

# Employer Resources for Hosting High School Interns

## Helping Youth Thrive in the Workplace

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**EdSystems**  
EDUCATION SYSTEMS CENTER at  
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# Introduction

These resources have been developed as a part of the Scaling Transformative Advanced Manufacturing Pathways (STAMP) initiative in Illinois to support communities across the state in developing high-quality manufacturing pathways for high school students.

A key component of a high-quality manufacturing pathway is student access to a paid and/or for-credit [career development experience](#) that takes place for a minimum of 60 hours, such as an internship or pre-apprenticeship. The design and implementation of a career development experience varies across the state, with schools and employers citing a variety of barriers and challenges, including:

- Employer concern about hosting students who are under 18 years old.
- Unclear expectations for the role of the employer mentor.
- Inconsistencies in tasks that a high school student engages in across employers.
- A lack of structure around assessment and professional development for students.
- A need for a clear next step for students who successfully complete the experience.

To address these challenges and provide a coherent set of guidance to employers, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association Education Foundation and Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University (EdSystems) partnered to convene a STAMP advisory committee of school district representatives and employers, including human resource professionals from manufacturing companies. Through a series of discussions and sharing of exemplar employer models and resources, the advisory committee developed the following set of resources:

- [Welcoming Young Talent: How to Prepare for High School Interns](#)
- [Navigating Legalities and Logistics: Hosting Manufacturing Interns Under Age 18](#)
- [Onboarding and Supporting High School Interns: Building a Strong Foundation for Success](#)
- [Cultivating Success: Mentorship in the High School Internship](#)
- [Connecting the Dots: Supporting High School Interns on Their Journey to College and Career Success](#)

We hope that manufacturing companies across Illinois and beyond apply, repurpose, and utilize these resources to provide meaningful and robust careerdevelopment experiences that prepare youth to be college- and career-ready for pursuing opportunities in manufacturing.

*Note: While these resources focus on manufacturing resources and employer models, the content is also largely applicable to employers in industry areas outside of manufacturing.*

# Welcoming Young Talent

## How to Prepare for High School Interns

### Role of schools, employers, and intermediaries

As an employer, you may work directly with schools to recruit students and collaborate on the design of your internship. Alternatively, an initial contact may be your region's [Education for Employment director](#), a role that often connects employers and schools to engage in work-based learning experiences. You may also work with an intermediary who coordinates with schools, such as a local chamber of commerce, workforce innovation board, or economic development agency.

A human resources representative within your company is a valuable team member to include, to help lead the coordination process.

### Documents to prepare before the first day

#### Internship job description

This description should provide a clear overview of the overarching projects and daily tasks. These should be tied to learning objectives to inform any professional skill assessment being utilized.

- ⇒ Download an [intern job description template](#) from the [Internship Micro-Credential](#), a collaboration of Valley Education for Employment System, Indian Valley Vocational Center, and CAST
- ⇒ View Boone County's [internship descriptions](#)
- ⇒ View Perfection Servo's [summer electronic internship description](#)
- ⇒ View the Aux Sable [document control internship description](#)

#### Organizational chart

This chart should provide a general overview of the team that the intern will be engaging with directly and highlight any direct supervisors and mentors for the intern.

- ⇒ Download the [organizational chart description](#) from the [Internship Micro-Credential](#)

#### Orientation plan

This plan should include what will be covered the first few days plus onboarding items that need to be completed before an intern's first day including pre-employment drug screening and background checks.

- ⇒ Download the [orientation template](#) from the [Internship Micro-Credential](#)
- ⇒ Download an orientation template [PDF](#) or [Word](#) file

### RESOURCES

- ⇒ Watch "[Top 10 Tips for Hosting a High School Intern](#)" from CAST



- ⇒ Review the Illinois [Recommended Technical and Essential Employability Competencies](#) (see pages 7 and 10)

### COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

- To support internship hosts, Boone County created [a handout](#) on the role of employer and school coordinator.
- Valley Education for Employment Systems (VALEES) hosted an [Intern Ready Forum](#) with manufacturing employers to discuss and prepare student-facing materials
- McHenry County's [Manufacturing Pathways Consortium](#) holds planning meetings to discuss who would make terrific mentors, and how employers can engage student interns.

## Collaboration conversations

Before an intern starts with your company, these collaborative conversations may be helpful:

With your intermediary, school, and/or community partners:

- **Timing and process for outreach to students**
  - When should recruitment begin?
  - How will students be identified as eligible to participate?
- **Length and timing of the internship**
  - Will the internship be offered during the school year or the summer?
  - How many weeks long is the internship? How many hours per week?
- **Onboarding requirements**
  - Does your company have specific requirements and expectations to be completed, such as drug screening and/or background checks, before an intern is able to start?
  - Are there any documents that need to be completed before an intern is able to start?
- **Mentorship and skill development**
  - Who will be the mentor and main point of contact at the employer, as well as who is the main point of contact at the school?

With your team:

- **Intern's contacts**
  - Who should be contacted for absences and late arrivals?
  - Who is the intern's contact for onboarding paperwork, timesheets, etc.?
  - Who will provide direction and support on the intern's daily tasks and ongoing projects?
- **School contact**
  - Who will work directly with the school or community organization? This person should be aware of the supports provided and expectations set by the school or community organization, including any time-specific requirements.
- **Expectations**
  - Who is supervising the intern?
  - Who is mentoring the intern?
  - How will interns be supported to engage in meaningful tasks and develop technical and essential employability competencies? How will these skills be assessed?

## EXAMPLE TASKS AND PROJECTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL INTERNS IN MANUFACTURING

- Material and equipment inspection
- Study plant safety and suggest recommendations for improvement
- Read and interpret drawings
- Develop, prepare, and/or review engineering plans
- Develop basic detail and assembly drawings for products and equipment
- Review applications and issues permits
- Perform physical and chemical tests for quality control
- Conduct research and provide technical assistance as needed
- Create 3-D models from 2-D drawings
- Test prototypes and standard products and write reports to document the results
- Maintain clean and orderly work areas
- Develop and write manufacturing process instructions
- Manage vendors; follow-up on purchase orders
- Receive and/or inspect parts
- Collect and record measurements and other data
- Review plans and/or maps of structures for inspections, troubleshooting, and/or repair
- Participate in developing and implementing SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) and WIs (Written Instructions)
- Maintain and prepare reports on inspections, as well as completed and pending work
- Assist with identifying and assessing technical problems; learn and apply techniques and methods using the necessary tools and equipment
- Assist with the installation of necessary equipment for maintenance and/or repairs
- Developing and implementing a consistent project management process for all departments
- Mapping process workflow for manufacturing line
- Developing and implementing a new contractor safety program with training
- Updating labeling system throughout the manufacturing plant
- Updating checklist to ensure all machinery is being inspected daily
- Inspecting and updating signage that required cleaning or replacement
- Developing and implementing new electronic assessment form
- Maximizing sustainability efforts and cost savings through new process development
- Generating part numbers for the new ERP system
- Posting cash for the accounting department

# Navigating Legalities and Logistics

## Hosting Manufacturing Interns Under Age 18

### Can a student under age 18 work on the floor?

**Yes**, students 16 years old or older can work in a factory setting as student learners. According to [Child Labor Provision for Nonagricultural Occupations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, Child Labor Bulletin 101](#), a high school student at least 16 years old can work in a factory setting and conduct welding, machining, and other manufacturing operations.

Minors under the age of 18 are prohibited from performing certain operations or working in certain industries even as student learners or apprentices. For example, minors under age 18 may not operate motorized vehicles or power-driven hosting apparatus. Companies should consult with their legal counsel for guidance regarding these limitations and take appropriate steps to ensure that minors do not engage in prohibited work.

### Can this work in a union environment?

**Yes**, it is possible. Introducing a high school internship program requires multiple up-front conversations and integration with your local union leadership and workforce. Processes and guidelines can help ensure the program is sustainable and does not violate the key tenants of any labor agreements.

### Does insurance coverage stay the same?

**Most likely.** Prior to offering an internship, employers should contact their insurance company for clarification on who/what their liability insurance covers. As long as the internship does not violate any of the federal restrictions on child labor or restrictions in Illinois, insurance should cover a 16+ student.

### Who covers the liability?

Paid student workers under age 18 should be covered under the manufacturer's liability insurance, just as any other paid employee.

### Still facing barriers to hosting students under 18?

As you work with your human resources, legal, and insurance teams to develop an internship program, consider roles that don't raise the same concerns as the production floor, such as CAD design, customer service, quality, and production. To expose students to a variety of occupations within manufacturing, companies have taken a job shadow and departmental rotation approach to hosting interns.

*This document does not constitute legal advice. Please consult with legal counsel to ensure your internship program complies with applicable law.*

### RESOURCES

- ↪ The Department of Labor presented on "[Can 16 and 17 year olds be employed in Manufacturing?](#)" to the Technology & Manufacturing Association, which created one-page [DOL synopsis](#).
- ↪ McHenry County created a [16, 17, & 18 Year-Old High School Student Interns Activity Guide](#), which helps companies navigate insurance for interns under 18 years old.

### COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

At Swiss Automation Inc., interns go through the hiring process, new hire orientation, and safety training. They also ensure supervisors/mentors are always paired with the intern, to lower the amount of autonomy interns may have with potentially dangerous equipment. Through a department rotation, interns are exposed to different jobs within manufacturing. An intern may spend a half day in Quality inspecting parts for conformity and a half day working with Production on some planning documents. Their summer schedule includes:

- Week 1: Quoting, Engineering, Customer service, Planning, and Materials
- Week 2: Quality, Blueprint basics, Gages, Inspection of product, and Non-conformance
- Weeks 3 & 4: Programming, maintenance, and tool room; ENC; CNC
- Week 5: Inventory management, Receiving, Shipping

# Onboarding and Supporting High School Interns

## Building a Strong Foundation for Success

### Set up expectations for communication and regular check-ins

Regular check-ins between an intern and their direct mentor/supervisor provide an opportunity for continuous feedback as well as an opportunity for relationship building by providing a space for interns who may still be hesitant to ask questions. These meetings can be brief (15 minutes or less) as long as they have an intentional structure and are productive.

These conversations should not focus solely on the tasks an intern is completing but extend to reflection and consideration of how their experience is shaping their career aspirations.

⇒ Download the [check-in meetings](#) template

### Integrate interns into the team and culture of the company

To ensure a positive internship experience, employers should proactively welcome interns, recognizing that it might be their first exposure to a professional environment and that they may feel anxious.

This can be done through staff meetings, introduction emails, or other intentional gestures, demonstrating the value and respect the company has for interns.

Additionally, interns should be included in relevant employee meetings and events, familiarized with company policies and physical layouts, and aware of the “unwritten rules” to help them integrate into the company culture more effectively.

⇒ Download the Participant “About Me” Profile: [PDF](#) // [Word](#)

### Providing targeted supports and resources

Internships should balance industry-related tasks and professional development opportunities, including one-on-one guidance. Employers should provide interns with a toolkit of targeted resources to support interns in areas where they may need additional help as they progress through their internship.



### COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

[IngreDion](#) has 1:1 bi-monthly check-ins documented in their management information system and schedules a welcoming lunch at the beginning of the program.

[MAC Medical, Inc.](#) provides pizza and hosts weekly meetings to support networking. They also created a designated area for one-one-one training with interns

[Nucor](#) sets up a meet and greet opportunity with the Human Resources team, so that high school interns can learn more about how to apply and opportunities available.

McHenry County Manufacturing Pathways Consortium created an [activity guide for high school interns](#).

GPEAK provides a free curriculum to help interns develop essential employability skills ([view samples on their website](#)).

# Cultivating Success

## Mentorship in the High School Internship

### Moving beyond the role of a supervisor

Staff working primarily with interns should understand their responsibility as more than an on-the-job supervisor. Staff should see themselves as mentors who play a crucial role in the personal and professional development of interns. While they will be assigning tasks, they should also make intentional efforts to incorporate interns into the culture and guide them through the successes and challenges of this professional learning experience.

Ultimately, the mentor represents the employer through their interactions with the intern, which means the intern's perception of the mentor is their perception of the employer. Preparing your team for the mentor role is worthwhile time invested in building a program that motivates interns to come back and work for your company.

- ⇒ Download [A Mentor's Guide to Youth Development](#) from the U.S. Department of Education
- ⇒ Download [Resources and Guidance for Supporting Young Women in Manufacturing](#)



### Best practices for providing feedback

A key role of the mentor is providing consistent and high-quality feedback, both formally and informally. The mentor/supervisor should take an asset-based approach, which is crucial for interns to see themselves as capable of being successful in a professional space. While interns may have room for improvement, they should be valued for the skills and knowledge they bring (many interns will have completed multiple manufacturing or other related coursework before they begin their internship).

An asset-based approach provides space for intern reflections, focuses on strengths, and views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. Interns should be valued for what they bring to an employer instead of being characterized by what they lack (often, there is a focus on inadequacies and what they need to gain or change about themselves to be successful).

- ⇒ Download [Participant Reflection Questions](#)
- ⇒ Download [A Guide to Providing Feedback to Participants](#)
- ⇒ View [Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation](#)

## Utilizing observations and formal assessments

One of the most valuable aspects of an internship is the ability for an intern to receive feedback and have conversations about their performance. A professional skills assessment is a tool-based observational assessment of an intern's performance given by an adult supervisor and shared with the intern that addresses both essential and technical skills. This assessment should be used primarily as a feedback tool and development strategy.

Depending on the length of the internship, it may only be appropriate to do one professional skills assessment. If the length allows (for example, a full semester), it is beneficial to have a baseline, middle, and final assessment with the same questions to evaluate an intern's growth over time.

Schedule time to sit down in person with the intern to discuss the professional skills assessment. Be prepared to manage the conversation so it remains collaborative and everyone is talking with, rather than at, one another. For youth to truly develop essential employability and technical competencies, they must be treated with respect and provided room for their voice to be heard during these conversations.

- ➞ Download [Illinois' Recommended Technical and Essential Employability Competencies](#)
- ➞ View GPEAK's [Guide to Competencies and Performance Indicators](#)

## Navigating challenges

Internships typically get off to a great start, but challenges may emerge as interns and their mentor/supervisor move beyond the initial excitement and anticipation. Through continuous coaching and support, it is possible to navigate challenges and improve the experience through a better understanding of needs and expectations.

This is a typical process for anything new and if an intern or mentor/supervisor reaches a moment of frustration and discontent with the internship, it is not a sign that the experience is unsuccessful but rather an opportunity to learn and improve.

- ➞ Download [A Guide to Difficult Conversations](#)
- ➞ Download the Navigating Challenges Worksheet: [PDF](#) // [Word](#)

## COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

Morton Industries created an [evaluation form](#) for mentors/supervisors to complete for their students and share with the students' high schools. Mentors/supervisors are asked to discuss the evaluation with the student intern before submitting it to the school, creating a great opportunity for feedback and to build trust, as interns will see it soon after it's completed.

John Deere engages in a behavioral competency development approach to their internship program, which is reflected in their [evaluation](#).



# Connecting the Dots

## Supporting High School Interns on Their Journey to College and Career Success

One of the most valuable outcomes of an internship are professional relationships that students can build on for future networking and career guidance. The ability to [build social capital](#) should be seen as fundamental to the internship experience you provide high school students. In addition to conversations and collaboration with their mentor and other team members, employers can support interns to take informed next steps in their career journeys by:

### Updating professional portfolios

Supervisors/mentors should support interns in building and regularly updating a professional portfolio that reflects the skills and experiences gained during their internship. Supervisors/mentors and their team members can facilitate this through mock interviews and resume statement development to help interns articulate the value of their internship experience. Portfolios may include resumes, LinkedIn profiles, work products/artifacts, and letters of recommendation.

⇒ Read [LinkedIn profile tips for high school students](#)

### Sharing career and postsecondary pathways

Throughout the experience, interns should have the opportunity to learn about different career paths within the organization, including hearing from early-career team members who can share their recent experiences job hunting and joining the workforce. It's also crucial for interns to meet with human resources representatives to understand role expectations, qualifications, and any earn-as-you-learn opportunities within the company.

### Staying connected after the internship

Connect interns to professional organizations and events to help them foster industry connections. Additionally, assess when interns are ready for potential further employment, such as apprenticeships or entry-level positions, and establish clear communication channels and next steps for this transition, while also involving interns in various professional networking opportunities. Invite interns to meet with the owner, human resources, departmental meetings/lunches, intern volunteering events, etc., to build their professional network.

Consider offering an [exit interview](#) with interns to gather their reflections and feedback on the experience to both intentionally make connections to next steps for the intern and inform adjustments to your program moving forward.

### COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

In addition to daily work responsibilities and special projects, [Carus](#) interns participate in several off site visits to expand their knowledge of manufacturing, local history, and the business. Interns are responsible for completing trip reports to summarize each field visit.

Interns are invited to McHenry Community College's monthly Apprenticeship Open Houses to hear about their earn-as-you-learn programs. They are also encouraged to have conversations with the companies they're working for about continuing to work with full-or part-time after the internship.