

# The Tech Internship Toolkit

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A practical guide for building a meaningful, sustainable  
tech internship program

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The Tech Internship Toolkit is a guidebook for helping you get started with your first internships. If you want to help mentor the next generation of software developers, marketers, and project managers, but you don't know where to begin – this toolkit is for you.

Inside, you'll find a complete explanation of the steps you'll need to get started with your first internship, including "homework" assignments and checklists for each step of the way.

Throughout the toolkit, we'll share our lessons learned and tips for making the most of this new venture within your company.

## INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, you've likely had interest at some point in hosting internships within your tech company. Maybe you've been looking for opportunities to mentor junior-level developers, you want your team to practice their mentorship skills, or you want to hone your mentorship abilities yourself.

But the process of hosting an internship can seem daunting, especially if you've never done it before. You know you want to help beginners in the tech industry, but where do you start?

You've probably asked yourself questions like...

- How much mentorship time might an intern need?
- Who on your team would make a good mentor?
- Can you afford to pay an intern...and how much should you pay them?
- What projects could you "safely" have an intern contribute to?
- Do you have time to oversee those projects?
- How do you avoid it being an internship like you see in film?

You get the point.

Luckily you won't have to start from scratch. Five years ago, our team didn't know how to properly begin an internship program, but we tried our best to figure it out along the way. After hosting dozens of internships, we've wrapped up our best practices, lessons learned, and tips in the sections below.

## OUR FIRST INTERN EXPERIENCE

Our biggest fear was that it could be a big distraction for ourselves and, as a result, the intern might not gain much while here. Fortunately, we decided that it felt like the "right time" to give it an honest trial. After meeting with Corinne, we invited her to intern with us for a few months.

Her first project was to build a web-based timeline of the company's history, which is still up on our website today. She then proceeded to work at Planet Argon for five years as one of our most ambitious, detail-oriented, and reliable web developers.

Since then, we've conducted over 20 internships and anticipate around 8-12 each year going forward. As we've gone through this process, we decided that we would "open source" our current thinking to our peers in the tech industry. Our hope is that this will help other businesses who might share similar concerns or aren't sure quite where to begin, and will provide them a framework to get started.



## IS IT THE "RIGHT TIME" TO HOST AN INTERNSHIP?

Probably not. At least, that's what we keep telling ourselves. Depending on how calm and organized your team is feeling at the moment, inviting one or more interns into your world might trigger some stress.

Do you have an empty desk or two? What if two new people showed up on Monday and were looking to your team for guidance. Isn't your to-do list already too long?

Despite hosting so many internships over the last few years, we still find ourselves a little nervous about inviting new ones in. However, we've been able to build up some self-confidence in how we run them.

Last year, we took a step back and reframed the question *"When will it ever feel like the right time?"* to *"When would it be the right time to NOT host an internship?"*

With that process, we came up with a few possible scenarios in which it would be extremely difficult for us to run successful internships.

1. Our business is losing a bunch of money and needs to prioritizing fixing that.

...and that was pretty much the entire list.

We decided that unless we were dealing with some serious existential issues, having interns around should just become a way of life at Planet Argon. This isn't to say that we don't have some windows throughout the year where there are not interns – but we're having new interns join us nearly every quarter.

## ROLE ROTATION CYCLES ARE IMPORTANT

As we're primarily a software development shop, our most common internship is for a developer. However, we also run design, project management, and digital marketing internships.

The aim here is to provide a space for nearly everyone at Planet Argon to work on their mentorship skills – while also offering budding developers, designers, project managers, and marketing people a chance to gain some experience.

This also gives our team a chance to focus more on their own professional development during their off-internship seasons. (Not to say that mentorship isn't also professional development, but there are other components, too.)



## HOMEWORK

Write out a list of all the areas of your business that might benefit from an internship. For example, if you're a tech startup, it doesn't mean that you only bring in software interns.

What areas of your business could interns learn from?

Area: \_\_\_\_\_

What can the intern learn in this role?

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Area: \_\_\_\_\_

What can the intern learn in this role?

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Area: \_\_\_\_\_

What can the intern learn in this role?

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Area: \_\_\_\_\_

What can the intern learn in this role?

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## PREPARING YOUR INTERNSHIP

Assuming that your organization is "ready" to host an internship, let's start getting things in order. While you could just invite a new intern to show up, we believe you need a thoughtful onboarding experience just like you would any other employee.

We've heard stories of interns showing up to a company only to find out that nobody was ready for them. The first week consisted of sitting around at a desk waiting for someone to swing by and put them to work.

Don't be that company.

Here's some preparatory work you can do before your intern arrives to help things kick off and proceed with purpose.

## THE WHO/WHAT/WHEN/HOW/WHY-QUESTIONS

Before we publish a job ad for an internship, we need to get some details ironed. What role are we opening up an internship for? This should be easy enough for you to sort out. Will this be an internship for a software developer, a UX designer, a digital marketer, a project manager?

At Planet Argon, we aim to have a healthy cadence of interns joining us throughout the year.

## WHO WILL THE INTERN REPORT TO?

Regardless of how big (or small) your organization might be, we really believe you need to give an intern a single person who is going to be responsible for their success. While many people on your team should interact with them and provide mentorship -- you need to designate a single person to be their mentor and leader.

As a default, it can be the same person that is already managing similar roles within your organization. However, this can also be a great opportunity for someone else to gain some leadership experience. At Planet Argon, we do this on an intern-by-intern basis depending on the role.

For example, we might have a software developer intern report to the VP of Engineering. Whereas, a marketing intern would report to our Digital Marketing Manager.

Whoever it is, they should be involved early on in the process and be given the authority to:

- a) Oversee the application process and
- b) Offer the internship to the candidate they believe is best suited for it.

Again, give them ownership here. If they're new to this experience, they may need some guidance along the way. (We hope this toolkit will help, too!)

We will dive into their responsibilities later.



## HOW LONG WILL WE RUN THIS INTERNSHIP?

Constraints are good for both the intern and your organization. It's been our experience that when the end of an internship is not clear -- it will become a complicated thing to sort out mid-internship.

Why? Because if both things are going well...it can be really tempting to keep extending the internship until something different needs to happen. There isn't anything inherently wrong with this, but it does make things complicated.

Having a timeline is good for both parties. On your organization's end, you have the ability to think about what types of projects you can challenge an intern with during their period of time. You might not put someone on to a six-month project if you knew they'd only be here for ten weeks.

It also helps your employees know that they're only needing to take on the intern for that period of time.

"Can your department mentor an intern for 10 weeks?" is an easier thing for your team to agree to than, "Can you take on an intern?" You're able to pre-empt the, "Maybe, for how long?" question that your team will likely ask.

## EXTENDING INTERNSHIPS

For the intern, an end date also gives them some clarity on when things will wrap up. Don't get us wrong – more often than not, an intern will ask you if they can stick around longer or inquire about full-time employment.

With this constraint, you have some flexibility on what your organization does should they knock your socks off – or not – come the end of the agreed upon internship. It's been our experience that it can be really easy to grow attached to your interns. If they're trying to land a full-time gig after the internship (and you don't have a position for them) you don't want them sticking around too long. At some point, they need to make seeking out a full-time position (elsewhere) one of their top priorities.

We've seen interns put those important next steps on the sideline during their internship as they hope for something at your company. Don't give them false hopes. It's not helpful for either of you.

Reflecting back on the good cadence, at Planet Argon, we believe that you should try to keep these internships tight and consistent, particularly if you run several each year. As our primary motivation behind internships is to provide people with an opportunity to gain some "real-world experience", we want to do that with as many interns as we can each year.

Keeping an intern for too long means that you might not have the bandwidth to do that again with another individual. As a company, we've decided that internships will not be a core part of our long-term recruitment process, but rather an educational component that we want to offer up to as many people as we can.

Your organization might need to figure out your own mission, too. From there, what length best benefits your employees and an intern?



## HOW MUCH WILL WE PAY AN INTERN?

We run both paid and non-paid internships at Planet Argon. As a general rule of thumb, all interns are paid. Some are paid with money. Others are paid with school credits. It depends on the interns that you're working with.

We've had a number of students (at local universities and coding schools) who are required to have an internship for school credits. As they're paying for that education and it's part of their grade, we don't pay those individuals for their work. We also don't charge our clients for any of the work they do on their projects, either.

If we're not paying, our clients shouldn't be paying, either.

For all other internships, we typically budget for a stipend. We recommend putting the amounts in your job ads so that folks know what to expect. While plenty of people might be willing to do an internship for free – in exchange for the experience – we believe you should compensate them for the work they're doing for your organization.

Our typical pattern has been a weekly flat rate (i.e., \$250/week) for a part-time internship for ten weeks.

## WHAT WOULD A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP SMELL LIKE?

Before you move on to recruiting an intern, we'd encourage you to collaborate with the person who will be managing the intern.

Ask yourself a few questions so that you reflect back on this during a) the interviewing process and b) throughout the internship.

The following page contains an activity to help you get started.





## HOMEWORK

Decide who will manage your first intern.

Write their name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Collaborate with them to answer the following questions:

What would a successful internship feel like after the ten weeks for the intern?

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How will the intern be better off for having been part of your organization for 8-10 weeks?

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What does your team hope to gain from this internship?

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## FINDING YOUR INTERNS

Once you've prepared the who's and where's of your future internship, it's time to think about the actual recruitment process. How will you find your new interns?

There are many avenues for finding new potential interns and informing them about openings at your company. These vary from job boards to college programs to alternative educational avenues (code schools, for example).

## POSTING THE JOB

We have an internship page on the Planet Argon site that shows which internships are available at what point throughout the year. Open internships are highlighted. Closed internships are still displayed for future references, but are listed as closed. From these pages, we link off to any job postings on our third-party recruiting tool, Workable.

This tool makes it easy to track progress of applicants. We recommend a recruitment system like this if you're handling dozens of applicants for multiple roles. It simplifies the process for internships and full-time positions alike.

Once the internship is posted on your website, you can share the opening across your social channels, on your personal LinkedIn page (and have your employees share as well!), and on local tech Slack groups and job boards.

In Portland, these groups might include women in tech organizations or language-specific code groups (for a developer role).

## PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS

Last year, we partnered with Epicodus, a local Pacific Northwest-based code school to serve as an internship host for their students. Members of their dev programs are required to complete a five-week internship at a local company to complete their certification. We're one of many local companies who participate in this program, hosting both Ruby on Rails and Front-End/JavaScript students.

If you're in a major metropolitan area, there may be a code school, technical school, or university program who you can similarly partner with for internships in your area.



## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

It's important to take the time to get to know your potential interview candidates, but you also want to limit the costs associated with the hiring, so you want to keep things short and sweet.

It's helpful to ask a few questions in the initial internship application, besides simply asking for a resume and cover letter.

These questions might include:

- Why did you choose this field (marketing, development, project management, etc.)?
- What companies do you admire?
- What skills are you looking to develop during this internship?

Based on these answers and the candidates prior experience, you should be able to narrow your field down to a handful for a quick, 25 minute video interview. We schedule these for 25 minutes to allow for a few minutes of overflow time without extending past 30 minutes.

We'll use these video interviews to ask questions about their past experience, what they're interested in learning, and to get to know their motivations for this role.

What's interesting about internships is that sometimes candidates have never worked directly in this field. They may not have directly applicable experience, but you want someone who can tie their past experience and interests into why they will be a good fit for this role.

After video interviews, we narrow it down to 2-3 candidates to speak with in-person. We find here it's helpful to have a second person help out with this interview stage. In person, you can ask further questions about their goals and experience, and also see if they're a good culture fit that aligns with your company's values.

## REMOVING BIAS

As in all of our interview processes, we try to remove implicit bias as much as possible during the internship interviews as well. If we have more than one person interviewing a candidate, we'll skip the post interview "What did you think?" conversation.

Instead, we'll separately write our feedback about the candidates immediately after the interview. This avoids potential groupthink. If you have criticisms about a candidate but the other interviewee immediately raves about them, you're less likely to share your feedback.



## SENDING AN OFFER

Once you decide on your chosen intern, you can send them over an email offering them the role. This email should be short and sweet, including an attachment with the information they'll need to know – duration, pay, who will be their supervisor, etc. They can formally accept the internship and you can agree on a start and end date.

Once you send an offer, be sure and send a notification that you have filled the role to anyone who has applied and you have not removed from the process yet. You should also update your careers or internships page to reflect the change.

**Tip:** Sometimes candidates will ask for feedback after you send an email informing them that you aren't moving forward with their application. It's helpful to send feedback for any role, but especially for interns that are new in their careers.

If you can provide quick observations about their interview or application in a quick email (if they ask!) that's a positive contribution to their career.



## SETTING THE STAGE FOR YOUR INTERN

Meet Molly. A month ago, Molly saw your tech startup internship job ad and applied. Your team went through a long list of applicants and finally narrowed down their decision to invite her in for the next few months.

Molly is really excited and nervous about her first day.

- What projects will she work on?
- What is your dress code?
- Who will she be working with?
- What time should she show up?

It's 9am. Molly walks through the front-door and tells the front desk person who she is and is starting today. The front desk person isn't sure who Molly is, or who she should call down to greet her. Eventually, an HR person comes down and brings her up and shows her a desk and says that she'll figure out who is going to be giving her projects to look at.

Molly hangs around for a while with a laptop without any idea of what she should be doing. She can't login yet, because she doesn't have any details. At some point, a few people come by and start to help steer her in a direction. Molly still doesn't know who is going to be managing her while she's here.

In 2018, we've had our own interns share stories like this about their peers who showed up at well-known tech companies and spent the first few days twiddling their thumbs. Molly doesn't deserve that.

Nothing says, "We can't wait to invest time in mentoring you" like leaving them hanging like that. We doubt anyone at said tech company intended for things to be that way...and we hope they've since learned from those experiences.

In this chapter, we'll walk through a checklist of things you need to sort out before someone like Molly shows up on Monday morning.

First impressions are important for both sides of this intern relationship.

## ADOPT A BUDDY SYSTEM

In an earlier chapter, we spoke about identifying who will manage the intern. It's important to have someone for them to go to for project assignments, feedback, etc.

In addition to that, we believe you should adopt a buddy system. We do this for all new recruits – full-time employees and interns. Using Molly's story, a buddy would be someone who is going to be there to welcome Molly to your organization. We ask someone else who might loosely interact with Molly during their internship (that isn't in a position of authority) to be a buddy.



# THE TECH INTERNSHIP TOOLKIT

At Planet Argon, a buddy is responsible for the following:

- Before the interns first day, schedule a lunch date with the intern along with 1-2 other employees.
- Add calendar and/or to-do reminders to quickly check in with the intern every day the first 1-2 weeks. After a few weeks, this can taper off a touch -- but we encourage them to continue be an active participant during the internship.

On the interns first day, a buddy will:

- Be there to welcome them when they arrive on their first day. New hires have a tendency to show up 10-25 minutes before you tell them to because they definitely don't want to be late
- Welcome them and show them where their desk and laptop are
- Show them their welcome packet (we'll touch on this more later)
- Show them around your organization's office. Show them where they can find the coffee/tea, printers, conference rooms, and other useful things that they may need to know
- Make a few introductions along the way with people you're crossing paths with. *"Hey John, this is our awesome new intern, Molly. She'll be working with Erica in Marketing for the next few months. Molly, this is John. He played a big part in redesigning our website last year."*

The buddy should also let the intern know that they're happy to answer any questions that pop up. If anything feels like it should be obvious--and isn't--and they don't want to ask their manager..they should be able to reach out to their buddy about.

*"Can you remind me where I can find extra pens and notebooks, again?"*

*"What does the company wide meeting on Monday look like? Is there anything I need to do to prepare?"*

Over the next few months, a buddy should continue to:

- Check in with them every-so-often to ask about their working on, finding out how things are going, if they're curious about anything, if they'd like to shadow someone for a day, etc.
- Ask themselves, "How can I help them succeed?"
- Ask themselves, "Where might they be struggling on projects or within the team?"

The buddy might relay some feedback to the manager along the way. While the manager is responsible for overseeing the intern, having another advocate for the intern can be healthy for your organization.

We don't want to assume that the intern is going to feel confident enough to raise bigger concerns at this point in their career. In parable, the buddy is able to gain some light experience in mentoring.

A buddy system is healthy for everyone involved.



## ORGANIZE A FEW PROJECTS

Unless you are planning wizards, you're not likely to have all of their internship accounted for in a project plan. That's okay. At Planet Argon we aim to have at least a few projects options for them to dive into.

Given that you might not know how quickly they'll get up to speed on things -- try to identify a few projects that they'll be able to complete in the first few days.

The sooner that you can have them go through a project cycle, the quicker you'll be able to provide some constructive feedback. Regardless of how the first projects pan out, you want to get into a healthy cadence of feedback so that they can learn more about how your organization's ethos, workflow, and expectations.

As an example, when we have software developer interns, our goal is to have an intern push their first contribution to a project within the first day of being exposed to it. A task could be: "fix this small bug", "change the copy on pages A and B", "update the README documentation to remove outdated details", etc.

They're making something better than it was when they got there. Quick wins help boost some confidence.

Just don't throw them into a multi-week project on day one; try to hold off on that for a few weeks.



## HOMEWORK

Outline a series of projects that a potential intern could tackle.

**Short-term projects:** These projects are quick wins that your intern can tackle their first week to gain traction.

- Sending a newsletter email on behalf of the company
- Fixing a small bug on the company website

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**Ongoing, long-term projects:** This will help your intern get in the habit of iterating on longer-term projects.

- Improving documentation on a project
- Building a small-scale marketing plan for a subdivision of the business

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**Role-adjacent projects:** These will help your intern learn more about the business as whole.

- A developer intern learning about SEO and technical writing from your Marketing Manager
- A marketing intern shadowing a front-end developer to learn about landing page development

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## AVOID PET PROJECTS AND THROWAWAY PROJECTS

For a few years, we had this goal of building out an internal data reporting tool for our company. We put together some mockups and technical requirements for it. We thought that this would be good work for interns to build for us.

Between 2014 and 2016, our interns and a few full-time employees spent over 400 hours on that project. Guess what? It wasn't ever finished. We've never used it.

We killed the idea when we hit 400 hours and realized we were really far off from getting it to where we needed it to be. We don't blame the interns for this. We don't blame our employees. Deep down, we knew it was a someday/maybe project. In retrospect, we think it was unfair for the interns to be thrown into a project like that.

While they got to work on building out pieces of a new web application, all that effort never saw the light of day. We can't imagine that felt good for the interns at the time. They were working on something that we knew would not be finished during their internship. One of the benefits of being a developer is getting to contribute to something and see how it benefits the end-user.

*During that era, our interns didn't get to experience that.*

After reflecting on the experience an intern has – in particular, with software developers, we've taken a different approach that we believe is more beneficial for them.

## OUR PROJECT APPROACH

Let us safely assume that the budding software developer who applies for an internship doesn't have a ton of experience working on software projects, yet. Often times, when you're learning to write software, your experience is focused on learning the basics and starting from a blank code editor. You start to build a new software tool from the ground up.

Fast forward to your first job. More often than not, said developer is going to be tasked with working on an existing code base. They don't have too much experience there so that's going to take some time for them to get comfortable working within something that has grown across multiple developers over several years. It's intimidating.

We rarely spin up a new web application for a client. We've had to help our employees get comfortable (and efficient) with diving into an existing code base and be productive. We now do the same thing with our interns .

We've worked out an agreement with some of our clients that we'll give them some free developer time in exchange for some of their time to collaborate with our interns. We'll earmark nice-to-have features for intern projects and not charge the client for them.

Not only does the intern get an opportunity to dive into a bigger code base, they get to gain experience interacting with a client over a phone/video chat, written communication via our project management tools, and if all goes to plan -- they get to see when the client approves their work and thanks them for it.



# THE TECH INTERNSHIP TOOLKIT

Unlike the pet project examples that we mentioned earlier, they get to know that they helped improve a project that someone else is using. This might be the first time that this has happened in their new career path.

We now have dozens of former interns who can share a story about how they helped make a piece of software better for clients like Nike and Applegate Farms.

*"Yeah, that company that makes those sausages. I helped make their web application better for them."*

On our end, it's also been great for us and our clients. We've added additional value for our clients and some of them really enjoy getting to play part in our internships. They might not have that luxury at their own organization.

Reflecting on a few recent examples, it's amazing to see how an intern will transition from being anxious about "breaking things" in "the biggest application I've ever seen" to 3-4 weeks later being able to jump around the code base and explain it to other people.

If there's one thing we want to help provide them is to help build up their confidence to jump into something that already exists.

## LEARNED LESSON:

If you do put an intern on a client project, be sure to let the client know so that you can set some expectations. As a recent example, we forgot to inform one client and an intern was taking a bit longer on a piece of code than they expected. We had informed our primary client contact but that wasn't relayed to the rest of their team.

One of our other contacts ended up reaching out and asking why things were going so slow. "I can't believe they've spent 12 hours on this ticket, already." It wasn't a huge priority ticket, but they were concerned about the cost of the work.

We quickly realized, "Oh, shit. They don't know that Molly is an intern and we're not charging them for it." We then looked at the ticket and saw that the client had grown impatient with the intern – and that wasn't helping the intern out, either.

Our bad. We called the client to explain and apologized to the intern for putting them in that position. On the plus side, the client and the intern worked through that project successfully and we all learned a little through the experience.

In short, make sure anyone that is going to interact with an intern is aware that they're an intern that is going to help contribute. We find that stakeholders tend to be a touch more patient, thoughtful, and helpful when they're aware of this.

Not all clients and stakeholders will have the bandwidth to play a part in your internship program – so be mindful of that, too.



## BUILD AN INTERN ONBOARDING (AND DEBOARDING) CHECKLIST

If your organization has already seen the light and has a templated checklist for new hires, this is basically the same thing. If your organization is still winging the steps to follow when preparing for a new hire – you might want to be kind to your future selves and get on that in the near future.

We have a template that we use for every new hire and intern. We just pare down the checklist for interns as we probably aren't needing to get items like healthcare paperwork organized.

At a high-level this covers everything from:

- Assigning their buddy
- Designating their manager
- Storing their signed internship offer in your HR files
- Setting up their email account
- Getting a laptop setup for them
- Getting a keycard for accessing the building
- Designated a desk for them to sit at
- Making sure there is a keyboard and mouse on their desk
- Notebooks, pens, etc
- Sending invites for our project management and software development tools
- Print out a welcome guide that tells them what they can do to login to their new laptop and email account
- Sending them a templated "We're looking forward to work with you!" email the week before

Hi Sarah!

We're excited to have you join the Planet Argon team as our front-end development intern. With Monday being your first day, here's some info to help your morning go smoothly:

- Please arrive around 9 am. We have a 9:15 am Monday meeting that you'll be a part of
- If you commute by car, I've attached a map with some streets that have free parking
- If you commute by bus, the 4 and 44 buses will bring you the closest to our office
- If you bike, we have a key-access bike room that we'll give you access to on your first day

The team is looking forward to meeting and working with you over the next ten weeks.

See you Monday!



# THE TECH INTERNSHIP TOOLKIT

- Sending a “Welcome! You’re here now...and here are some useful links + next steps” email to their new email address, so that it’s one of the first things they see when they login to their account.
- Adding them to team email groups so they aren't left off of internal discussions
- Adding them to recurring meetings that they might need to be part of
- Scheduling their first day lunch and sending a calendar invite
- Informing the necessary teams of intern start and end dates
- Scheduling any first few day meetings that may need to happen
- Setting up recurring 1:1s with their managers during their internship
- Queuing up a few projects + assignments

Each of these items need to get assigned to the right people. We have grouped these checklists into different roles so that the buddy and manager have their lists – while an office manager or HR person will handle the other items (i.e. a keycard and email address).

**Tip:** Take this a step further. For all of the things you need to get back and/or revoke access to at the end of their internship – create a deboarding template, too. This template will include removing your intern from all of the systems they had access to during their internship. You can also include items like exit interviews in this checklist to keep track of all the things.

This will make your life easier. Trust us.

## SARAH’S INTERNSHIP STORY

While you've likely been preparing for the internship (assuming that you took some of our advice and prepared for this moment)...it's now to put on your mentorship cap and get started.

Meet Sarah. Sarah just finished a local coding bootcamp and has been placed at Planet Argon for the next six weeks. (This is a fictional story based on a few experiences from a combination of internships that we've hosted. The names have been changed to protect the guilty.)

Let's walk through a few high-level things that we'll be trying to keep in mind as Sarah shares her time at our organization.

- Sarah’s first day
- Sarah’s first week
- The messy middle
- Sarah’s last two weeks
- Sarah’s last day

Our goal is to do the best that we can to provide Sarah with as rich of an experience as we can.



## SARAH'S FIRST DAY

Sarah shows up at our front door ten minutes earlier than the time we mentioned in the email we sent her last week. Fortunately, Scott knows this happens a lot because nobody wants to be late on their first day. He greets her at the door, welcomes her, and shows her where her desk is.

He explains to her that there are some instructions printed out in a folder. Before she dives into that, he takes her on a quick tour of our studio and introduces her to a few other people on the team.

Other people come up and introduce themselves to Sarah, too. A few of them had already met during the interview process. Ideally, the manager is also around and lets her know that they have time on the calendar to meet later in the day. In the meantime, Sarah can start getting her laptop dialed in.

Scott shows her where she can get a cup of tea and/or coffee and the water cooler – important details! After walking her back to her desk, he reminds her that he's organized a lunch with a few people and makes sure the place he's selected will accommodate any dietary restrictions she might have.

He also lets her know, *"If you have any questions that you don't think need to go to your manager, hit me up and I'll try to help direct you in the right direction."*

For the next few hours, Sarah is going to get some software tools setup on her laptop and go through the welcome checklist to figure out a few things and compile a list of questions. She might ask Scott for some assistance on things that weren't documented too well. Scott will then, ideally, keep a list of things to go back and improve upon before our next intern starts.

Eventually, Sarah will find herself saying hi to the wider team in Slack and then head out for lunch with a few of her new peers. Scott picks up the bill and will later submit that for reimbursement.

Sarah has a meeting after lunch with her manager, Robby. They spend an hour talking through some background on the company, the team she'll be working within, and introduce her to a few initial project assignments.

Robby reminds Sarah that Scott is available as her buddy and that she might go to him for things about how we work/tools/etc...and outlines the types of topics we'll aim to cover in their weekly 1-on-1s.



## THE FIRST TASK

On her first day, Robby will challenge Sarah to get one small assignment completed before the end of the day. If she's unable to get it finished, she's asked to let Robby know where she got to and what her next steps will be tomorrow when she resumes it.

The aim here being to establish some expectations that if things can't get done by a due date – do let the stakeholders know where things stand.

Around 3 p.m., Sarah gets in touch with Robby to say, *"I think I got that project finished. Are you free to walk through my solution?"* Robby swings by Sarah's desk and asks her to walk through how she approached the assignment, what she learned, and the proposed solution.

This is not the scenario that Robby needs to chime in with, *"I would have done it differently. Can you try redoing it this other way?"*

Robby sees that the end solution works for now and makes a mental note to come back and revisit this at a later time with her. At this point, we want Sarah to feel like she's having a productive day and there are many ways to approach each software solution.

Our hopes for Sarah's first day is that she will:

- Feel welcomed and know a few people by their first name
- Have a decent idea of what her internship will be like in the coming weeks
- Be able to login to several of the software tools she'll need to use
- Make progress on her first assignment.
- Go home at a reasonable time and tell her friends, loved ones, and/or pet that they had a positive first day at Planet Argon.
- Be excited to come back the next day and dig deeper into things

## SARAH'S FIRST WEEK

We find the first day to be the easiest for us to get right. As the week progresses, the team starts to get deeper into their own project assignments. Having time for their new intern can be a challenge at times – in particular, if Sarah's peers are running up against some deadline.

Sarah continues working on her projects and working with a few more people on those assignments. She might spend some time pairing with mid and/or senior level developer on a project. She'll start to have code reviewed by a peer and hopefully start reviewing someone else's code.

On Thursday, Sarah and Robby have their first recurring one-on-one meeting (ideally, after they've been around for 3-4 days). One of the best parts of having someone new on our team is that we can solicit some feedback from them.



A few questions that tend to come up in the first one-on-one.

- How would you describe Planet Argon to one of your peers?
- What three words would you use to describe our vibe?
- What about the way our team works has been most surprising this week?

Robby will capture Sarah's responses to this so that he can compare to how she might answer similar questions at the end of her internship.

Other topics for the first one-on-ones might focus on questions that Sarah has about the organization. The important part is for Robby to put his listening cap on and learn from Sarah.

Our hopes for Sarah's first week is that she will:

- Still feel welcome by the team
- Be able to dive into a few project assignments
- Collaborate with a few different people on the team
- Have daily check-ins with her buddy each day to ask how she's settling in
- Have established a healthy rapport with her manager
- Wrap up her week and enjoys her weekend



## THE MESSY MIDDLE

Over the next several weeks-to-months, Sarah is going to dive into bigger project assignments. Our goal is to ensure that she has ample time to work closely with an experienced software developer -- typically via pairing or a pull-request process.

For example, we will start to assign tickets that our clients are comfortable with being delivered a touch slower than our more experienced developers. Depending on Sarah's knowledge at this point, we'll have another developer walk through the requirements to make sure everyone understands what success looks like.

A few approaches that we take is to:

### 1. Schedule a couple of 3-4 hour pairing sessions each week

We'll team Sarah up with a few different developers and get time on the calendar.

During those sessions, Sarah and the other developer will see how far they can get in that time boxed window and perhaps that'll be enough for Sarah to press on solo in the coming days on. (With the caveat that Sarah will later send a pull-request to the developer to get that reviewed)

### 2. Send pull-requests to Sarah

While Sarah will be expected to send pull-requests to other developers, we'll also encourage our more experienced developers to send their branches for review to her, too. We might not ask her to approve the pull-request but we believe it's beneficial for Sarah to get exposed to as much code as she can during her internship.

More often than not, we'll hear interns say, "I didn't know that you could do that."

### 3. Assist Sarah with her client communication

When Sarah is working on client projects, we want to provide her with the opportunity to gain more experience confirming requirements and requesting approval with them. Our goal here is to provide opportunities for her to deal with the scenarios where we/she might have overlooked one of the requirements and have the client pointing that out.

This type of thing happens to everyone in software from time-to-time. As they're still in a jr-level role, we want to help build up their resilience when they miss something. Ideally, Sarah will follow-up with the client with an update that fills in the missing piece. The client thanks her. Sarah has gone through a few feedback reviews. We're all better off for that now.

### 4. Ask Sarah who she'd like to shadow

Shadowing is when we invite Sarah to pull up a chair next to anyone in the company to spend several hours seeing how they spend a good chunk of their day. We'll try to schedule at least one





half-day shadowing experience every week or two with someone different.

Our goal here is for Sarah to get a little exposure to how:

- Project Managers keep clients updated on progress, budgets, etc.
- UX Designers communicate with clients to extract high-level requirements before diving into wireframes/mockups
- Developers work through debugging a new bug that popped up in a client project (and how they might build a new feature on a different client project)

A simple way to manage this process is to ask Sarah every week or two, "Is there anyone that you'd love to shadow next week?"

If the timing works well for both parties, Sarah can then reach out to that person to coordinate that. We don't want to predetermine all of this and want Sarah to feel like she could go up to anyone in our organization to ask if she could book time to shadow them.

## 5. Give Sarah some solo projects

When we have interns from a local coding bootcamp join us, they usually send a pair of them. For the past six months they've been put into pairs and have primarily worked alongside someone. That's great. When they come to Planet Argon, we encourage more of that but, after a few weeks, we will begin to split them up for 40-50% of their work week.

The goal here is to give Sarah a chance to go through a project assignment on her own. We want to help her build more confidence in their own technical skills.

When they're always pairing, it can also be difficult to see how each of them is progressing so that we can provide our interns with individual feedback (and praise!)

Our hopes for Sarah's next several weeks or months:

- Sarah will feel like she understands some of our team's dynamics and processes
- Sarah will feel like she has been able to start adding value to real-world projects
- Sarah will be feel like she's included in group technical discussions
- Sarah will feel like she has more than enough assignments waiting for her to complete -- while being mindful to not overwhelm them with things too far beyond their current skill set
- Sarah will feel like her buddy is still a good advocate for her
- Sarah and her manager will continue having one-on-ones to talk about how she's learning and what she'd like to dive deeper into

They should also be asking her about what she's aiming to do after their internships. Is she spending some time on getting her resume and portfolio prepared for sending out applications in the near future? Is she moving full-speed ahead on the job hunt?

If finding a new job is her top priority after the internship, let's help her get that sorted out.



## SARAH'S FINAL TWO WEEKS

As Sarah enters her last few weeks, we want to make sure we've been able to provide her with the experiences she was hoping for. During her one-on-ones, her manager should have been able to pick-up on a few things that she's not had a chance to work on or get exposed to.

- Is the internship meeting her expectations?
- Is there anyone she hasn't had a chance to pair with, yet?
- Is there a specific project that she wanted to learn more about?
- Is there an aspect to her coding skills that she needs to invest more time in honing?

## HER FINAL PROJECT

As Sarah is getting closer to the end of her internship, we will organize a good final project or challenge. If possible, it will be an assignment that requires a good amount of research (on their own), a bit of pairing with a senior-level role, and with the possibility that it may not get finished before they leave.

If they're able to get it done, great! If not, if they've organized their research, documentation, and were able to outline what needs to happen next to get it done – that's also a really great skill for them to learn.

In many ways, this latter is more important as a developer (or any role!) should be able to document the state of an unfinished project so that another can pick it up and get running with it.

Perhaps your next intern can pick up from where they left off.

## HER LAST FEW DAYS

Like any other employee, let's send our interns off into the great unknown with tons of encouragement and praise. Depending on schedules, we'll have a group discussion with our interns to have a quasi-retrospective.

This is a great time for everyone to share some highlights and lessons learned. Our goal as a team during these last few days is to capture feedback about their internship so we can iterate for the next interns that join our team.

Regardless of whether Sarah finished the final project, we'll ask her to give the development team a quick demo of what she was working on. We'll ask her to talk about how she approached the challenge, what she learned, how far she got with it, and what needs to happen next.

On Sarah's final day, we'll send them away mid-day so that they can get an early start on their weekend. We'll typically have the whole team sign a thank you card and toss in a gift card, too.

Are they outdoors people? Perhaps a gift card to REI or another local outdoors store?

Are they big book people? A gift card to our beloved Powell's Books.



Are we completely unsure of who they are outside of work? Shame on us – here's an Amazon gift card.

Our hopes for Sarah's last few days as an intern:

- She will leave feeling capable for the next role she decides to take on in her career
- She will be proud of the work she's done during her time as an intern
- She will feel supported as she takes the next steps in her career

We'll be sure to grab a personal email address from them to follow up in the future.

## AFTER THE INTERNSHIP

During our intern's last week, we'll open ourselves up for career advice in the future – do they need a resume review or tips for a coding challenge? Would a recommendation on LinkedIn help with future job applications? But beyond the internship ending, it's still important to keep in touch and show that you meant what you said.

People early in their career tend to be extremely wary of “bothering” people and afraid to ask for input and advice. By reaching out, you can give them the nudge they need to ask for advice or for a favor.

## POST-INTERNSHIP FOLLOW UP

When an internship wraps, set a few reminders in your calendar to follow up with these interns.

1-2 weeks after the internship ends

- Encourage your team to connect with them on LinkedIn/social media
- Suggest any team members who worked with them directly to write recommendations on LinkedIn

2-3 months after

- Send a check-in email. How are things?

6 months after

- Send a follow up check-in email. How are things?

1-2 years

- Yes, really, stay in touch for the long haul! These people could be great allies in the future for your organization. You never know how you will cross paths again.

If you notice your intern has started a new job (maybe you received a notification on LinkedIn) it's helpful to send a congratulations and well wishes email, too.



## CONCLUSION

We hope that this guide has been helpful in motivating you to start or iterate on your company's internship program. We created it to help "pull back the curtain" and show that tech internships don't have to be complicated. With a little bit of planning and enthusiasm, you can create a structured program that helps you give back to the next generation of tech employees and future leaders.

Have questions or want advice? Send us an email to [hello@planetargon.com](mailto:hello@planetargon.com) and we'll try to answer them.

Happy planning!





[planetargon.com](http://planetargon.com)

## About Planet Argon

We bring engaging, powerful, and delightful web applications to life through Ruby on Rails and modern JavaScript development.

If you're seeking a collaborative partner to set your ambitious ideas in motion and help scale your business to new heights, you're in the right place.

To learn more about our team members and view examples of our work, please visit our website at [www.planetargon.com](http://www.planetargon.com).