

Partnering to Create a New Hospital Internship Program – HPOG Case Study

Introducing the Hospital and its Training Partner

Several years ago, Inova Health System began partnering with a health care administrative training program to place interns from the program into entry-level administrative roles within Inova. Inova is a large nonprofit health care system located in Northern Virginia. At the time of this case study, Inova operated five hospitals and a network of specialized health care businesses, employing over 12,000 workers.

Inova consistently had several dozen entry-level jobs posted that matched the skills and focus of a local career training program called Training Futures. Available entry level jobs included medical receptionist, patient admissions specialist, medical records clerk, and unit secretary. Training Futures was a medical office training program, operated as a partnership between a nonprofit organization, Northern Virginia Family Service, and Northern Virginia Community College. The training curriculum delivered a comprehensive set of administrative skills for its participants, including computer user capabilities (Microsoft Office Suite), customer service, filing, and soft skills. Its specialized health care industry modules included medical terminology, introduction to HIPAA compliance (patient confidentiality requirements), and an introduction to medical coding. The 5-month curriculum featured a 17-week skill-building curriculum, followed by a 3-week unpaid internship for all participants who successfully completed the curriculum and met performance expectations regarding program attendance.

The Relationship-Building Phase and Finding a “Champion”

Inova was well-known as a premier regional employer, and the abundance of online job postings for various administrative positions compelled many Training Futures participants to apply. However, applications submitted by trainees seem to go into a “black hole” of its online recruiting system. No one was called for interviews.

Training Futures’ program leaders made several attempts to develop a partnership with Inova, including meeting representatives from Human Resources and a few individual hiring managers. They explored how to leverage Inova’s internship program as an opportunity to test out new hires risk-free and to help provide additional support for special projects or divisions that had open positions. Inova’s response was always, “we don’t do internships”.

However, one senior Human Resources recruiter at the largest Inova hospital, located close to the training site, was interested enough to visit the Training Futures program. She came away very impressed with the quality of the program and the participants she met. Hiring managers had expressed frustration to HR about the slow pace of hiring for administrative positions. She believed that hosting interns from the program could help address several ongoing challenges that she described to the program team: having hundreds of unknown applicants for each opening, a higher-than-desired turnover rate for entry-level administrative jobs, and a cumbersome and time-consuming hiring process.

Training Futures’ program coordinator gave her the form used by other employer-partners to define the skills and tasks required for each requested internship position, since administrative roles vary widely. For each internship requested, the Training Futures staff use the completed employer forms to match with participants who had excelled in the skills and tasks needed, in order to maximize the success rates for both parties. The senior Human Resources recruiter met with her supervisor, the hospital’s Human Resources Director, to discuss the possibility of using internships with Training Futures as a type of temporary-to-permanent tryout for potential new hires. He agreed to explore it further with the hospital’s legal team.

Encountering and Overcoming Potential Barriers

The proposed new internship program passed the first test, about legal liability of interns. Since the hospital already hosted clinical rotations for other college training programs, the administrative training internship program at Training Futures, which included Northern Virginia Community College as a partner, was viewed similarly.

However, the new administrative internship program would need to follow all of the requirements and processes for clinical rotation placements, such as with registered nurses' training programs. This included many new steps that the Training Futures program didn't do for internships with all of its other employer-partners, such as having participants complete the formal employment application, passing a background check and drug screen, documenting required immunizations, getting a hospital name badge, and attending new employee orientation. These activities would require the Training Futures staff to conduct internship selection several weeks earlier than usual for any training participant who was matched with an Inova internship, in order to have time to complete the additional steps. Given the importance of this relationship to the success of the Training Futures program and its participants, the staff and Inova's senior recruiter agreed to work closely together to coordinate these additional steps and pilot the internship program.

Building on a Successful Pilot

For the first pilot internships, Inova's senior recruiter persuaded two influential hiring managers who had open administrative positions to be the first internship supervisors. The staff placed two strong Training Futures participants in these 3-week internship roles, and the participants agreed to complete all of the extra steps. They visited the hospital a week prior to the internship start date to get their immunizations and a name badge.

The first internship placements were successful; managers and interns all felt the program was beneficial. Managers found that the Training Futures interns needed only limited supervision and were more productive than anticipated. The senior HR recruiter also liked it because it made her job easier compared to time needed in the traditional process to review and screen so many resumes, conduct screening interviews and then broker hiring manager interviews. She had more confidence that interns who had already proven themselves would be successful in the job. Successful interns already had hiring action files that were nearly complete, so HR didn't need to do much else in order to make an offer to successful interns.

Following the pilot cohort, the initial internship hiring managers and the senior recruiter spread the word about this success with other Inova hiring managers that had administrative openings. Soon the Training Futures program was receiving more internship requests from Inova per cohort than they could handle – over a dozen in some cohorts. Over a period of several years, Inova hired several dozen Training Futures interns for full time positions, and became the program's top employer-partner. One particularly successful intern is the receptionist for the hospital's HR department. She had such a striking presence with all guests that the HR Director presented her with a plaque that read "Vice President of First Impressions".

Reflecting on the Training Futures internship-based partnership, the senior recruiter summarized her experiences: "Since Training Futures participants had already persevered to attend and complete an intensive 5-month training program, they had already demonstrated many qualities and capabilities we needed. 95% of the Training Futures participants who served as interns were successful. There were trained to meet or exceed our expectations."

INTERNSHIP ADVOCACY CASE STUDY

HPOG Tool to Guide Advocacy Efforts with Employers

Below are responses that combine HPOG grantee suggestions and subject matter expert recommendations in response to 3 questions arising from the Internship Case Study presented in April 2018 for the HPOG Virtual Learning Community. This information can be used as a tool to guide similar efforts by HPOG grantees to develop new internships or similar work-based learning programs with employers.

<u>Questions to Answer from Case Study Review</u>	
<p>1. What conditions signal that an internship may be a solution to recommend?</p> <p>2. What advocacy strategies can influence organizational decisions to approve a new internship program?</p> <p>3. What key action steps can lead to a successful new internship program?</p>	<p>1. What conditions signal that an internship may be a solution to recommend?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer need for difficult-to-fill occupations, with limited success via traditional recruiting - Ongoing hiring demand for targeted jobs - High turnover in targeted jobs - HPOG has training program that matches needs - Absence of work-based learning option for this program - No new costs for employer to fund
<p>2. What advocacy strategies can influence organizational decisions to approve a new internship program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to have established relationship with a “champion” within the employer organization to advocate for/run program - Cultivate potential champion via program exposure, such as an HPOG site tour/meeting participants - Emphasize HPOG’s role in screening and preparing successful trainees for a strong fit and employment success - Need backing of senior manager to approve new internship program, either directly or via internal champion - Cite precedence of similar program (e.g., clinicals with HPOG partner college) - Having college partner helps, especially for HPOG grantees that are CBOs 	<p>3. What key initial action steps and stakeholder benefits can lead to a successful new internship program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be prepared to make changes to follow employers’ processes - Run small scale pilot to test process/work out bugs and minimize risks before expanding - Choose internally influential pilot supervisors; Leverage existing relationships when possible - Careful screening/matching of interns for placements - Give interns real work to perform - HR Recruiter benefits: Makes recruiting easier by completing hiring package upfront; Reduces the need to screen scores of resumes of unknown candidates - Hiring Manager benefits: reduce hiring risk via temp-to-perm tryout; High productivity via HPOG training programs and soft skill preparation - Work experience and supervisor recommendation even for interns not hired