



Evaluating Internship Hosts¹

As you approach your Connecting Experience, you have the option of pursuing internship opportunities with a variety of hosts such as government agencies, non-profits, businesses, international institutions, and international non-governmental organizations. Your BDP advisor can help you get started researching internships, but you are responsible for identifying and securing your opportunity. To help ensure that your internship experience is mutually beneficial for you and your host, below are some strategies to help you critically assess potential internship hosts and set the conditions for a meaningful experience.

Familiarize yourself with the organization's website. Reading the potential internship host's mission statement is a great way to learn about the organization's core values, but look also for evidence of its accomplishments. What the organization has *already* achieved is as important to know about as what it *intends* to achieve.

Questions to consider as you peruse the website:

- What are the long-term goals of the organization?
- How do the projects, campaigns, and programs fit in with and advance these long-term goals?
- Does the organization have an established record of goals achieved?
- Does the organization document and evaluate its impact on the community in which it operates? Is this documentation public and available on the website?
- Does the organization have an established internship program and/or training for interns?
- In light of the short-term nature of undergraduate internships, does the organization have suitable projects, campaigns, or programs on which you could work as part of a meaningful internship?

If the organization has a social justice agenda, search the website for evidence of responsible community engagement. There is a growing consensus among social justice scholars and practitioners that the most effective initiatives avoid the “top-down” imposition of an agenda and rather take their cues from local leadership.

Questions to consider as you evaluate evidence of Responsible Community Engagement:

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- Can you discern what audience the website targets—donors, volunteers, members of the community the organization seeks to serve?
- With what communities and issues does the organization involve itself?
- What is the organization’s relationship with local community leaders who work on these issues?
- To what extent does the leadership of the organization consist of community members?
- How much of the organization’s budget goes directly into programming? Check out the organization’s rating at the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance (<http://www.bbb.org/us/charity/>).

In addition to perusing the organization’s website, search the internet for mentions and reviews of the organization’s work. What are people saying about the organization? Does the online chatter surrounding the organization raise any questions or concerns for you?

If you still have questions after conducting online research, contact the host to ask about the possibility of corresponding, or, if possible, meeting with a representative of the organization. Use the questions listed above to open a conversation about whether the organization could be a good match as an internship host. Remember that online criticisms of an organization do not necessarily mean that the organization is not a suitable internship host for you. Don’t be afraid to pose questions that address your concerns.

Be confident in your ability to contribute substantively to the organization’s mission and operations. Assessing organizations critically does not mean dispensing with the idea that they can make a difference in people’s lives and that you can be a part of that change. If you feel demoralized or disillusioned in the process of critically assessing potential internship hosts, remind yourself that many organizations are eager to enhance their programming by taking advantage of the energy, enthusiasm, and expertise that undergraduate interns have to offer.

Further reading:

The sources below offer models of how to critically assess a potential internship host. Although these sources address a wide array of projects, organizations, and causes worldwide, each source includes critical analyses of selected non-profit and community engagement initiatives, including discussions of where these organizations succeed in their missions, where they fall short, and why.

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<<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-soft-bigotry-of-kony-2012/254194/>>.

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Modirzadeh, Naz K. "Taking Islamic Law Seriously: INGOs and the Battle for Muslim Hearts and Minds." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 19 (2006): 191-233.

Mukherjee, Joia. "Frontline Health Workers: The Key to Increasing Access to Health Care for the Poor." *Partners In Health: Resources*. 28 June 2012.
<<http://www.pih.org/news/entry/investing-in-frontline-health-workers/>>.

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