

State of Maine Intern Program



Project: Maine IT Internship Program

Category: Cross-Boundary Collaborations and Partnerships

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State: Maine

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Project Completion: Ongoing

Executive Summary:

In Maine, and many other states, employment stats may be rising; however career paths within IT show a different story. Information Technology faces unique employment challenges. These challenges are due to a plethora of factors such as precedent requirements, differences in education and IT skills, lack of qualified candidates, etc. One initiative used to address the issue is the Office of Information Technology's (Maine IT) Internship and Mentoring Program (Intern Program). The Intern Program allows for timely and seamless integration of temporary interns to state employment as well as giving many talented individuals the opportunity to experience meaningful projects they would encounter in a similar career.

Business Problem and Solution:

Recent studies have shown that within the next two years nearly a quarter of the Maine IT workforce will be eligible for retirement. When those employees retire, they will leave behind critical unfilled positions. These positions are mainly comprised of mid- to senior-level positions which require candidates to have relevant experience and critical technical skills. This phenomenon has been coined the "Silver Tsunami" in reference to the aging workforce. The program also addresses another emerging issue for Maine IT—the differences in culture between the older generations and newer generations. With all organizations in the IT industry competing for IT talent, both in the private and public sectors, the State recognized the challenge in remaining competitive in such a high-demand field. The Maine IT Intern Program, the first of its kind in Maine, was designed to address both of these challenges in an effort to ensure a highly skilled, sustainable workforce equipped to meet the ever evolving technology needs of the State.

Maine IT has created positive relationships by partnering with local community colleges and universities, career centers, credit and non-credit technical programs and veteran resources in an effort to educate the upcoming workforce about technology jobs in the State of Maine. Additionally, the mentoring component serves to foster an environment to inspire and engage our existing workforce, and become a new way of recruiting, developing and retaining talent in Maine IT. Strategic workforce planning and development is increasingly important to establish a holistic approach to drive cultural change; and it is critical for attracting and retaining the talent needed to serve the public who, in one form or another, all use information technology services. We believe the intern and mentorship program does just that, and more!

Interns are recruited mainly through partnerships between technology leaders, agencies, and outside organizations. We have built our recruitment foundation on three pillars; traditional college students, adult learners - particularly those re-entering the workforce from a technical program, and veterans. Partnerships are forged between colleges and universities whom direct both traditional and non-traditional students with great IT potential, as well as technical centers and veteran centers. Advisors and directors from all institutions are able to scout out individuals with IT talent and direct them toward Maine IT. These partnerships power a majority of the interns in the program.

Individuals who are motivated problem solvers and undergraduate students with some prior work in internships, coursework or evidence of hands on programs/projects related to business or technology; who are pursuing or have completed degrees or certifications in Computer Science or training program for Application/Computer Systems, Hardware/Software, Expert Systems, Networking, Programming, Systems Analysis, Web Design or Social Media applications are sought out. We primarily go after the attitude and aptitude - the rest seems to fall in place.

The goal of the Intern Program is to recruit, train, and retain interns. Interns are mentored by a director or mid- to senior-level management. During these internships our interns put their IT knowledge to use, learn new skills beneficial to the responsibilities within their position, receive career guidance, and, if successful, are ultimately extended employment offers for positions within the State.

Our Workforce Innovations team and interns are proactive in attending events designed for networking about careers. By attending community events, MAINE IT can increase awareness of the Intern Program, and stimulate a greater desire for internships while creating a greater pool of potential candidates. Interns are also extremely involved with "TechNight", an event sponsored by the Office of Information Technology for central Maine high school students. Students are educated on post-secondary careers and options involving IT. Statistics from the last TechNight show that over half of the participants are now either considering careers in IT, considering going to school for an IT related major/minor or are considering attending a school featured in the "TechFair."

When an intern is approaching the end of their term, their opinion is highly valued in the process of finding a replacement for their current position. By then, students are able to grasp the responsibilities and tasks of the position and have the ability to recommend other students who may be suitable for the position, identifying a better candidate for positions than a posting on a job board would do.

Benefits of the Project:

- **The Increasing Dissonance between the Existing Workforce and the Incoming Workforce.** There is no doubt that individuals graduating with degrees from schools are currently some of the best and brightest. Millennials will seek out the best opportunity for themselves, and also are extremely social, hence their avid participation with social media. Millennials are familiarizing themselves with current technology and expect their workplace colleagues to also have current and relevant skills. Interns also are able to provide a different perspective and opinion on projects relevant to the number one target – residents and clients. By taking in talented individuals with an eye for innovative change and agility in the workplace, the Office of Information Technology has begun to realize a shift in workforce culture to one which is more current, inviting, open and collaborative. These skill sets also fit well with the adoption of Agile and Business Process Management. Inability to adjust to the ever changing culture of the residents and clients, as well as the incoming workforce, will result in little to no growth and little

success. Our interns are part of the change process and instrumental in teaching us how they embrace workforce change.

- **Keeping IT jobs in Maine.** Most often, college graduates and individuals who change their career direction find themselves pursuing careers outside the State of Maine. While the unemployment figure in Maine has been low for quite some time, the Office of Information Technology Workforce Team recognizes that the unemployment rate for careers in IT or Computer Science is quite high, and in order to retain such jobs one must establish a strong foundation to encourage individuals to remain local rather than search elsewhere.
- **Seamless integration of interns who have accepted full employment.** The State of Maine Office of Information Technology extended an offer of employment to over 70% of interns. Interns are already familiar with the structure of the State, the tasks and responsibilities associated with the position and the workplace and other co-workers. This greatly reduces the need for training and reduces the time necessary for orientation.

Overall Impact:

Since January of 2013, the State of Maine Office of Information Technology has hired over 70% of interns that have completed the Intern Program. About one-fourth of the interns have completed the program solely for school credit. About three-fourths of the interns have been hired by the State of Maine, with several having already been promoted to higher-level IT positions. By participating in the program, the interns are able to take part in beneficial, hands-on, exciting projects in which they gain the invaluable experience working with highly technical teams and projects relevant to their career field. This experience increases the odds of retaining this talent. Many times during their term, interns work with high senior level leaders and have the opportunity to share their knowledge and make our workplace even better. For example, a group of interns recently completed the “**Intern Challenge**,” in which the group



analyzed the current application process and reported their findings as well as suggestions. The interns later went on to present their findings to the Governor of Maine, Paul Lepage. Not only was this an amazing experience, but it led to real change – resulting in the implementation of an online and cloud-based Applicant Tracking System (ATS). Early adoption shows significant results.

We have an exciting new way to recruit candidates in the Office of Information Technology, and the mentors gain crucial leadership skills to foster a diverse workplace and build a stronger team. The Intern Program continuously proves to be efficient by cutting costs (interns are capable of doing the same work contractors would be hired to complete), saving time (interns who are hired are already familiar with the workplace and tasks), and ultimately fulfilling positions with incredible IT talent who have great potential to continue to grow within the Office of Information Technology.

WITHIN 2 YEARS
24% OF THE WORKFORCE
IS ELIGIBLE FOR
RETIREMENT

18

Current
Interns
Employed

19

Interns that
have been
hired for full
employment

6



*Interns Returned to
School/Summer Only Interns*

74%

...Of Interns Looking
for Employment Were
Hired