigned to. They go into detail about the role of their Department, their mission and goals, and how the Department contributes to the overall success of the Town as an organization. Additionally, they each have a set of questions they need to answer within their presentations, such as: what the biggest lessons learned were or what their strongest takeaways were from their internship experience. They also need to detail what they would do differently, if they could do it all over again. These presentations are performed in front of the high school sophomores in the iPrep Academy (a.k.a the incoming interns) and then those interested students are invited to apply for a position as an intern with the Town for the following year. Following the application, each intern is required to submit a letter of interest and an

educational resume, then they are interviewed or screened by the Administrative Services Director, who then recommends Departmental placement for each intern. The placements are reviewed and approved by the Town Manager.

College/University
Sarasota County

Q: Which techniques does Sarasota use to recruit interns?

FCCMA Resources

The Florida City and County Management Association maintains an active Student Council as one of its member committees and can be an excellent resource in finding potential candidates for your internship program. The Student Council maintains a contact list of relevant Public Administration undergraduate and graduate programs throughout the state and can help distribute your application to their students, or get you in contact with a school’s internship coordinator. The Student Council is also composed of active ICMA Student Chapter presidents from Florida’s colleges and universities, who can serve as an additional network to engage potential applicants – or may themselves apply.

To learn more about FCCMA’s Student Council and current contact information, click [here](#) for FCCMA’s Student Resource Center.

A: We strongly utilize web-based/social media recruitment along with “boots on the ground” efforts at job fairs and local colleges to recruit interns for our program. Our website has a webpage and job board specifically dedicated to information on the internship program as well as the internship job postings and applications. (www.scgov.net/intern)

We take advantage of associations that offer free advertisements for internships (i.e: APWA, ASCE, ACEC, etc.) and use the college web-based portals such as Handshake and Career Link sites to post our opportunities in a location easily accessible to students. We focused on job fairs at colleges targeted towards students specifically interested in internship opportunities. Priority was placed on building strong relationships with local colleges in our area by meeting with Professors and Career Center staff. ■

Designing Your Program

There are a variety of ways to structure a successful internship program. The way in which a program is organized may vary depending on a range of factors, such as the size and population of the municipality, the number of interns involved in the program, the educational level of the interns, the length of the internship program, whether interns are paid or unpaid, etc.

It is vital to consider these factors when designing your program and in considering whether you will hold an orientation for interns, determining which projects and tasks would be appropriate for interns to complete in the time of the program, and identifying whether a mentorship process and/or professional development events should be included in the program.

Orientation

Q: Did you have an orientation process for new interns? If yes, how was this organized?

Kenneth City: This depends on the individual intern, their aptitudes, and their interest levels. Since we are a smaller Town, we can dictate that a new intern spends a week each in different Town departments in order to obtain a snapshot of responsibilities, then regroup back at Town Hall after the prescribed period, followed by a debrief.

Collier County: Collier County has a two-day New Employee Orientation that all employees, including interns, must attend. County rules, policies and procedures are reviewed and discussed. Employees are introduced to the structure of the County, Departments and Divisions and learn more about the different types of work the County does by presentations given by fellow colleagues representing different business units.

Fort Myers: The interns are part of our regular employee onboarding.

Sarasota County: Our interns attend an orientation on their first day to introduce them to our organization and inform them of important information such as our values and mission, ethics and employee relations policies, safety and IT procedures. In addition, we review the program structure to prepare them for the upcoming professional events throughout the program and final presentation at the conclusion of the program. Our

orientation was also used as an opportunity to introduce them to their mentors.

Cutler Bay: At the start of the academic year, the Town hosts a Student/Parent Orientation Night at Town Hall. During this orientation, the Principal of the high school and the Town Manager introduce themselves and the program to all the interested interns and their parents/guardians. The interns are provided with a booklet that contains pertinent information like the Program Handbook and the route for the Town's Circulator Bus. Since not all high school juniors are equipped with transportation, they rely on the Town's public transportation to get to and from Town Hall for internship. The Administrative Services Director then reviews key points from the Program Handbook and opens the floor for questions and answers. Once all questions are answered, the orientation is closed, and the interns begin internship the following Monday.

Palm Beach Gardens: Simplified version of regular new employee orientation, starting in HR with employment forms, meeting City Hall personnel including City Manager and City Manager's Office, and then brought to their department for introductions and department specific information and processes.

Projects and Tasks

Sunny Isles Beach:

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? When possible, we try to assign short term projects that have a definitive end date that falls within the internship so that the intern has a tangible work product they can showcase in their portfolio/resume. Some project examples we have had interns work on include the creation of a City map that highlights City parks and various amenities within the City, taking pedestrian counts for various traffic studies and then assisting with compiling the final report, compiling research on various topics in order to create legislation and make policy decisions, assistance with the annual budget process and putting together the budget book, etc.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent across educational backgrounds? Yes, and we try to have a pretty well-defined plan for what the intern will work on prior to their start date, however, it is tweaked once the intern is on board based on their strengths and any changes in the City's needs.

Kenneth City:

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? Assignments provided to interns depended on their overall skills or learned habits. Personally, I have assigned certain projects that have required considerable research, or those that often required fieldwork to interns. I would then monitor their progress through other staff, or directly on my own. As we all know, most Managers projects far exceed the available time afforded them on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Personally, I further use the projects as teaching tools, with the same often revealing strengths and weaknesses of the intern. Rather than penalize the intern on their shortcomings, we provide valuable feedback, and if possible, ask the intern to go back and correct their shortcomings. Having worked with one intern for

over 6 months, I have personally witnessed that the constant feedback provided enables the intern to hone-in on their skills and weaknesses, ultimately making the intern more adept at providing an improved work product over time.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent across educational backgrounds? Yes. They are also assigned based on the degree of study and age.

Collier County:

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? Divisions interested in hosting any intern must complete an "Intern Request" form and create an Intern Development Plan that details the specific project the intern will be working on during their internship. Additionally, the supervisors also complete performance feedback documents during the course of the internship.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent across educational backgrounds? The complexity of the internship projects vary by educational level and type of work being performed across our Divisions.

Sarasota County:

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? Our departments each create their own 12-week work program for interns customized based on their education level and skill set. We encourage our departments to create a project-based program with the purpose of giving our interns the opportunity to see their project through from start to finish.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent across educational backgrounds? - Yes.

Fort Myers

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? This varied from department to department. In Human Resources, our intern built our new HR/Risk Mgt. webpages for the City's upcoming website. He worked on our new electronic Performance Management System as well as the new electronic learning/training system. He worked with the Safety Officer to experience Risk Management. These are just a few of the functions he was introduced/exposed to during his time with us.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent

across educational backgrounds? Consistent across the educational backgrounds.

Treasure Island

Q: What work products or programming did your organization assign to interns? How did you organize these projects? We include the projects and what department they will work with in our job posting so we can attract the student or recent graduate with those interests. Generally, we try and group smaller projects or break up one larger project into 12-week segments.

Q: Did work products vary by educational level (E.g. more complex projects for college level interns), or were they more-or-less consistent across educational backgrounds? We try and target graduate students and across an MPA and Engineering areas. ■

Pay, Benefits, and Policy

The decision to launch an internship program may be daunting for many organizations. One of the biggest challenges faced by many local government agencies with a desire to launch or continue an internship program is related to funding. The cost of an intern may vary depending on the rate of pay and benefits package that is offered. This may further vary based on the educational level and qualifications of the intern. For instance, Sarasota County offers a pay schedule that ranges from \$9.00 to \$17.50 per hour, depending upon the level in school/credit hours completed.

While some municipalities may elect to host paid interns, others may not have the resources available to do so. Many local governments also host unpaid interns to fill unmet needs within their organization, and to also provide students an opportunity to learn more about public service in a local entity. Whether an internship is paid or unpaid, it is important to make it a meaningful learning experience for the intern. Furthermore, it is critical that Federal labor laws are closely followed. The U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, outlines general information under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) as it relates to internship programs (See Appendix A).

Pay Snapshot of Respondents

Boynton Beach

Q: Were your internships paid? If so, please share a brief explanation of your pay structure (E.g. higher pay for higher educational level, etc.). - Most internship opportunities will be unpaid unless otherwise specified. School credit can be obtained only when approved by the academic institution.

Q: Did your organization offer interns any additional benefits or perks outside of compensation (E.g. professional development opportunities, resume-critique, professional headshots, career coaching, etc.)? The City will gladly extend letters of recommendation to interns who demonstrate professionalism and proficiency throughout their assigned tasks.

Green Cove Springs

Q: Were your internships paid? If so, please share a brief explanation of your pay structure (E.g. higher pay for higher educational level, etc.). Yes, all interns were paid \$14.00 an hour. That was the amount that was agreed upon during budget workshops.

Q: Did your organization offer interns any additional benefits or perks outside of compensation (E.g. professional development opportunities, resume-critique, professional headshots, career coaching, etc.)? Everyone was very helpful to the interns in career coaching, networking, and resume assistance. Each intern was provided a letter of recommendation at the end of their internship.

Lantana

Q: Were your internships paid? If so, please share a brief explanation of your pay structure (E.g. higher pay for higher educational level, etc.). Yes, \$11.00 to \$15.00 per hour.

Lakeland

Q: Did your organization offer interns any additional benefits or perks outside of compensation (E.g. professional development opportunities, resume-critique, professional headshots, career coaching, etc.)? In addition to informal career coaching throughout the internship via their mentor, tours of various City departments, and a one-day job search and resume-critique workshop, the City has partnered with the Lakeland Economic Development Council to engage our Interns in their Summer Leadership Program. This program meets one day a week for five-weeks and offers Interns additional exposure to Lakeland and other businesses and organizations within the community. The five-week Summer Leadership Program, outlined below, has a major focus each week to add value and development to the Interns.

- Week 1 DISC Assessment and Team Building Events
- Week 2 Learn History and Inner Workings of the City and Business Leaders
- Week 3 Leadership Skills
- Week 4 Giving Back through Community Service Projects
- Week 5 Economy and How It Impacts the City

Learn more about the Summer Leadership Program and other LEDC initiatives here:

<https://lakelandedc.com/ledc-initiatives/>

Pay At-a-Glance

Table 1.1. Matrix of Pay Ranges for Internships in Selected Florida Municipalities

	High School	Undergraduate	Graduate Student/Graduate
Cutler Bay	Unpaid	N/A	N/A
Sunny Isles Beach	N/A	\$10/hour	\$12/hour
Fort Myers Beach	\$17/hour		
Fort Myers	\$10/hour		
Treasure Island	\$500 - \$1,000/12-week project		
Collier County*	\$9.77/hour	\$13.2115/hour	\$16.3596
Sarasota County	\$9-\$10/hour	\$11.50 - \$15.50/hour	\$16.50-\$17.50/hour
Kenneth City	\$10/hour		
Palm Beach Gardens	\$12.80 - \$17.28/hour		
Osceola County	Unpaid or stipends ranging \$1k - \$2k		
Hillsborough County	\$10.50/hr for 8 weeks		\$13.79
Belleair Bluffs	Unpaid		
Destin	Unpaid		
Lantana	\$11-\$15/hour		
Green Cove Springs	\$15/hour		
Punta Gorda	At directors' discretion		

*Fellows Program: 10% less than minimum of pay range of assigned paygrade

Table 1.1. Matrix of pay ranges for internships in Florida municipalities. This table shows a summary of pay rates by educational level as indicated by municipalities in Florida. ■

After They Leave

One thing to think about when structuring your program is what you will do in preparation of interns leaving as their internships come to an end. It is beneficial to think about this topic in advance so that you can be prepared for the “exit process” that may need to occur. For instance, it may be advantageous to conduct an exit survey to gauge feedback from outgoing interns. This could be helpful in improving your program for next year.

Don’t forget that the internship program is a great way for your organization to recruit for part-time and/or full-time positions. Many interns will be looking for employment following their graduation. For this reason, it is important to make their internship experience worthwhile. Interns will be more likely to return if they had a meaningful experience with opportunities to grow professionally. It will be beneficial to your organization if you host an internship program that inspires interns to return to your community to live and work!

Exit Survey

Q: Have you ever conducted a survey or exit interview to gauge feedback from outgoing interns? If so, what benefits did you see from this practice?

Fort Myers Beach: Yes, we modified our process as a result.

Kenneth City: Yes. All our interns to date have been elated at the opportunity provided, and although some may not have maintained a passion for local government, they have all been appreciative of the opportunity provided.

Cutler Bay: Yes. The benefit to conducting an Intern Satisfaction Survey at the end of the year was that we were able to gauge whether the students were happy with their overall experience. We found that the majority of them felt “left out” or “bored” when there were too many interns assigned to a Department, so we scaled the number of interns accepted down to fit the criteria of one intern per Department (unless otherwise requested by the Department Head). We also identified a need for more communication regarding transportation and attendance. We developed a system where all communication would be redundant between the Town, the interns, and the school. Reminder emails, text messages, group chats, and quarterly meetings have been used to continue the flow of redundant communication so that all interns remained up to date on the latest announcements and happenings.

Hillsborough County: Start, Stop, and Continue exercise with them regarding the program.

Transition from Intern to Employee

Q: Have former interns applied to positions within your organization, or have they indicated that they are likely to return?

Cutler Bay: Yes, we have had interns apply to part-time Lifeguard, Park Service Aide, and Youth Program Aide positions following graduation.

Sarasota County: Yes, we requested this information in our exit interviews, which revealed that 90 percent of the interns said, given the opportunity, they would apply for positions within our organization.

Fort Myers: Yes, and we have hired interns. Some expressed an interest in returning to the City in a full-time position when they finish school. ■

Final Thoughts

In preparing this Internship Toolkit, we received many key recommendations from reputable local government agencies for launching or growing a successful internship program. Towns, cities, and counties of all sizes responded with sincere advice to their peers who may wish to take on the challenging, but profitable task of starting an internship program. This general advice is also pertinent to those communities that may already have an internship program, but that may wish to reinvigorate their program with new ideas and fresh perspectives. We are optimistic that you will review these recommendations with an open-mind and take away applicable information to foster an effective internship program in your community.

Recommendations

Port Orange

Q: What lessons or general advice would you give to an organization that is just beginning their internship program? You really must go into this program with the right heart. The intent of this is for

the intern, not the employer. The interns do require a lot of attention and work, but it is very rewarding. They can really surprise you by the fantastic work that is accomplished. Try to have a list of ideas and projects in mind before starting the internship and get

that outlined for the student to ensure it is a good fit. Do not just wing it. Listen to what the intern is interested in.

Q: What recommendations would you make to an organization that is struggling to recruit students to participate in a local government internship program? Work with the college to understand what expectations are placed on the students. If you host a couple of interns and then have them doing work, they feel is not meaningful, they will share that with the college and others may be less likely to return.

Punta Gorda

Q: What lessons or general advice would you give to an organization that is just beginning their internship program? Challenge the intern with real work, not just filing, scanning, and office work. Don't be afraid to use interns to full advantage. Governmental agencies do not have the same internship restrictions as those applied to private sector employees.

Q: What recommendations would you make to an organization that is struggling to recruit students to participate in a local government internship program? Expand their outreach, including the local community. The City has had several interns referred to us by local residents who have children or grandchildren in college and the relatives referred the student to us. Stay with it.

Q: Many organizations may have the desire to launch an internship program, but do not feel they have adequate resources to do so. What recommendations or advice would you give to a smaller municipality that may have limited resources, but that wants to provide opportunities for students to become involved in local government? The City of Punta Gorda is a small City with limited resources and staffing (275). Frankly our internship program has had extremely positive outcomes.

Starting and implementing an internship program is not difficult once the decision is made to do it. Honestly, the only real "burden" has been thinking

outside the box in recruiting. There is no need to re-invent the wheel because there are others out "there" with programs in place that would be happy to share. It's all public record, just ask for it.

Kenneth City

Q: What recommendations would you make to an organization that is struggling to recruit students to participate in a local government internship program? Don't set unrealistic expectations for the intern, especially in the first couple of months. Also, don't think that you must watch or supervise the intern every moment that they are in the office. If you see a habit or performance aptitude that is lacking or needs subtle improvement, don't be afraid to step outside of your own comfort zone and talk to the intern to explain your observance, and how correction or altering their behavior will ultimately benefit them in the long run.

Lakeland

Q: What recommendations would you make to an organization that is struggling to recruit students to participate in a local government internship program?

1. Start the recruitment process early; approximately two semesters ahead of your scheduled internship (ex: summer internship recruitment should start mid-to late-fall). This gives students time to plan their semester around the internship hours.
2. Review the job posting to make sure that the projects, duties, requirements, and pay scale are easily seen. Also, be clear about if the internship may lead to a permanent hire opportunity.
3. Utilize Handshake.com as part of your recruitment toolkit. Handshake enables recruiters to target different categories of interns all at once.
4. Have a clear plan for your intern, and make sure it adds valuable experience that lines up with the intern's current education goals. The best recruitment tool is word-of-mouth, and having a solid internship for your interns will ensure they become positive ambassadors for your business. ■

Appendices and Other Resources

References

Please use the below references as supporting resources in the creation or expansion of your internship program.

- Appendix A – Fact Sheet #71: Internship Program Falls Under The Fair Labor Standards Act by the U.S. Department Labor, Wage and Hour Division (WHD, January 2018)

<https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>

- Appendix B – Management Internships: A Guidebook for Local Governments by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA, January 2013)

https://icma.org/sites/default/files/304703_ICMA%20Internship%20Guide%20%28final%29.pdf

