

# Internships & Mentorships

A guide for newcomers to British Columbia



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## 1. Introduction

As a newcomer, you may find one of the most difficult aspects of finding a job is getting Canadian work experience. Many employers look for Canadian references to show you are able to fit into the Canadian work environment.

This can mean having the right communication and language skills, familiarity with work expectations, and an understanding of Canadian workplace culture. It can also mean proving that the work experience or skills obtained in your home country are similar to Canadian standards.

Internships and mentorships are two strategies that you can use to get the knowledge, experience, and connections that will help you to advance your career in Canada.

More Information:

- **Getting Canadian Work Experience**  
<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/getting-canadian-work-experience>
- **Networking for Employment**  
<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/networking-for-employment>
- **Workplace Culture**  
<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/workplace-culture>

## 2. What is an Internship?

An **internship** is a type of on-the-job training offered by an employer to provide you with practical work experience. Internships are generally offered to recent graduates of a degree or diploma program as an opportunity to gain real-life experience in their field. There are also special internship programs that can help newcomers gain experience working in Canada.

Internships are normally for a set period of time, often a 3 to 6 month contract. They can be either part-time or full-time hours. While they may not pay as highly as other positions in the same field, internships can be a great way of bridging the gap between what you learned at school or in your home country, and getting the practical, hands-on work experience you need for your resume.

*Because internships are considered "work" by the Employment Standards Act of British Columbia, all advertised internships must be paid positions.*

Occasionally internships will be advertised as unpaid experience for school credit. This type of experience is actually classified as a **practicum** in British Columbia.

Internships and practicums are different. A practicum is part of your formal studies at college or university, and is not considered to be "work". Depending on your educational program, a practicum may be optional or it may be mandatory for graduation. In either case, no wages are paid for this type of work experience; instead you get academic credit for successfully completing the practicum.

A **co-op**, or co-operative education program, is another type of work experience that is sometimes available to students at post-secondary institutions. Like practicums, they are done during the course of your studies, prior to your graduation. In all other respects though, they are more like internships – they are paid positions that provide on-the-job training and a chance to gain practical work experience. While you won't receive course credit for taking a co-op placement, your completion of the co-op will be noted on your academic record or transcript.

*Internships are a good way to:*

- *Obtain relevant, Canadian work experience in your field*
- *Make professional connections and get employer references*
- *Learn about what it's actually like to work in Canada*
- *Earn some money while advancing your career objectives*

### 3. Protect Yourself

The only types of companies that can advertise unpaid positions are not-for-profit or charitable organisations looking for **volunteers**. Volunteer positions are not covered by the BC Employment Standards Act.

*In British Columbia, it is illegal to advertise unpaid internships. If a company does not offer at least minimum wage for time worked during an internship, it is in violation of the Employment Standards Act of BC.*

More Information:

- **Employment Standards in British Columbia**  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards>
- **Federal Labour Standards for Interns and Student Interns**  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/workplace/federal-labour-standards/interns.html>

### 4. Finding Internships

Many internships are posted directly by employers on job boards like **Indeed.com** (<https://ca.indeed.com>). There are also a number of special internship programs offered on an ongoing basis that you can apply for.

- **Government of Canada | Federal Internship for Newcomers (FIN) Program**  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants/prepare-life-canada/prepare-work/federal-internship.html>  
An IRCC program that offers newcomers a chance to gain temporary work experience, training opportunities, and access to a mentor.
- **BC Government | Internship and Co-op Opportunities**  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/careers-myhr/job-seekers/internship-co-op-opportunities>  
Paid internships, co-op placements, and youth employment hiring programs sponsored by the provincial government in British Columbia.
- **Career Edge | Meaningful Internships**  
<https://www.careeredge.ca/for-job-seekers>  
A “head hunter” for talented jobseekers, with internship programs specifically for skilled newcomers, recent graduates, and persons with disabilities.

- **Government of Canada** | Post-Secondary Co-op/Internship Program  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/jobs/services/recruitment/students/coop-internship.html>  
Post-secondary students enrolled in participating programs can reach out to their school's co-op or internship coordinator to ask about opportunities.
- **BC Tech Association** | BC Tech Intern Program  
<https://wearebctech.com/talent/bc-tech-intern-program>  
A program that provides skilled individuals with internship experiences at technology companies and in tech roles at non-tech companies across BC.

## 5. What is a Mentorship?

Mentorships are another highly successful strategy to help you find suitable employment in the long-term.

Mentorships are programs that connect recent graduates or internationally-trained professionals with people in Canada who are actively working in the same field. These people are typically already quite established in their careers and want to help you succeed professionally too.

In addition to formalized mentorship programs that pair you up with a suitable mentor, informal mentor-mentee relationships can develop at school, work, or through networking activities.

*The benefits of having a mentor include:*

- *Building your professional network and meeting new people*
- *Gaining an understanding how things work within your industry*
- *Increasing your knowledge of Canadian workplace culture*

More information:

- **WorkBC** | Seven Easy Steps to Find a Mentor  
<https://www.workbc.ca/blog/seven-easy-steps-find-mentor>  
Tips on how to find a mentor and maintain the relationship.
- **NewToBC** | The Power of Mentorship  
<https://newtobc.ca/news-and-events/blog/the-power-of-mentorship>  
Information about the value of seeking out mentorship opportunities.

- **MentorshipBC** | Business Mentorship: Types, Benefits, Finding a Mentor  
<https://www.mentorshipbc.ca>  
Connects experienced business professionals with entrepreneurs and business owners who are looking for mentorship and support.

## 6. Finding a Mentor

As a newcomer to Canada, it can be difficult to find a mentor. A number of options are available specifically for you.

*For career mentoring:*

- **Immigrant Employment Council of BC** | MentorConnect  
<https://iecbc.ca/our-work/programs/mentorconnect>  
Matches skilled immigrants to professionals in a range of occupations.
- **Mentor Canada** | Mentor Connector  
<https://connect.mentorcanada.ca/en/find-a-mentor>  
A national database that helps youth locate a mentor near them.
- **MOSAIC** | Workplace Connections Mentoring Program  
<https://mosaicbc.org/our-programs/career-mentoring-for-newcomers-to-canada>  
A 3-month mentoring program and monthly classes on employment- and workplace-related topics.
- **S.U.C.C.E.S.S.** | Career Mentoring for SUCCESS Program  
<https://isiponline.ca/services/employment#mentees>  
A mentoring program that matches professional newcomers with BC professionals in a related field.
- **City of Vancouver** | Mentorship Program  
<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/mentorship-program.aspx>  
City staff share their knowledge, expertise, and professional networks with newly arrived immigrant professionals.

*For small business mentoring:*

- **Futurpreneur Canada** | Mentoring  
<https://www.futurpreneur.ca/en/mentoring>  
A mentoring program for young newcomers aged 18-39 who want to start a small business.

- **WeBC | Business Mentoring & Peer Groups for Women Entrepreneurs**  
<https://we-bc.ca/what-we-offer/mentoring>  
Pairs entrepreneurial women with a mentor or group to help build up a strong peer support system.

## **7. Additional Resources**

- **NewToBC**  
<https://newtobc.ca>
- **S.U.C.C.E.S.S.**  
<https://successbc.ca>
- **Mosaic BC**  
<https://mosaicbc.org>
- **Immigrant Services Society of BC**  
<https://issbc.org>
- **WelcomeBC**  
<https://www.welcomebc.ca>

**Questions? Please ask the Information Staff in the Central Branch,  
Vancouver Public Library or telephone 604-331-3603.**

*Please note that the information in this guide is also available online through the  
Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre website at <https://www.vpl.ca/siic>*