

# Oak Park NEXT (Navigating Employment and eXperience Training): Youth Internship Program Proposal

## Program Brief

Oak Park NEXT (Navigating Employment and eXperience Training): Youth Internship Program is a workforce development initiative created to support Oak Park businesses by connecting them with local youth residents aged 14-21 for paid, educational internships. The program serves as a vital resource for businesses experiencing staffing shortages while providing students with early career exposure, hands-on skills, and insight into potential career pathways within Oak Park. Managed by the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce, this pilot program spans two 2025 cohorts, positioning Oak Park as a community invested in youth empowerment and local economic development.

## Program Eligibility

To ensure alignment with The Village of Oak Park's goals, eligibility requirements for the program are as follows:

- **Student Residency:** Eligible participants must either attend a District 200 or District 97 school (Oak Park-River Forest High School or feeder schools) or, for those in college or attending private schools, maintain a primary residence in Oak Park while studying out of the area.
- **Age Requirement:** Program participants must be between the ages of 14 and 21. Middle school students aged 14 may apply, but all individuals under 16 will require a work permit to participate.
- **Academic Standing:** Students must be in good academic standing and able to meet behavioral expectations, confirmed through school records or references.

These criteria ensure that the program specifically benefits Oak Park's local youth, fosters a strong connection to the community, and aligns with the educational and workforce priorities of Oak Park.

## Program Structure

- **Timeline:**
  - **Summer 2025 Cohort:** May-August 2025
  - **Fall 2025 Cohort:** September-December 2025
- **Capacity:** Each cohort will consist of up to 20 students, with the selection process aimed at balancing student interest with the staffing needs of local businesses.
- **Internship Parameters:**
  - **Compensation:** Internships will be paid at \$15.00 per hour.
  - **Work Hours:** Interns will work up to 20 hours per week.
  - **Educational Component:** Businesses are required to dedicate at least 25% of internship hours to teaching interns about business operations, including departments such as marketing, finance, and management.

## Program Goals, Objectives, and Metrics

1. **Goal 1: Business Support**
  - **Objective:** Provide staffing assistance to Oak Park businesses by placing pre-vetted interns based on need and job fit.
  - **Metric:** Measure the number of participating businesses, track business satisfaction scores, and evaluate staffing relief outcomes through monthly feedback surveys.
2. **Goal 2: Youth Employment Experience**
  - **Objective:** Equip interns with essential work readiness skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, while providing career exposure.
  - **Metric:** Conduct pre- and post-program surveys to measure skill development, including self-assessment ratings on job readiness and overall satisfaction with the experience.
3. **Goal 3: Talent Retention**
  - **Objective:** Introduce young Oak Park residents to local career opportunities and encourage long-term career consideration within Oak Park's local economy.
  - **Metric:** Track intern retention within the program, record feedback on interest in local employment, and conduct follow-up surveys six months post-program to gauge long-term interest in Oak Park jobs.

## Methods

1. **Recruitment & Selection:**
  - **Engagement with Schools and Community Organizations:** Partner with District 200 and District 97 to distribute information on the program, hold information sessions, and provide guidance in the application process.
  - **Structured Application and Interview Process:** Create a streamlined application process, followed by structured interviews to assess intern qualifications and match their skills and interests to the right business placements.
2. **Business Engagement and Training:**
  - **Outreach to Local Businesses:** Use Chamber communications to engage local businesses in need of staffing support and introduce them to the benefits of hosting an intern.
  - **Supervisor Training Sessions:** Host training workshops for supervisors, focusing on skills for mentoring interns, conducting evaluations, and supporting interns' professional growth.
3. **Data Collection & Reporting:**
  - **Surveys and Checkpoints:** Use digital tools to administer bi-weekly surveys and collect feedback from both interns and business supervisors.
  - **Mid-Program and End-of-Cohort Evaluations:** Complete detailed evaluations of program outcomes, covering both qualitative and quantitative metrics, to provide comprehensive insights to the Village of Oak Park.
4. **Continuous Improvement:**

- **Feedback Analysis:** After each cohort, assess all feedback and performance data to identify key success factors and areas needing adjustment.
- **Program Adaptation:** Adjust cohort structuring, business training materials, or program communication based on feedback to ensure continued growth and alignment with community needs.

## **Program Administration & Responsibilities**

The Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce will oversee all aspects of program management, focusing on a seamless, supportive experience for interns and businesses. The Chamber's responsibilities include intern and business vetting, ongoing program monitoring, and outcome reporting to the Village.

## **Key Administration Components**

### **1. Intern Vetting and Placement:**

- **Eligibility Verification:** Ensure applicants meet age, academic, and residency requirements. School transcripts or equivalent documentation will confirm academic standing.
- **Interest and Skills Assessment:** Conduct interviews with applicants to align their skills, interests, and career aspirations with business needs. This assessment process will also help identify opportunities for skill development.
- **Diversity Considerations:** Strive for a diverse intern cohort that reflects Oak Park's community demographics and interests, including students interested in a variety of career paths, industries, and skill levels.

### **2. Business Vetting and Training:**

- **Business Assessment:** Screen participating businesses to ensure safe, positive work environments, conducting site visits and interviewing current employees where applicable.
- **Training for Supervisors:** Provide business supervisors with training on internship best practices, including mentorship techniques, the importance of educational engagement, and guidelines for maintaining intern well-being.
- **Educational Commitment:** Require businesses to allocate at least 25% of internship hours to training on fundamental business operations, such as marketing, finance, or management, ensuring students gain insight into the functional workings of their placement.

### **3. Monitoring and Support:**

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Schedule bi-weekly check-ins with interns and business supervisors to assess relationship quality, task alignment, and satisfaction.
- **Surveys and Feedback Collection:** Administer bi-weekly surveys to interns and supervisors to measure engagement, job satisfaction, and educational value, with a focus on identifying areas for improvement.
- **Program Liaisons:** Designate Chamber staff as dedicated program liaisons to provide on-demand support, guidance, and problem resolution for both interns and business participants.

### **4. Marketing and Reporting:**

- **Promotional Outreach:** Utilize local schools, social media, Chamber channels, and partnerships with community organizations to promote the program and maximize awareness among eligible students.
- **Outcome Reporting:** Develop quarterly reports for the Village of Oak Park to provide updates on program metrics, including intern progress, business satisfaction, and the achievement of program goals.

## **Business Selection Criteria with Quantitative Metrics**

To ensure the best outcomes for both interns and businesses, Oak Park NEXT will select business participants based on the following quantitative metrics:

### **1. Positive Work Environment**

- **Safety Standards:** Businesses must maintain a safety score of at least 85% based on an initial site visit checklist evaluating cleanliness, hazard mitigation, and adherence to OSHA or local safety regulations.
- **Employee Satisfaction:** Participating businesses must have an employee satisfaction rate of at least 75%, measured through an internal survey or third-party feedback (where available).
- **Past Internship/Employment Experience:** Businesses that have hosted interns or young employees in the past will be required to demonstrate an intern satisfaction rate of 70% or higher from prior programs.

### **2. Capacity for Mentorship**

- **Mentor Availability:** Businesses must allocate at least one dedicated mentor for each intern, with no mentor assigned more than two interns simultaneously.
- **Mentor Experience:** Selected mentors must have at least two years of professional experience in their field, ensuring they can offer relevant guidance and insights.
- **Mentorship Hours:** Businesses should commit at least 5 hours per intern per month specifically to mentorship activities, including skills coaching, career discussions, and performance feedback.

### **3. Educational Value**

- **Training Commitment:** Businesses must commit to spending at least 25% of internship hours (approximately 5 hours per week) on structured training sessions focused on key business functions such as marketing, finance, customer service, or operations.
- **Skills Development Opportunities:** Businesses should provide a list of at least three new skills or competencies that interns are expected to gain during their placement, aligned with industry standards.
- **Project-Based Learning:** Businesses should identify at least one substantial project per intern that can be completed within the internship period, ensuring hands-on learning beyond routine tasks.

### **4. Internship Role Clarity**

- **Job Description Completeness:** Businesses must submit a detailed job description with specific roles, responsibilities, and learning outcomes, meeting a

job clarity score of 90% based on an internal rubric assessing detail, clarity, and relevance.

- **Skills Alignment:** Businesses are encouraged to provide positions that align with the interns' skills and career interests, aiming for a skill match rate of 80% based on the intern's initial skills assessment.
- **Position Availability:** Businesses must demonstrate that they can provide the required 20 hours per week for each intern over the 12-week period, verified by an operations schedule review.

**5. Compensation and Financial Commitment**

- **Payroll Capacity:** Businesses must show payroll capacity to cover the initial 100% payment to interns, with 75% reimbursement processed through the Chamber. Verification of this capacity may include a payroll report or financial statement summary.
- **Willingness to Educate:** Businesses will be required to sign an agreement acknowledging that 25% of internship hours are dedicated to educational and training components, with agreement adherence monitored through regular check-ins.

**6. Addition Considerations**

- **Community Impact:** Preference will be given to businesses with a demonstrated commitment to community engagement, measured by participation in at least two community events, partnerships, or sponsorships within the last year.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Businesses that actively promote diversity and inclusion within their workforce will receive priority. This can be verified through an internal diversity metric showing a minimum of 30% representation of underrepresented groups within the company or by meeting specific inclusive hiring practices as documented in their hiring policy.

By establishing these criteria, Oak Park NEXT ensures that selected businesses not only provide a safe and educational environment but also contribute meaningfully to intern development and the Oak Park community. Let me know if you'd like to add any further details to these metrics.

**Budget Overview**

Budget Category	Description	Cost
<b>Intern Compensation &amp; Reimbursement</b>	Summer Cohort (20 interns): \$15/hour x 20 hours/week x 12 weeks x 20 interns x 75% reimbursement rate	\$54,000
	Fall Cohort (20 interns): \$15/hour x 20 hours/week x 12 weeks x 20 interns x 75% reimbursement rate	\$54,000
	<b>Total Reimbursement Costs</b>	<b>\$108,000</b>

<b>Administrative Costs</b>	Chamber Program Administration including: staff time, intern vetting, business training, check-ins, reporting, marketing	\$35,000
<b>Program Marketing</b>	Promotion through schools, social media, and community channels	\$5,000
<b>Materials &amp; Supplies</b>	Program materials, educational resources, and office supplies	\$1,000
	<b>Total Operating Funds</b>	<b>\$41,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>\$149,000</b>

**Timeline**

- **January-March 2025:** Recruitment of businesses, school outreach for intern candidates, and application processing.
- **April 2025:** Finalize intern selection, match interns with businesses, and conduct orientation sessions.
- **May-August 2025:** Run Summer Cohort with regular monitoring and data collection.
- **August 2025:** Conduct program evaluation and make necessary adjustments for the Fall Cohort.
- **September-December 2025:** Run Fall Cohort, finalize outcome data, and submit end-of-program report.

**Conclusion**

This pilot program provides a valuable service to Oak Park by equipping young residents with job skills and connecting businesses with motivated, trained interns. Through structured guidance, training, and community investment, Oak Park fosters a sustainable talent pipeline, creating a positive impact for businesses and residents alike. This initiative will lay the foundation for a lasting workforce development program that grows alongside Oak Park’s community and economy.