
Interns help nonprofit organizations

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Does your agency or business have valuable projects waiting for the time and talent to implement them? The Washington State University Tri-Cities Business LINKS program may have the business expertise you need.

From marketing projects to procedure manuals, Business LINKS--Local Institute of Networking, Knowledge and Support--provides organizations with WSU business majors who can help.

This summer the focus has been assisting nonprofit agencies due to a special grant from the Kauffman Foundation. "Interns do what the business owner can not get to because of lack of resources or time," said Johan Curtiss, program director for the internship.

For Tri-Cities Residential Services, intern Lori Wagner is working on a marketing project. The agency is exploring the idea of expanding from its traditional work with the developmentally disabled, to include assisting any seniors with managing their resources.

"We have taken only incremental steps on the project," said Roger Krebs, executive director. "There have been so many other things on our plate we haven't devoted attention to it recently. It seemed like a golden opportunity to resurrect it."

Wagner has modified a survey that was developed by the agency and is presenting it, in person, to local senior organizations. She works out of her house and the Business LINKS office, which has computers for the interns, and reports to Krebs at least weekly.

Interns benefit also. "In class everything is black or white," Wagner said. But her summer experience is teaching her many problem solving and people skills. For Adult Day Services, intern Emily Rogers is reorganizing the agency's policy and procedures manual to match state standards. "She has gotten us organized," said Merrie Felton, director of nursing.

The agency had policies, but they were scattered. Though a valuable and necessary project, their more immediate day-to-day task of supervising and assisting adults with impairments took precedent. She praises Rogers for being studious and able to work independently.

At Tri-County Partners Habitat for Humanity, Chana Hickey is doing a variety of tasks: going through their publications and creating a consistent look, updating their web page and instructing staff on how to produce Power Point presentations. "She is helping us make a better presentation of ourselves to the public," said Lisa Staudinger, executive director.

To meet criteria of the Kauffman Foundation, which was established to promote youth education and entrepreneurship, Business LINKS seeks projects that will have long-lasting benefits to the organization and the community.

For an organization to qualify, it must be up and running for a year. At least 25 hours must be spent by the director or the owner with the intern. Nonprofit organizations must have fewer than 50 employees, for-profit businesses less than 100 and also less than \$7.5 million in sales. Business owners meet with the Business LINKS staff to describe their projects, which are screened "to find projects that would provide the broadest experience," Curtiss said: not busy work and not the type of work a volunteer could do.

Each organization interviews three students who have stated a preference for certain projects. Then, the organizations and students evaluate their choices and Business LINKS matches the organization with the student.

Interns are available from mid-May to the end of July. This summer five positions were filled from 11 student applicants, who were screened by Business LINKS for knowledge and maturity. There is a sliding fee for businesses, from \$750 to \$1500, depending on the company's earnings. For nonprofit organizations, the fee was \$250, subsidized by the Kauffman Foundation Entrepreneurial Internship Program grant. Business LINKS will continue the internship program next summer.

Application forms from organizations are due by April 2000.

Students are undergraduate seniors from both WSU Tri-Cities and Pullman campuses. Most have Tri-Cities connections and live with their families during the internship. Interns earned seven dollars per hour this summer.

Business LINKS is an outreach program of WSU funded by a grant from the Department of Energy economic diversification program. Business LINKS is located in the Consolidated Information Center, Room 125, on the WSU Tri-Cities campus. In addition to the internship program, Business LINKS offers classes, counseling and information resources to businesses. For more information contact Johan Curtiss at 372-7191 or their web page at www.TriCity.WSU.EDU/LINKS.