



Fact Sheet Internship Initiative

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Definition: The Internship Initiative is a statewide effort intended to create 25,000 internship opportunities by the fifth year of the initiative. WMSA is working closely with employers throughout the region to generate an additional 3,000 internships by the end of 2011, strengthening the economy and potentially increasing the quality of life for everyone in West Michigan.

Purpose: In April 2007, 300 leaders from around West Michigan came together to discuss the most critical issues facing our region. Increasing **educational attainment** (the percentage of people in the region, ages 25 to 34 with a four-year college degree and higher) was identified as a top priority for the region. WMSA's Regional Issues Committee took on this task, examining best practices from around the country and gathering available information on the statistical effectiveness of several programs. Committee members agreed the expansion of internships was one of the best methods for retaining and expanding our intellectual capital base. A subsequent review of all career placement offices operating in West Michigan revealed a definite need to increase the available internship opportunities, particularly paid internships.

Goals of the Internship Initiative:

- To increase the number of internships at employers by 3,000 in the eight-county West Michigan region by the end of 2011. WMSA is also working with the Southeast Michigan and Mid-Michigan WIRED projects to create 25,000 new internships statewide.
- To create a statewide website portal to facilitate matching college students with internship opportunities. To make the site operational in the first quarter of 2009.
- To work with the Council of University Presidents to create a cultural shift toward the value of internships as part of the college experience.
- To create a toolkit (*Employers Internship Toolkit*) to help employers establish internship programs, and a comprehensive communications plan designed to stimulate use of the site by both students and employers.

Leaders of the Initiative: A Regional Advisory Committee consisting of area employers, colleges/universities and economic development organizations has been established. (A complete list is available on the WMSA website, www.wm-alliance.org, under the Internship Initiative/Partners link.)

Progress: In March 2009, employers and students began utilizing the statewide website portal. *The Employers Internship Toolkit* has been completed and is now being distributed to employers throughout the region. The Internship Initiative Project Manager meets regularly with area employers to assist in developing and enhancing their organization's internship program.

Additional information can be found on our website: www.wm-alliance.org.