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The Association for the Advancement
of Sustainability in Higher Education

GUIDE TO CREATING & MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS



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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

As efforts to transform colleges and universities into sustainable communities expand and evolve, meaningful engagement of students has never been more important. Students have both the passion and influence to help achieve even the most improbable institutional or cultural changes. Many colleges and universities are tapping into this valuable resource by developing Sustainability Internship Programs (SIPs) to formally engage student leaders in campus sustainability initiatives.

SUSTAINABILITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM = SIP

Sustainability Internship Program (SIP): a program offered by a college or university that provides students with structured opportunities to contribute meaningfully to sustainability-focused research, academics, programming, and projects

WHAT IS A SIP?

Sustainability Internship Programs (SIPs) provide students at colleges and universities with structured opportunities to contribute meaningfully to sustainability-focused research, academics, programming, and projects. SIPs have been instrumental in advancing sustainability on campus and in the surrounding community, often epitomizing the campus as a living-learning lab experience.

Findings suggest that SIPs vary widely among institutions in their size, structure, management, and assessment (see [About the Guide](#) on the next page for information on methodology and findings). These programs are typically designed to meet the unique needs and challenges of their respective colleges and universities. Nonetheless, some typical goals for SIPs often include any or all of the following:

- Supporting institutional or cultural change toward sustainability
- Connecting operational activities with the academic mission
- Providing unique skill and career development opportunities to students
- Increasing institutional capacity to develop, implement, and assess sustainability programs and initiatives

There are some important differences between SIPs and peer-to-peer sustainability programs (often referred to as “Eco-Rep” or sustainability educator programs). As the name implies, peer-to-peer programs rely heavily on peer education techniques. They are typically based in residential buildings and focus on sustainable living practices. As outlined in the definition and goals above, SIP programs tend to apply to a broader range of goals. While this guide does not address peer-to-peer programs directly, some of the information presented here may be helpful for setting up these types of programs. (See AASHE’s [Student Sustainability Educators Guide](#) for more information on peer-to-peer programs.)

Spring 2014 intern team leaders kick off the semester at Texas A&M University by leading the intern team on a tour of campus. The tour is our first field trip of the semester and buttresses teambuilding efforts. Photographer: Ben Kalscheur



ABOUT THE GUIDE

Who Should Use this Guide?

This “How-To Guide” explores best practices for establishing and managing highly effective SIPs. It presents information for individuals seeking guidance on creating new SIPs ([Chapter 2](#)), or for those looking to change or improve the ongoing management of existing SIPs ([Chapter 3](#)).

The SIP model is highly adaptable, so much of the content within this guide can apply to any college or university regardless of institution type. While most of the information in this guide is based on experiences of SIP managers at U.S. institutions, much of the content can also be applied to colleges and universities outside of the United States. We welcome feedback from non-U.S. institutions about their unique challenges in creating and managing SIPs.

Methodology

This guide draws on conversations with sustainability professionals who were either interested in creating internship programs or responsible for managing individual interns or internship programs as a part of their official duties. In this guide, the latter are referred to as SIP managers. These discussions took place, both informally and formally, through workshops at multiple AASHE annual conferences and at the 2014 Smart and Sustainable Campuses Conference. Additionally, a series of 60-minute interviews was conducted with SIP managers at several U.S. institutions. While these conversations added needed breadth and depth to the guide, much of the content reflects the authors’ experiences as SIP managers.

SIP Support, Resources & Communication

Additional SIP resources have been compiled into a [SIP Resource Toolkit](#), provided alongside this publication. The toolkit provides access to sustainability internship program resources crowdsourced from sustainability managers across the United States. References to specific resources within the toolkit are linked throughout this publication, and readers are encouraged to use both this guide and the toolkit as a reference.

Feedback is encouraged to answer questions about creating or managing SIPs, to share stories of accomplishment, and to continuously improve the SIP toolkit resources. Please submit your feedback or questions to sip.managers@gmail.com.

Student interns Haley Prihoda and Haley Long trim reusable posters for the annual Greenest Floor Challenge at Indiana University Bloomington. Photo Credit: Jessica Plassman



CHAPTER 2: CREATING SUSTAINABILITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Values, goals and resources must be established in order to successfully create a Sustainability Internship Program (SIP) that fits an institution's needs. This chapter outlines common program components for making decisions related to structure, goals, and function, as illustrated below.

COMMON PROGRAM COMPONENTS FOR ESTABLISHING SIP STRUCTURE, GOALS, AND FUNCTION



SETTING GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The first step in creating a SIP plan is to establish goals and priorities for the program. Where possible, it is important to align SIP goals and priorities with institutional strategic planning. This type of alignment will help to:

- Forge clearer ties with senior administrators
- Provide greater access to funding sources
- Foster collaborations between offices and departments
- Influence the course of ongoing sustainability or campus strategic planning efforts

Mapping Institutional Assets

Reviewing and understanding the unique assets that an institution possesses may serve to support the development of a SIP and may help shape its goals. These institutional assets may include:

- **Strategic planning documents:** Institutional strategic plans, vision/mission/values statements, campus master plans, climate action plans, campus sustainability reports, etc.
- **Human resources:** Sustainability champions among students, faculty, and staff; community members; and the institutions partner organizations.
- **The environment:** Each institution's unique campus environment, including its buildings, grounds, and facilities.
- **Policies & processes:** Policies, decision-making processes, and structures across the institution that influence or determine sustainability outcomes.

Cal Dining Sustainability Team hosts Food Day celebrations at UC Berkeley. Photo credit: Katherine Walsh



Creating a Short-Term Committee or Working Group

Convening a diverse group of faculty, staff, students and community members for the purpose of setting SIP goals and priorities can increase communication and buy-in among program stakeholders. It is important to ensure that operational staff are engaged members of this committee or group. (Note: These tasks may be more appropriately addressed through an existing working group or committee.)

Analyzing Goals & Priorities

The committee or working group should consider questions that will impact goals and priorities. Examples include:

- **Institutional priorities:** What does the institution value? How can the SIP leverage these values?
- **Sector priorities:** Are there campus sectors (e.g., academics, operations) that are more (or less) engaged with sustainability priorities? Are there high-priority initiatives in certain sectors to which a SIP might contribute?
- **Sustainability goals:** Has the college or university set institution-wide goals and priorities for sustainability? If so, how might a SIP support these efforts?
- **Sustainability initiative needs:** What resources (financial, human, material) does the sustainability office, center, or initiative possess? What role might the internship program play in supporting those leading the initiative?
- **Student needs:** Who are your students and how will a SIP serve their needs? Do students need additional student engagement opportunities, sustainability education, or career development?

Determining Program Purpose

The committee or working group should determine the overall purpose of the program. Example program goals include:

- **Student engagement:** Students are encouraged to create new sustainability projects based on personal interests.
- **Student education:** Internships are exploratory in nature with a focus on sustainability education; may cater to first-year students.
- **Career development:** Internships are designed to provide students with concrete and marketable skills for career attainment at graduation.
- **Project completion:** Internships are designed with the primary purpose of meeting the institution or sustainability initiative's sustainability goals. (Students have limited ability to propose their own projects.)

Some considerations when narrowing program goals:

- Giving students the ability to choose their own projects might compromise a SIP manager's ability to complete projects aligned with specific sustainability goals.
- Adopting "student engagement" and "project completion" oriented goals simultaneously may result in competing priorities.
- When priorities are most aligned with student education or student engagement, a student peer-to-peer program may be more appropriate.
- In creating SIP goals that meet institutions' unique needs, informational interviews with students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders are always helpful.

SYNTHESIZING INSTITUTIONAL GOALS, PRIORITIES & NEEDS TO CREATE UNIQUE SIP PRIORITIES.



DETERMINING THE IDEAL SIZE

With goals established, the next step is to determine the size of the program. Program size will be contingent on institution size and type, history of sustainability at the institution, budget and support, program orientation, and capacity for management and mentorship. Some institutions may prefer to pilot a SIP and build the program over time as institutional support increases and new needs are identified. It may be critical to demonstrate success on a small scale, then ramp up to larger-scale programs.

Institution Size & Type

Institutional size and type is important to consider in determining the size and scope of the SIP. A small SIP will be adequate for a smaller institution and vice versa. Student participation in SIPs is also driven by institution type. For example, demand for co-curricular engagement may be higher at four-year institutions, while smaller, more career focused programs may be more adequate at two-year colleges.

History & Current Status of Sustainability

Institutions with young sustainability initiatives may not be ready to support a large SIP (though hiring interns can be logical, low-cost entry point for institutions with fewer resources). As an institution develops a culture of sustainability, its ability to support a larger numbers of sustainability interns will increase.

Budget & Support

SIP budget needs will heavily impact program size. It is necessary to get an understanding of administrative support for the program, and whether institutional funding will be available. Details on funding are provided on the next page under 'Assessing Institutional Funding'.

Team or Individual Orientation

Some programs are team-oriented while others are more individualistic. Students working in cohorts can build camaraderie and may reduce the administrative burden. Alternatively, independent work by students provides more flexibility and greater opportunities to build important organization and management skills, while addressing more projects.

Capacity for Management & Mentorship

SIP mentorship is an important component that can impact program size. (Mentorship is covered more in-depth in Chapter 3 under [Developing Good Mentors](#).) Establishing large programs is a common pitfall that increases the mentorship burden and may increase the likelihood of unsuccessful internship experiences.

University of Illinois at Chicago SIP participants, Alyssa Straits and HULLIAMS KAMLEN, collect measurements and data to update the campus tree inventory. Photographer: Timothy Nyugen



ASSESSING FUNDING AVAILABILITY

SIP interviews conducted in preparation for this guide indicate that funding levels vary significantly from program to program. Some SIPs have budgets in excess of \$100,000, while others run without a formal budget. In making decisions about the structure, functionality, and management of a SIP, it is important to estimate the budget necessary for the program to be successful. This section provides budget creation considerations and background on potential funding sources.

When creating a budget, the following expenses should be considered:

- **Intern compensation:** Hourly wage, stipend, service learning hours, or academic credit
- **Intern benefits:** Health care, tuition remission
- **Program management:** Point person for hiring, intern support, and program evaluation
- **Mentorship:** In-kind time donations of time and effort (may be helpful to monetize)
- **Academic:** Instructor compensation, course related expenses
- **Supplies:** Books, instructional materials, etc.
- **Professional development:** Sending interns to national conferences to present a paper or poster
- **Associated program costs:** Costs associated with the development of new SIP initiatives (e.g., materials needed for new campus garden program led by interns)

Compensation Options

One of the primary considerations when establishing a SIP is how and whether students should be compensated for their participation. In SIPs across the United States, students are either paid, receive academic credit, meet service learning requirements, or volunteer their time. Student payment can come in the form of hourly wages or a fixed stipend. Some institutions do not allow interns to receive both academic credit and compensation.

Academic Credit

Programs where students receive academic credit for their involvement in a SIP typically have a formal academic focus. Such programs require consistent support and involvement from faculty. Students can earn academic credit by presenting on project work outcomes, writing an academic paper, or keeping a project experience journal.

Student Volunteers

For programs where students can gain valuable skills and experience through their participation in a SIP program, it is possible to recruit student volunteers who do not receive payment or academic credit for their experiences. For example, there may be a student need for service-learning hours that a SIP can provide. Meaningful professional development opportunities should be incorporated to encourage and maintain student participation.

Indiana University student interns participate in Campus Garden Redesign Workday. Courtesy of Indiana University Bloomington



Potential Funding Sources

When requesting SIP funding, it is helpful to assess costs and benefits of all potential funding sources. Many programs find benefit in diversifying with both one-time and long-term funding sources.

COMPARISON OF ONE-TIME & LONG-TERM FUNDING STREAMS

	ONE-TIME FUNDING	LONG-TERM FUNDING
TYPICAL USE	Piloting, program expansion	Long-term budgeting
TYPICAL SOURCE	Grants, one-time upper admin funding	Line-item in sustainability or other dept budget
CONS	Programs vulnerable after grant period	Programs vulnerable to budget cuts

Internal Funding

- **Sustainability initiative funds:** Reallocation or request for funds to be included in the budget of a sustainability initiative. *Typically long-term.*
- **High-level administrative request:** Presidents, provost, and other upper-level administrators may provide discretionary funding for special programs. *Typically one-time.*
- **Cost-sharing with related units, offices, or departments:** Operational or auxiliary units and academic departments may grant requests for full or partial funding for interns working directly on projects associated with that department. *Typically one-time, though can manifest as long-term.*
- **Office, unit, or departmental sponsorship:** Operational units or academic departments that want to support sustainability without getting actively involved in projects may agree to sponsor the entire SIP or specific parts of it. *One-time or long-term.*
- **Student funds:** Some student sustainability funds can provide full or partial funding for SIPs, especially when these programs provide opportunities for students. *Typically one-time.*
- **Complementary existing student employment programs:** Many institutions have been successful in allocating funds from existing fellowship, graduate assistant, or scholarship programs aimed at placing students in exploratory career positions. *One-time or long-term.*
- **Federal work-study programs and other financial aid:** Financial aid offices can provide information about the availability and appropriate use of Federal Work Study funds as well as other financial aid opportunities for students. *One-time or long-term.*

External Funding

- **Corporate sponsorship:** Developing relationships with corporate partners can alleviate financial burden on the institution. Such arrangements should be pursued through the institution's fund development office. *One-time or long-term.*
- **Private/Foundation grant:** Establishing a SIP through a private donor or foundation gift can yield additional donations to either the SIP or to other sustainability programs at the institution. *Typically one-time.*
- **Private endowment:** Through collaboration with a fund development office or foundation, a secured endowment could fund an individual internship or an entire SIP. *Long-term.*
- **Federal or state grants:** Targeted funding opportunities may exist from federal agencies such as EPA, Department of Energy, or National Science Foundation, and state agencies involved in education or environmental resource management. *Typically one-time.*

DRAFTING A GUIDING DOCUMENT

A narrative document outlining the mission, function, and structure of the SIP will promote understanding of goals for the institution, its students, and potential funders. (Examples of SIP guiding documents are provided in the [Creating a Program](#) folder of the SIP Toolkit.) In drafting a guiding document, consider including the following sections:

- **Vision and Mission:** What is the aim of the program and the primary goals? (e.g., student engagement and education, project completion, career development)
- **Structure:** Who will manage the program and how? This section of the document should include information on mentorship and intern support.
- **Roles and responsibilities of interns:** What are the expectations of students accepted into the program? It may be beneficial to develop a set of sample job descriptions for internships proposed through the program.
- **Target audience:** What kinds of students are most ideal for the program?
- **Application process:** How will students apply? Who will evaluate applications, and how will this process be completed?
- **Budget:** What are the program expenses, including intern compensation and program management? Funds can be requested for pilot programs, long-term rollouts, and singular requests.

Greater detail on many of these concepts is provided in [Chapter 3](#).

University of Texas Austin student, Hiro Horikoshi, is performing an irrigation audit at Littlefield Fountain. The audit helped determine modifications to increase efficiency of irrigation. Photographer: Markus Hogue



CHAPTER 3: MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

The remainder of this guide is designed to support the implementation and ongoing management of Sustainability Internship Programs (SIPs). This chapter is split into five sections, each devoted to a stage of the “life cycle of a SIP.” (The first stage, “Aligning with Strategic Planning”, has been covered in the previous chapter.)

Implementation and ongoing management practices vary widely among the SIPs surveyed for this guide. While not all programs follow the steps provided here, all encountered management challenges relevant to one or more of the six stages. The strategies outlined in this chapter can be adapted to better suit the institution.

SIX STAGES IN THE LIFE CYCLE OF A STUDENT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



DEVELOPING INTERNSHIP PROJECTS

Well-structured SIP projects can keep students interested and engaged throughout the duration of the project. This section provides background on soliciting new project ideas, increasing the quality of project ideas, and creating a project submission template (see the [Developing Projects](#) folder in the SIP Toolkit for more info).

Sourcing Project Ideas from Stakeholders

Internship ideas often arise from a variety of sources:

- **Student initiated projects:** Students can submit a number of project ideas which and which may or may not be practical or feasible in the framework of a short-term funding project.
- **Staff or faculty initiated projects:** Project ideas may align directly with staff or faculty job duties and research. Ideas from staff and faculty may be collected through an organized effort or open call for proposals.
- **Sustainability office initiated projects:** These projects often align with sustainability planning or core needs of the sustainability initiative. However, project selections may not always be of high interest to others.

Contextualizing Project Ideas

While SIP managers and key sustainability stakeholders often have a strong sense of the types of projects needed, new energy, creativity, and support can be found when soliciting ideas from outside the core group. Consider the following strategies for documenting project ideas and engaging others in submitting new internship ideas:

- **Internship Archive:** A public inventory documenting the successes, challenges and recommendations of previous projects will ensure that projects can be easily evaluated and are not repeated.
- **New Idea Bank:** Several colleges and universities maintain lists of project ideas that are collected and maintained on a semester or yearly basis. Idea descriptions may include potential mentor contacts and resource needs. These lists can be created in conjunction with living learning lab programming.
- **Submission Guidelines:** SIP managers can more easily assess project quality, level of interest, and potential impact of project ideas by providing some parameters for project submissions. Example guidelines include:
 - Project description, impetus, basic purpose, and goals
 - Mentor(s) willing to support student work on the project
 - Required student skills and experience
 - Any possible funding sources for the project
 - Administrative approval (important for projects that would alter facilities infrastructure or institutional policies)
 - Proposed metrics for evaluating project success

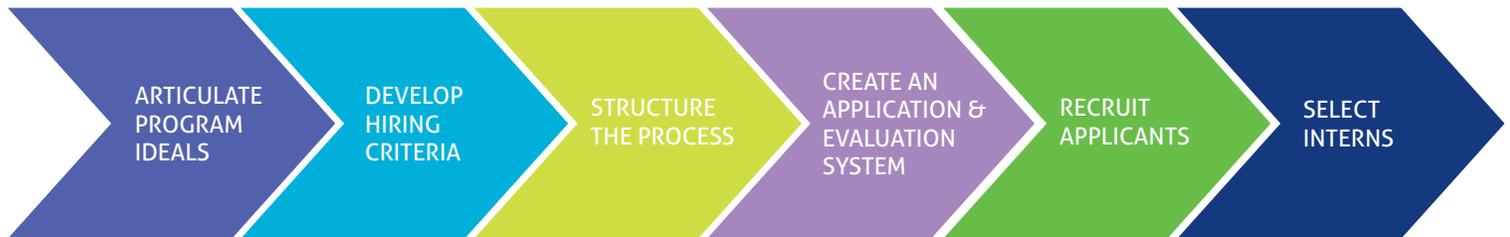
UC Berkeley's Campus Recycling student staff attending the 2014 California Higher Education Sustainability Conference as professional development. Photo credit: Katherine Walsh



ESTABLISHING A HIRING PROCESS

Protocol for establishing a hiring process should vary based on the unique needs of each institution. The diagram below outlines basic steps to consider when structuring a process for hiring sustainability interns:

TYPICAL HIRING PROCESS FOR STUDENT INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS



Articulate Student Qualifications & Outcomes

The hiring process presents an opportunity to articulate program values, skills, competencies, or knowledge students should bring to the program (versus outcomes students will gain from participation in the program). Program qualifications might include: passion for or interest in sustainability, comfort working independently (and/or collaborative group work abilities), proven leadership abilities, demonstrated cultural competencies, critical and systems thinking skills, troubleshooting skills, technical skills, and oral and written communication skills. An ideal list of qualifications should be drafted and prioritized to help shape expectations throughout the hiring process.

Develop Hiring Criteria

Development of hiring criteria related to program ideals will help students demonstrate their fit for the program. Basic criteria to consider includes:

- Personal statement or essay to help assess applicant qualifications
- Educational background requirements, such as minimum standing, GPA, and relevant majors or minors
- Co-curricular activity requirements related to student experience in relevant organizations or activities
- On- or off-campus work experience
- Volunteer experience or community service
- Requirements for submitting professional or academic references

To assess the quality of applicants and provide transparency in how applications are evaluated, a SIP manager or hiring committee should consider creating a hiring criteria rubric. The [Recruiting Students](#) section of this guide will provide additional resources for communicating hiring criteria to students.

Structuring the Hiring Process

The SIP hiring process should be structured in a way to select the best candidates while minimizing stakeholder burden. In outlining the hiring process, consider the following variables:

- **What:** How thorough or involved of a hiring process will be required?
- **How:** How do you plan to evaluate applications?
- **Who:** Which stakeholders might be willing or able to provide support during hiring?
- **When:** Do you plan to have a semester, academic year, summer, yearlong or hybrid length program?

The [Establishing a Hiring Process](#) folder in the SIP Toolkit provides examples of other institutions' SIP hiring resources.

BASIC TIMELINE FOR SELECTING SIP APPLICANTS

PREPARATION (4 WEEKS)

- Request for proposals issued
- Budgeting for number of positions being funded
- Identifying Mentors

RECRUITMENT (2-8 WEEKS)

- Marketing campaign: press release, email blasts, info sessions

APPLICATION EVALUATION (4-6 WEEKS)

- Initial review, ranking, elimination of applications
- Finalist interviews
- Students selection and offers sent

PAPERWORK (1-2 WEEKS)

- Students provided with institutional hiring requirements and timeline for completing paperwork

Notes: 1) The basic timeline for an involved hiring process outlined above can be scaled down to meet institutions' needs. 2) Start dates vary and may be longer for first time implementation.

Connecticut College student interns participate in a waste audit. Courtesy of Connecticut College



Application & Evaluation System

Consider creating a rubric to evaluate applicants and application reviewers. At a minimum, this might include descriptions of program ideals with examples of highly qualified responses to each of the application criteria. Assigning point values to a rubric can be advantageous, but score inflation can still occur among reviewers. A voting system where reviewers distribute a set number of points is better suited for large applicant pools.

The format for submitting applicant information will dictate how easily reviewers are able to evaluate and compare applicants. Individual documents (e.g., MSWord or PDF) will limit ability to compare applicant information side-by-side. The table below lists some systems for collecting and evaluating applications.

COMPARISON OF THREE SIP APPLICANT EVALUATION FORMATS

	E-MAIL DOCUMENT SUBMISSION	ONLINE FORM SUBMISSION	CUSTOM ONLINE APPLICATION SYSTEM
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Google forms Survey Monkey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PHP programmed MySQL database
COMPLEXITY OF HIRING PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified timeline and framework One round of review, few interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified to complex Several rounds of review/interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex reviewing timeline and framework Several rounds of review/interviews
STAGE(S) OF PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection Evaluation/review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection Evaluation/review Interview
SIZE OF APPLICANT/ REVIEWER POOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small applicant pool (< 20) Small reviewer pool (< 5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium applicant pool (20-50) Medium reviewer pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large applicant pool (> 50) Large reviewer pool
FINANCIAL COST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low short-term financial investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low short-term financial investment Capacity to reduce long-term HR cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High initial financial cost Capacity to reduce long-term HR cost
TECH LEARNING CURVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No barriers to entry for reviewers with less technology experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No barriers to entry for reviewers with less technology experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential barriers to entry for reviewers with less technology experience
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an application template in Word or Acrobat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have students submit essays independently, or ask short answer questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U existing applications Work with IT-savvy students, staff, or departments

Recruiting Students

While investing in recruitment is primarily meant to enhance the breadth and quality of the applicant pool, it can also provide opportunities to raise awareness about campus sustainability programming among new stakeholders and form new partnerships with campus units. The following are recruitment strategies for increasing application numbers and enhancing program exposure overall:

- Craft the institution's sustainability story to highlight how students have impacted the sustainability movement. Include recent projects and goals moving forward.
- Develop a marketing campaign and recruitment resources to identify marketing goals, messaging, media contacts, and strategies for different types of media.
- Leverage current assets and make new connections by reaching out to student groups, departments, student service offices, residential housing services, and other groups.

Selecting Interns

Depending on the size and complexity of the hiring process, selecting interns can be logistically challenging. Consider using the following tools to ensure interviewers and interviewees understand expectations.

- An interview prep sheet will help student applicants prepare for interviews. Typical components include: background on the SIP, interview structure, and expectations for preparation.
- Standard interviewer questions help to convey any basic information that should be collected during the interview. This is particularly useful if teams are interviewing candidates.
- An interviewer rubric gives interviewers a framework for prioritizing finalists.

Offering the Job

All students will need to meet hiring requirements, including background checks, federal work eligibility and potentially other restrictions. For paid student internships, the payment structure and other benefits should be included in a conditional offer.

Institutional Hiring Requirements

Institutions should work with the human resources department when hiring students, particularly for paid internship positions. Consider requesting supplemental paperwork, such as photo or liability release, to help decrease the overall liability of the SIP. For internships resulting in academic credit, it is important to work with academic administration to ensure that academic credit is handled in accordance with university policy.

Student interns assist in irrigation installation on the University of Texas Austin campus. The students provided a design for the irrigation and gained hands-on experience implementing the design. Photographer: Markus Hogue



SUPPORTING STUDENTS DURING INTERNSHIPS

Many SIP managers have found that providing students the opportunity to thrive during their internships requires a strong support framework. (See [Supporting Students During Internships](#) folder in the SIP Toolkit for several resources related to this section of the guide.) This section will provide resources and background in each of these areas, focusing on how to:

- Foster and distribute mentorship responsibilities among campus stakeholders
- Provide relevant background materials in sustainability, leadership, and organizational change management
- Empower students to manage their projects effectively and efficiently

Developing Good Mentors

Finding good mentors to help shoulder the burden of managing interns can increase the capacity of sustainability staff while creating strong partnerships within the campus community. (See [Developing Good Mentors](#) folder in SIP Toolkit.) Faculty, staff, graduate students, or community members can serve as SIP mentors. There are many factors contributing to positive experiences among mentors and mentees.

Characteristics of Good Mentors:

- **Availability:** Mentors should dedicate at least 1-2 hours per week to review the work of each student intern.
- **Relevant experience:** Finding mentors whose work relates to the internship focus can provide students with foundational support and help connect them with departmental resources.
- **Knowledge of the campus:** Understanding the political climate and organizational complexities surrounding the focus area can be extremely helpful for students.
- **Communication skills:** Mentors with clear, ambitious, and reasonable expectations for student output can both steer and catalyze student progress.

After an action-packed semester, a Texas A&M spring 2013 intern team celebrates with a fun picture that epitomizes the bond that was created between interns during the semester. Photographer: Karen Bigley



Setting Clear Expectations for Mentors:

The following resources may be helpful in communicating expectations to mentors:

- **A guidelines document:** Expectations for communication, availability, and completion of work are usually included in a guidelines document. Stated commitments to complete program evaluations and protocol for reporting issues may also be included.
- **Mentor evaluations & reporting:** Such reporting, ideally submitted at several stages throughout the internship, can provide valuable feedback on student performance. These evaluations can be created using simple survey tools such as Google Forms or Survey Monkey.
- **Mentor summits:** Several institutions hold half- or full-day summits focused on sharing best practices for mentorship.
- **Mentoring mentors:** Pairing veteran mentors with new mentors can provide important support, while validating the good work of dedicated faculty, staff, and students.
- **Co-mentorship:** Several large programs pair staff with faculty to support integration of operational and educational perspectives.

Preventing Mentor Burnout:

Good mentorship takes time and dedication, and the best mentors are often already overcommitted. Consider the following strategies to avoid mentor burnout:

- **Communication:** Connect with mentors regularly to identify potential warning signs of burnout.
- **Per-term commitments:** Ask new mentors to commit to shorter, well-defined terms (one summer, semester or academic year).
- **Community:** Connect new mentors with veteran mentors and relevant community members building a sense of community around the program. Ask veteran mentors to help identify new mentors within their areas.

Providing Students Foundational Knowledge

Interns within a SIP cohort will begin the internship experience with varying levels of background, knowledge, and skills. Providing foundational knowledge and skills to students can provide them with a common language for collaboration. (See [Providing Students Foundational Knowledge](#) folder in SIP Toolkit.) Consider following the sequence in the diagram below.

SEQUENCE FOR PROVIDING FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS TO STUDENT INTERNS



Defining Core Competencies and Student Outcomes:

Outcomes will vary based on institutional needs and the nature of the internship projects. Basic topics to consider when defining core competencies or student outcomes for success include:

- Sustainability literacy
- Organizational change
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Institutional knowledge
- Cultural competency
- Communication
- Management
- Metacognition and self-reflection
- Assessing current/incoming intern knowledge and skills

Intern Training:

Intern training options vary, and selection will likely depend on institutional resources available and the knowledge level of students. Options include:

- Half-day or full-day retreats
- Credit or non-credit seminars
- Workshops
- Mentor meetings

Developing a Curriculum:

For programs with strong curricular components, course objectives and desired student outcomes should be developed.

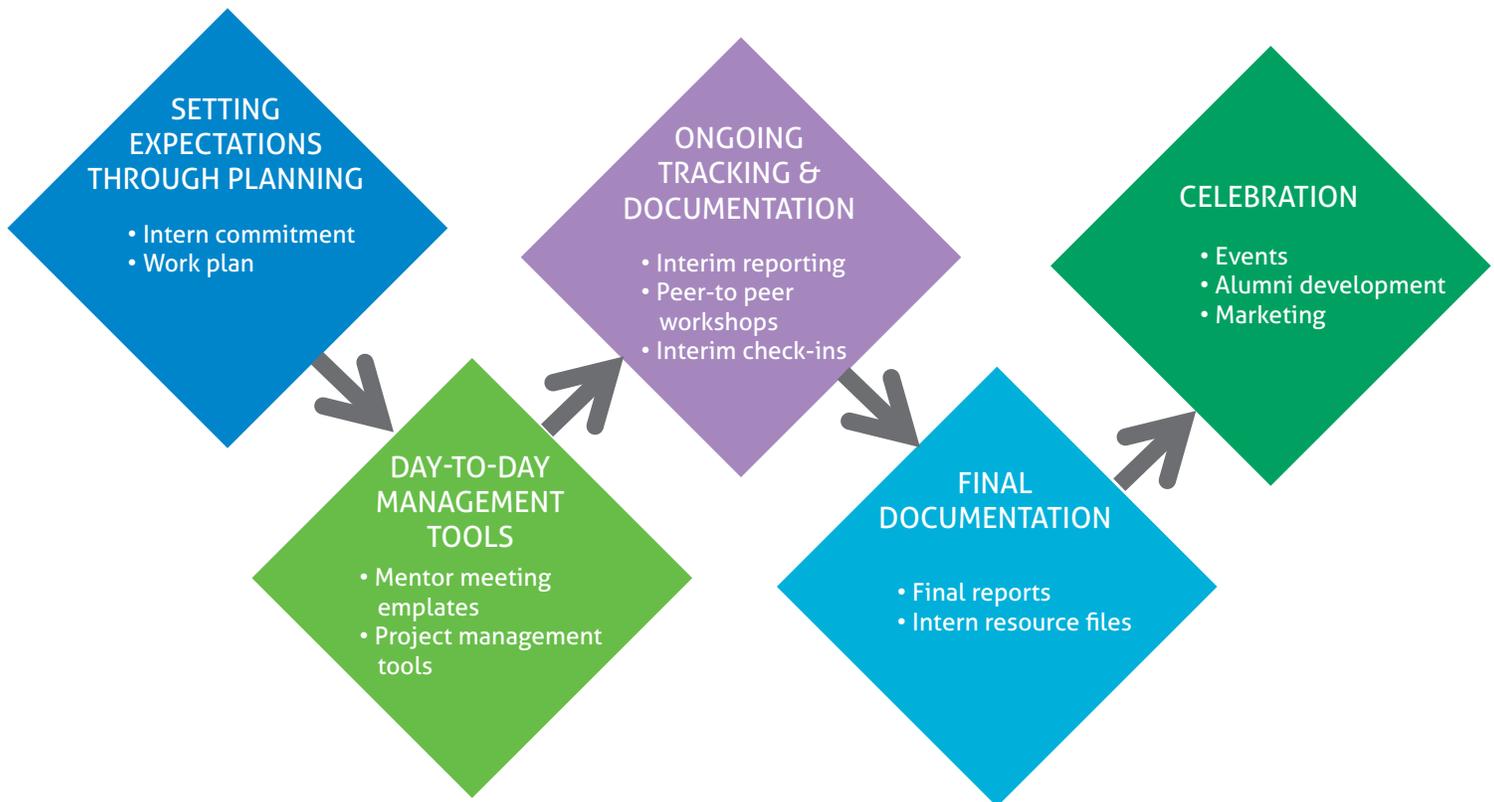
Assessing Student Outcomes:

Student outcomes can be assessed through self-evaluations, mentor comments and feedback, or through formal assessments. The section in this guide on [Evaluating the Program](#) provides evaluation tools which can be applied to student outcomes.

Empowering Students to Manage Internship Projects

In an environment where time and resources are scarce, empowering students to manage projects and relationships with their mentors can increase program efficiency, while providing interns valuable management and organizational skills. (See [Empowering Students During Internships](#) folder in the SIP Toolkit.) Examples of tools for supporting students in managing their projects are listed below.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN MANAGING THEIR PROJECTS



Setting Expectations:

Interns should receive a work plan with clearly outlined expectations of commitment, deliverables, professionalism, and conduct. The work plan should include:

- Framing the project goal/purpose
- Setting goals
- Identifying tracking methods
- Identifying institutional background and resource needs

Day-to-day Project Management:

SIP mentors should have access to mentor meeting templates that outline expectations for how mentor meetings are structured. SIP managers and student interns should follow project management guidelines to understand where and how to store project files, resources, and contacts.

Tracking and Documentation:

- Interim reporting allows students to reflect on the project and internship outcomes through a template or journal.
- Peer-to-peer workshops provide opportunities for intern interaction and sharing of best practices.
- Interim check-ins allow mentors and interns to periodically check in to evaluate overall progress toward goals.

Final Documentation:

Final reports or similar documentation provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their success, provide recommendations for improvement on the project or program, ensure institutional memory, and provide a means for educating the campus community. Intern resource files associated with projects, from contact lists to deliverables, should be organized in a manner that supports continuity.

Celebration:

Whether achieved through a final symposium, poster session or marketing campaign, celebrating student success is critical to the health of any internship program.

Connecticut College student interns use heavy machinery to create a sprout garden. Courtesy of Connecticut College



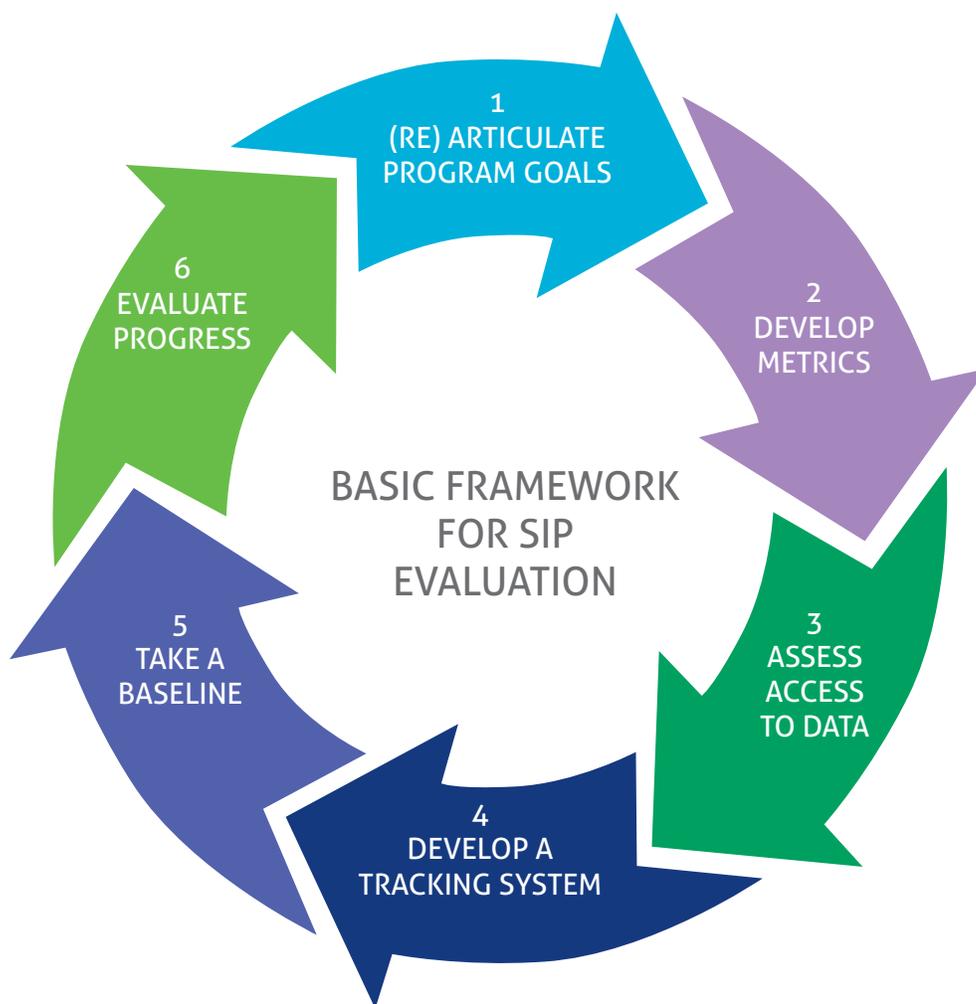
EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Measuring success is critical to improving student and overall program outcomes, increasing institutional support, and accessing potential external funding. However, evaluating the success of a program can be one of the most difficult management tasks. This section outlines strategies for assessing programs (the [Evaluating the Program](#) folder in the SIP Toolkit includes program evaluation resources).

Assessing Sustainability Internship Programs

Below is a basic framework for SIP evaluation, which includes six processes: 1) articulate the program goals, 2) develop metrics to measure the success of those goals, 3) assess your access to data for each of these metrics, 4) develop a system for tracking data, 5) take a baseline measurement, and 6) assess data throughout and at the end of a project to measure your progress and overall success.

These processes can and should occur in tandem with the development of the program whenever possible. Where possible, revisit the overall strategic planning objectives of the program and consider how the assessment might overlap with strategic planning efforts and metrics for the university.



Strategies for Assessing Specific Internship Projects

Because many internships are tied to specific programming, measurable and meaningful goals should be defined for the duration of internships. Ultimately, the internship-level evaluation can provide students unique experiences to understand the impact of their work. The following is a general process for engaging stakeholders in goal-setting on a project basis:

- **Choose a framework for goal-setting:** Many frameworks exist for goal setting (e.g., Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) framework; Heartfelt, Animated, Required, Difficult (HARD) framework). The selected framework should fit the needs of the program and institution.
- **Prime mentors for goal-setting:** Having early conversations with mentors about the need for goal setting within the internship will help prepare them for conversations with the interns.
- **Formalize goal-setting as part of the internship process:** Consider providing students at least one lesson in the goal-setting process with case studies, modeling, or other activities.
- **Provide opportunities to revisit goals and progress:** Providing students structured opportunities to revisit their goals and track attainment of program objectives can help ensure more positive internship outcomes.
- **Revisit goals through final internship evaluations:** Use student, mentor, and SIP program manager perceptions of goal attainment as evaluations of student success.

Strategies for Assessing Student Outcomes

Along with project-related outcomes, it is also important to evaluate student outcomes such as gained knowledge and job placement. The following table lists common example outcomes along with potential metrics, data and, where applicable, strategies for measuring student outcomes within the internship program.

POTENTIAL METRICS & DATA FOR SIP STUDENT OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

		POTENTIAL METRICS	POTENTIAL DATA
COMMON DESIRED STUDENT OUTCOMES	OVERALL STUDENT SUCCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student perceptions of success • Student attainment of goals related to project, program, or research • Mentor perceptions of success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self reported data from students (survey) • Data related to project goals collected throughout project • Self reported data from mentors (survey)
	CAREER PLACEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time employment among SIP alumni (in general or within sustainability field) • SIP experience's contribution to employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reported data from alumni (survey)
	INCREASED SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student acquisition of sustainability knowledge, skills, and/or competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and post-SIP assessment measuring sustainability literacy (survey, interviews)
	INCREASED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE LITERACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of organizational change management knowledge/skills • Acquisition of campus specific organizational knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and post-SIP assesement measuring organizational change literacy

CREATING AN ALUMNI NETWORK

Along with current students, alumni of SIP programs are among the greatest assets of any sustainability internship program. Student success after internship completion at least partially reflects the effectiveness of SIPs. Alumni can help enhance networking opportunities within the program, and can provide invaluable resources to interns and the SIP in general.

Determining Alumni Network Outcomes

Whether starting a new alumni network or improving an existing one, working with stakeholders is essential. To identify desired outcomes of an alumni network, it is helpful to convene relevant alumni stakeholders. Through this process, the group can brainstorm potential goals, and the role of the network, as outlined below:

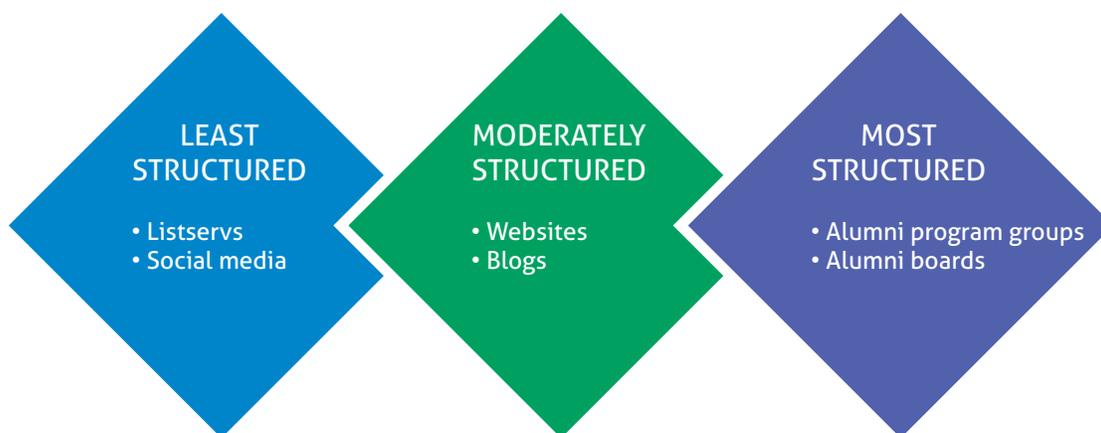
- **Professional networking:** Opportunities for alumni to support one another, posting relevant job listings and useful resources.
- **Mentorship opportunities:** Alumni serving as mentors to one another or current interns.
- **Guiding SIP development:** Alumni serving a key role in developing, evaluating, and improving the SIP.
- **Professional development:** Alumni, current student interns, SIP managers, and others can benefit from professional development opportunities offered within the network or externally.
- **Fund development:** Alumni collaborating to donate personal funds or support a fund development initiative.

Determining Alumni Network Structure

Once the ideal outcomes for an alumni network have been determined, potential network structures for achieving those goals should be determined. Here are some common structures and tools:

- **Listserves:** With minimal moderation, listservs can provide opportunities for informal interaction among alumni and between alumni and current interns.
- **Social media:** Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn provide the opportunity to easily track alumni when they leave the program. These spaces also provide opportunities for interaction.
- **Websites and blogs:** Websites provide a platform for displaying more permanent information about alumni, such as former internships, current positions, areas of interest, unique strengths as mentors, and more. A blog portion of a website or separate site can provide more dynamic updates about alumni contributions to the community.
- **Foundation/alumni association groups:** Many institution foundations and alumni associations provide on-campus offices, schools and departments the opportunity to create a topic-based interest group. Creating a sustainability-based group with the foundation or alumni association can be especially helpful with regard to fund development.
- **Alumni boards:** Formal boards for program alumni can provide advice on diverse topics such as program development, evaluation, improvement, fund development, and career placement. Involving alumni as a core constituency in decision-making can help build the network while benefiting the entire SIP operation.

Alumni network structures vary in formality, resources required, and management. SIPs with limited resources may find it useful to choose a less structured option to begin.



CONCLUSION

While this guide has explored best practices for establishing and managing highly effective Sustainability Internship Programs (SIPs), it is important to remember that all SIPs must be designed to meet the unique needs and challenges of their respective colleges and universities. Internship programs represent tangible student engagement and academic connections with the operational side of higher education. These programs can expand the capacity of campus sustainability offices to tackle meaningful new projects, while providing transdisciplinary, hands-on educational opportunities in demand by students and educators. Students engaged in these experiential learning opportunities can attain real-world work experience useful in marketing themselves as sustainability professionals. Ultimately, these rich academic experiences help tie the work of the sustainability initiative to the primary educational mission of the university.

The diversity and complexity of SIPs across the United States provides a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and experience. This guide and the [SIP Toolkit](#) can serve as a jumping off point for a rich conversation about SIPs. Updates and improvements to the toolkit will be made periodically to provide expanded information on SIP best practices.

The writers of this guide look forward to hearing from members of the campus sustainability community with questions or feedback: sip.managers@gmail.com. When in doubt, consider reaching out!

Cover and back page:

The first cohort of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Sustainability Internship Program, along with the SIP Graduate Assistant and Associate Chancellor for Sustainability. Photographer: Nina Pellizzari

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