

BEST PRACTICES **for AAEP Internship** **Program Practices**



INTRODUCTION

Recent AAEP data indicates that over 70% of new veterinary graduates annually entering equine practice elect to complete an internship. While not a requirement, many new graduates feel that participation in an internship program will enhance both their clinical and client communication skill sets.

Developed by the AAEP Internship Subcommittee, the following best practices are intended to foster transparent and ethical equine internship programs which are mutually beneficial to both the intern and the veterinary practice.

Every practice offering an internship may not immediately meet all recommendations, but these best practice recommendations are a valuable basis for discussion and goal setting, designed to foster long-term success for new veterinarians entering equine practice.

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Internship Compensation & Offer

The total value of an internship offer includes monetary compensation and experiential education. When evaluating the full value of the offer, consider salary, benefits, educational skills acquired, networking and mentorship, among other details.

The Contract

When extending an offer of employment, allow the prospective intern a minimum of seven days to respond. Give the prospective intern ample time to review and consider the offer, seek legal counsel (if needed) and respond with their decision. This allows candidates to make the choice that will best prepare them for a long and successful career.

Important Considerations:

- Internship contracts are most frequently written to be consistent with a practice's business model. While it is difficult to make extensive changes to these contracts, any concerns or special expectations and circumstances should be communicated clearly and early in the offer process to arrive at an agreement that best suits both parties.
- Negotiation should be professional, inquisitive, and realistic with the knowledge that the internship contract must fit within the scope of the business of the practice and be equitable to all members of the practice.
- Both parties should be aware that while non-compete clauses are common, they are frequently cited as a reason for leaving equine practice. The practice and the intern candidate should be prepared to negotiate realistic and reasonable terms. Elimination of non-compete clauses should be considered for internship contracts. As this is likely an intern's first professional experience, consider forgoing the non-compete clause or instead utilizing a solicitation clause. Ask yourself, what is it really accomplishing from a professional standpoint?

Salary

- Use MIT's Living Wage Calculator (livingwage.mit.edu) to guide appropriate base salary minimums for your internship position. For Canadian practices, reference Living Wage Canada (<https://www.livingwage.ca/rates>).

- Other paid compensation (emergency fees, etc.) should be in addition to the "required annual income before taxes;" however, an estimate of this incremental compensation should be discussed.
- To enable a fair comparison of listed internships and calculate realistic cost of living, AAEP-recognized practices should include state, county or metropolitan area and specify whether or not housing (or a housing allowance) is provided.
- It is recommended that practices provide housing, a housing stipend, and/or assistance finding convenient housing for their interns. The Living Wage Calculator should be used to determine the monetary value of housing provided and/or appropriate housing stipend for geographic region.
- Consider offering a housing stipend when on-site housing is available but not conducive for the intern due to living situation (i.e. size or make-up of household, pets, etc.).

Note: Internships participating in the AAEP Internship searchable database will be required to report their salary and benefits package. A living wage for county of practice will also be reported.

Benefits

Contracts should present all benefits and values in clear, concise terms. In addition to the contract, provide an offer sheet or compensation package document that summarizes the meaning of the contract's legal language and lists the monetary value of benefits.

This document should clearly represent any expected costs to or contributions from the intern, as for instance in the case of the employee's portion of health insurance premiums. It is understood that insurance premiums and coverage options are subject to change per practice ownership, enrollment period or insurance company.

Benefits in a contract package should represent between 25-35% of the value of the contract as a whole (Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

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Benefits, continued

The following core benefits are recommended as best practices for a competitive internship:

- **Health insurance** (50-100% employer-covered premiums)
- **Liability insurance** (\$100k/\$300k AVMA PLIT)
 - Appropriate for practice region or in line with other clinic doctors.
- **Minimum paid time off (PTO)** – 10 days
 - PTO days should be used within seasonal parameters of a practice when practical.
 - PTO can be considered to include sick days, planned vacation, travel for interviews, etc.
 - Consider contingency plans for unexpected life events such as illness or death in the family.
- **Licensing fees**

Consider covering the following fees as part of an internship package:

 - Doctors may be licensed in multiple states. Make allowances for interns to prepare and take exams as necessary.
 - Controlled drugs license fees/DEA
- **Professional association fees** (AAEP, AVMA, Local VMA) – as appropriate for region or in line with other clinic doctors.
- **Education (CE)**
 - CE allowance for at least one conference (\$1,500 minimum)
 - Allowance includes necessary time to travel and attend conference as provided in paid time off.
 - Additional virtual options for CE may be provided.
- **Clothing stipend** (if practice has a uniform or logo apparel expectation)
- **Practice transportation**
 - If an intern is expected to perform ambulatory services, provide a practice vehicle and a fuel card.
 - If a practice vehicle is not provided, reimburse for mileage, ideally using the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standard mileage rates.
 - Practice vehicles should include functional storage system for veterinary supplies.

- **Vet box**

A vet box or vehicle organizational system will be needed if the internship is ambulatory. If an intern is required to provide their own vet box, it should be included in expectations above. A practice can facilitate sharing, trading, or selling of vet boxes from one intern class to another or provide clinic loaners, if available. However, vehicle sizes and securing vet boxes in various vehicles can complicate this process.
- **Veterinary equipment**

Interns should be provided with practice-standard equipment and appropriate training in its use. Fully functional, high-quality diagnostic equipment helps the confidence and developing skill set of a young veterinarian. Seeing the new doctor arrive with equipment similar in quality to the senior clinicians conveys a sense of security to the client.

Additional contract benefits that a practice may wish to offer include: dental and life insurance, student loan repayment, a 401k program with employer matching, a provided cell phone or cell phone allowance, and discounted veterinary care and/or medications for personal animals.



Schedule & Time Off Expectations

Working Hours

- To maximize the learning experience over a short period of time, interns may often work longer hours than is typically expected of an associate. While a small portion of those hours may be performing technical roles, the vast majority of the time should be spent functioning in a practitioner role.
- Interns are often an important part of emergency services for a clinic. Likewise, emergency and critical care cases are an important part of the education of young veterinarians.
- The following recommendations are based upon guidelines published by organizations such as the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), and Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA) for fair and humane work hours:

Recommendation 1: 80 hours maximum clinical and educational hours per week averaged over a four-week period.

- Eighty (80) hours is a recommended cap for fair working hours. When possible, avoid maximal hours while maintaining appropriate learning and patient care.
- Eighty (80) hours per week should be a seasonal exception rather than a weekly rule.

Recommendation 2: Aggregate one day off out of seven averaged over a four-week period.

- We strongly encourage clinics to give interns a minimum of one day off per week and 48 hours consecutively off in any month-long or four-week period.

Recommendation 3: Scheduled clinical work periods should not exceed 24 hours in duration.

- Interns may remain on duty for a maximum of six additional hours to transfer patients, maintain continuity of care, or participate in educational activities.
- If more than 24 consecutive active hours are worked, a minimum 10-hour break with no clinical responsibilities for personal care and sleep should be enforced.
- On-call periods may be scheduled for longer than 24 hours, but continuous active work without rest should not exceed 24 hours. Loss of more than four hours of sleep during each 24-hour

period of call should be relieved before sleep deprivation compounds.

- Prolonged hours without sleep or time for personal care rapidly degrade a veterinarian's medical judgment and safety awareness. Working hours should be closely monitored by both intern and supervisor to ensure appropriate patient care and doctor health and safety.

Recommendation 4: Clear communication that interns are not expected to stay beyond the established practice business hours once the required tasks have been completed on days when not on call.

- This guideline is recommended as a best practice to encourage young veterinarians to begin to exercise their ability to create and set boundaries.
- By communicating that an intern is not expected to stay after business hours on days they are not scheduled to be on call, the intern is then allowed to make choices about how they use that time. They may choose to stay and see after-hours cases, but they should also have the freedom to pursue personal interests during that time. These decisions must be supported by all members of the staff. It is incumbent on the intern supervisor to respect their intern's decisions and to encourage the other employees to do so as well. Any negative feedback for choices to leave the clinic should be met with reprimand.

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On-Call

- Emergency on-call duties are an integral part of an internship experience. However, on-call interns should be heavily supported by senior clinicians for guidance as needed, with an appropriate training period before primary case management is performed solo by the intern doctor.

Paid Time Off (PTO)

- PTO days are a staple of any contract benefit plan but are frequently left unused by American workers. As part of a comprehensive benefit plan, interns should be strongly encouraged to take the full complement of their PTO days during their internship. As an employer, respecting and encouraging the use of these vacation days is considered a best practice for maintaining employee well-being. Due to the short nature of employment



during internship, PTO should be scheduled during appropriate times based on individual practice culture and caseload.

- Employee manual should have explicit policy regarding scheduling paid time off, including the disposition of any accrued but unused paid time off.

Continuing Education (CE)

- Expenses covered in accordance with standard doctor allocations
- Local, online vs. national convention
 - Intern CE should be scheduled and coordinated among practice doctors to maintain adequate practice coverage.
 - Considerations should be made for speaking opportunities by the intern at meetings.
 - All doctors should have the opportunity to meet their CE requirements for licensing purposes.
 - Networking/interviewing opportunities at meetings should also be taken into consideration.

Personal Safety & Well-Being

An AAEP Practice should put the personal safety and well-being of an intern above required work, production, or clinic needs. The practice should follow all applicable occupational safety guidelines and physician's recommendations should an injury occur.

Because the transition from veterinary school to an internship can be challenging, the mental well-being of an intern can be supported through the resources offered through the AAEP Healthy Practice Member Assistance Program. Free counseling and consultation services as well as access to online resources are available. Go to aaep.org and search "Member Assistance Program" for more information.

Orientation, Onboarding & Feedback

- Orientation and onboarding should be systematic, informative, and comprehensive—consistent with the onboarding process for an associate veterinarian.
- Orientation should be designed around basic clinical skills development and team-building principles. Leadership programming and training are encouraged.
- A general workplace employee handbook and a more specific intern handbook outlining clear and specific expectations and guideposts should be provided.
- The handbook should be comprehensive and provide the interns with clear instruction regarding the oversight of their program and how to resolve confusion or conflict within the practice. Access to an outside “ombudsperson” should be encouraged and facilitated.
- The orientation materials and/or handbook(s) should be reviewed updated annually.
- AAEP Core Competencies Guide
 - This document should be introduced to intern doctors early in their internship. It should serve as a framework for mastering the professional skills expected of an equine practitioner. This is to be differentiated from the Technical Skills Guide that functions as a checklist of skills that an intern may be expected to perform over the course of their internship and into practice. Completion of Technical Skills can be pursued in the course of the clinical caseload or through actively seeking to learn and practice with a senior clinician if the caseload does not provide the opportunity. It is worth noting that different types of practices or focus of internship may dictate different Technical Skills expectations or availability.
- Performance Review and Progress Updates
 - Interns should be encouraged rather than intimidated by the skills expected of a new graduate. They should achieve familiarity with these skills during the first three months of their internship.
- All internships should have a formal review process for their interns no less than two times during the internship. These should be conducted in person. One of these reviews should be timed prior to the residency application process (if applicable).
- The reviews should evaluate clinical skills, performance across different services, interpersonal skills, basic conduct, and should clearly address individual strengths and opportunities for growth in a constructive and respectful manner. The individual’s goals and progress toward those goals should be discussed. The reviews should include extensive feedback from interns themselves and all clinicians and support staff with visibility to or firsthand knowledge the intern’s performance. The Entrustable Professional Activities framework or a similar model can be utilized to guide these conversations.
- During these reviews, interns should be given an opportunity to provide the practice with feedback about the strengths and opportunities of the program.
- At the end of the internship, a final exit interview should be performed to allow the interns to reflect on their entire experience.



Mentorship

- Technical Skills Development
 - Interns should be mentored through their technical skills and clinical competencies development, focusing on mastering those skills necessary for general equine practice and then any additional skills relative to clinical areas of interest.
 - Different pedagogical paradigms can be employed, but “see one, do one, teach one” remains an excellent approach to mastering a skill. Interns are expected to understand the basic principles of any skill from basic textbook/literature review and should be able to talk through each anticipated step, referencing relevant anatomy prior to performing the task.
 - Dedicated time to help an intern develop these skills is imperative to ensure that best practices are being employed. This means focused, one-on-one oversight in clinical practice and/or on a teaching horse.
 - Interns should experience a training period prior to managing cases without direct supervision. The Entrustable Professional Activity framework provides an excellent resource for determining when an intern may be ready to manage cases without direct supervision.
- Veterinary and Clinical Training
 - Interns should perform patient rounds one to two times daily in a hospital setting. Interns should be expected to present their cases and be able to list current treatments, dosages and mechanisms of actions of medications, and rationales for the therapies being employed.
 - Additional rounds should be performed regularly to augment learning, including but not limited to practical labs, journal clubs, theriogenology rounds, imaging rounds, ambulatory topic rounds, morbidity and mortality rounds, grand rounds, ethics discussions, etc.
 - Programs that prioritize these opportunities for extracurricular learning for their intern doctors should be recognized.
 - Encourage extracurricular education, including podcasts like Merck’s “Disease du Jour,” health- and well-being-focused “The Whole Veterinarian,” and “AAEP Practice Life.”
- Other training may be provided by the practice or via AAEP resources to participating programs. These may include such topics as financial skills, personal development/leadership skills, and career counseling, etc.

Further Career Planning

It is important that interns receive support and guidance from senior clinicians as they begin to consider career plans beyond the intern year.

- Interns should be provided mentorship and access to learn about job opportunities (AAEP employment website, AAEP meeting postings, networking, word of mouth, cold calls and e-mails).
- Interns should be encouraged to ask a senior clinician to review their application materials (letter of intent, CV).
 - Interns should be encouraged to make requests for document review and references with a reasonable timeline.
- Preparation for residencies and the VIRMP (if relevant)
 - Interns should decide if they wish to apply for a residency by early fall and understand the process of residency application prior to the release of all available programs through the VIRMP in October.
- Mentorship should be provided regarding different programs (and networking opportunities to learn more about each of these programs), the application materials (CV, letter of intent), recommendation letters, and the visiting and interviewing process.
- It is important that throughout this mentorship the intern is provided realistic expectations on their strength as a candidate, and they should be encouraged to develop an alternate plan if they do not obtain a residency.
- Time and travel for interviews should be taken into account when planning yearly PTO and/or CE attendance where interview could also take place.
- Peer mentorship groups – interns should be encouraged to seek out a Decade One group or similar peer mentorship group to establish ongoing education and support network for the non-clinical aspects of veterinary medicine. Data from participation in peer-mentorship groups shows a positive correlation to retention in equine practice.

AAEP Internship Program Expectations for Participating Practices

Intern Recruitment & Selection Process

These expectations will be implemented when the new Internship database comes online, projected to launch Spring 2024.

- Standardized program description and application process
 - All participating practices will be required to provide a standardized program description for the revamped Internship database.
 - A basic standardized application to be completed by candidate.
 - Each program may require additional or supplemental materials for its application.
 - A standardized letter of reference system
- Access to previous and current interns. This should include interaction with current interns and contact information for interns from the three previous years.
- The recruitment and selection process should emphasize the alignment of the goals of the internship with the expectations of the prospective intern.
- To ensure transparency and that the internship experience is reflected accurately, anonymous standardized survey responses from past interns will be provided with the program description once enough responses have been obtained to maintain fairness to practices and anonymity to respondents.



AAEP Internship Practice Self-Reporting

(Required of All Practices)

- AAEP Internship Exit Survey - Practices will be expected to encourage all interns to complete the exit survey and provide contact information for follow up as necessary. Representative Survey Questions:
Did the program match the internship description? Answer options: Yes/No plus comment box if no. (Recommend putting links to the internship description from the Internship page for fresh comparison upon completion of program.)
Would you recommend this internship program to others? Yes/No and comment box
What improvements could this program make in the future? Comment box
Ask intern to indicate next intended professional role: residency, another internship, private practice, academia, small animal practice, or other
 - Exit survey responses will be collated and kept anonymous.
 - Survey results to be shared as cumulative scores/ratings on Internship website.
- AAEP Internship Practice Self-Reporting
 - Collect and retain data on placement of interns into residencies, internships, and equine jobs.
 - Report numbers of both completed and incomplete internships.
 - Report outcomes for interns as long as five years after internship once data is collected.



Thank you for your participation in the AAEP Internship Program.
For more resources, please visit the AAEP website at www.aaep.org