

Some helpful hints regarding student internships

Looking for an Internship?

So, you're thinking about career paths and find yourself interested in a "museum job" or, for starters, a "museum internship." Fabulous! Almost certainly one museum, library, archive, or historic site needs your help and skills.

It's gratifying to those working in museums to know that many aspiring museum professionals simply want to obtain some kind of work in or related to a museum. Sometimes, however, even the competition for volunteer work is quite stiff. Museums employ individuals who specialize in many diverse types of work. Even if you are willing to do almost anything to gain basic experience, it is best if you have identified some of your present dreams, goals, and work strengths. It's also important to show a little familiarity with the types of work that keep museums and historic sites open and operating.

Below are some examples of museum / historic site / archive positions. Large institutions may have every type of work mentioned, while small institutions may be run by one or two people who hold all of these positions! What are you willing to do in terms of the work required by the site?

- Administrative
- Development
- Membership and Member Services
- Human Resources
- Learning Resources / Media / IT
- Education / Outreach
- Conservation
- Curatorial
- Security
- Custodial
- Planning
- Financial
- Grounds

Consider too, what kind of internship are you seeking? What kind will you accept? For how long, and how often, are you able and willing to work? Are you willing to relocate for a paid internship? Are you willing to relocate if the internship is temporary, part-time, or unpaid? How far are you willing to go?

How does one find advertised internships? What about volunteer work? Is it okay to "cold call / email"?

Visit the websites of museums, historic sites, libraries, or historical societies where you'd like to find work. These will often describe the institution's departments, provide contact information, and they may even offer a job list or call for volunteers.

Look at:

- ncmuseums.org
- museumjobs.com
- Job-search areas of profession-specific email listservs
- Job advertisement pages of arts and humanities newsletters or journals
- AAM and AASLH have job listings on their web sites.
- Academic department or professor in your area of study / interest.
- Career or guidance office.
- A local newspapers may contain information for temporary paid or volunteer work as well as full-time or part-time jobs and internships.

Participating in regional and local associations or societies related to your field of interest is also a great way to start. Organizations often provide membership at a reduced rate to students or unwaged participants. Becoming involved in a local or regional organization can be very rewarding, since the group frequently has more than enough work to go around, and a newcomer may have more "chances" to play an active role.

Consider joining NCMC and the Southeastern Museums Conference (SEMC).

Finally, yes, if you hope to work with a particular institution, department, or individual and if you have a clear idea of your interests, skills, and goals, it's okay to send letters of inquiry or call a department in your field of interest. Exercise caution and proceed with respect. Remember, you're asking if you might arrange to meet/visit an individual/department/site, not inviting yourself over.

Common internship arrangements include:

- Volunteer internships for specific events, such as preparations for new programs, fundraising efforts, exhibitions, or membership drives
- Volunteer internships for a specific time period and/or purpose, such as high school or university course credit, temporary or seasonal work experience, fixed term placements of a year or more
- Scholarship award-related internships
- Internships with a stipend or salary. The stipend or salary is similar to what one might receive through a scholarship and reflects the training and educational purpose of the internship.
- Fellowships are a common form of temporary work and continued training for new graduates in some fields, particularly in museum conservation, curatorial, and history-based professions.

Most museum and historic site internships do not involve glamorous work. You should expect some clerical work, such as answering telephones, filing, and labeling. These tasks are usually part of almost any "real" job. For you, the volunteer or intern, they demonstrate that you are willing to work and can complete assignments efficiently. Probably "shadowing" a full-time employee / expert in your field of choice and/or a special career-related project will comprise at least some of the internship period.

Formal and informal internship applications:

Sometimes internships involve formal procedures such as submission of a cover letter and a resumé or CV with references or letters of recommendation. Depending on the requirements of the position, examples of art, design work, or writing might be required. Remember to be selective and choose only one to three representative examples, unless requirements stipulate otherwise. It is usually possible to send more examples later if needed.