



# Frequently Asked Questions – Rhode Island Clean Energy Internship Program

Spring 2022



## **1. What is the Rhode Island Clean Energy Internship Program?**

The Rhode Island Clean Energy Internship Program is co-managed by the Renewable Energy Fund (REF) and the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER). It is a workforce development initiative which focuses on enhancing the talent pipeline for Rhode Island employers engaged in the clean energy industry. The Rhode Island Clean Energy Internship Program facilitates the placement of students and recent graduates who are considering career opportunities in clean energy through paid internships across the state. Consistent with the REF and OER's roles as catalysts in growing the talent needed by the clean energy industry, the Internship Program is designed to provide students and employers with the tools to connect, and REF will reimburse eligible employers for intern stipends.

## **2. What are the objectives of the Rhode Island Clean Energy Internship Program?**

The objectives of the Clean Energy Internship Program are to:

- Provide the clean energy community with a talented pool of young professionals.
- Enable students to gain significant career opportunities in a challenging economic environment.
- Enable clean energy employers to mentor students and provide internship opportunities across a broad spectrum of student backgrounds.
- Support the need for greater diversity in our clean energy workforce.
- Provide a peer network of students interested in working in clean energy.

## **3. How does the program work?**

- Students looking for an internship in the clean energy industry will be required to complete an online application through the portal at <https://refinternships.commerceri.com/> that includes attaching a resume, current unofficial transcript and one-page cover letter describing field interests, background, career goals, etc.
- Students will also identify their academic background and the industry subsector in which they would prefer to intern. If students meet eligibility requirements, their account will be marked as eligible.
- Representatives from employers looking to host either one or two interns post their internship position(s) on the portal Internships Board. They can view and select eligible candidates to interview with the qualifications that are most suited to their needs. Eligible students can also reach out to employers they are interested in when viewing the Internships Board.
- Internships are full or part-time during the session, typically over a 12-week period.

- Employers will provide a meaningful internship opportunity and mentorship opportunities for each intern.
- Upon completion of the internship, eligible employers will request a reimbursement from the REF for the stipend paid to the intern.
- Funding is reserved for clean energy employers to host interns on a first-come first-served basis until funding has been exhausted or the submission deadline is met.

#### **4. How does an employer register to participate?**

Potential Host Companies interested in hosting interns through this program should apply through the portal at <https://refinternships.commerceri.com/>, which includes uploading a current W-9 and a financial capability document.

#### **5. What are the eligibility requirements for organizations to participate in the program?**

Completing the Host Company Application does not guarantee or entitle your organization to receive internship funds. In order for your organization to gain approval to participate, your organization must:

- Be an eligible clean energy company. For the purposes of this program, OER and REF defines a clean energy company as “an employer engaged in whole or in part in goods and services, or advanced and applied technologies that significantly reduce or eliminate the use of energy from non-renewable sources, including, but not limited to: energy efficiency; demand response; energy conservation and those technologies powered in whole or in part by the sun, wind, water, biomass, alcohol, wood, fuel cells,” and “any renewable, non-depletable or recyclable fuel.” REF and OER staff in their sole discretion makes the determination of whether an employer is a clean energy employer.
- Be registered to do business in Rhode Island.
- Provide a meaningful internship (as defined in the General Terms and Conditions).
- Provide adequate proof that your organization is able to pay your intern(s) and all associated costs associated with employment. The financial capability document in your application should demonstrate this and describe the payroll system utilized by your company. Please be aware that it is a requirement for interns to be paid on a W2 status in order for you to participate and be reimbursed through the program.
- Successfully demonstrate that your organization has a formal office in Rhode Island.

- Not be an academic or government entity.
- Be in good standing with the REF. The Host Company must have submitted all completed paperwork relating to any prior internship, including the mandatory final survey, which has been received and approved by program staff.

Once you receive approval from program staff to participate as a Host Company in the program, your organization must complete the following tasks in order for your organization to gain approval for funding:

1. Select your intern(s) from the pool of eligible applicants on the portal.
2. Submit to program staff an executed offer letter signed by both the Host Company and selected intern(s). We recommend that the offer letter issued by the Host Company clearly states that funding for the internship is contingent on funds provided by program staff. Once the offer letter is sent to program staff, it will be reviewed for approval.
3. If approved, program staff will issue an award letter to secure funding for your organization. Until this award letter is co-executed by the Host Company and the previous two steps have been completed, your organization will not be entitled to any funds. Program staff may, at its discretion, give conditional approval for an intern to work at a Host Company once a signed offer letter is received and your award letter is drafted. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in Host Company's disqualification from the program.

## **6. Can Government or Academic Institutions Apply to the Internship Program?**

Not at this time.

## **7. How many interns may an organization employ?**

Host Companies are allowed to select up to two interns. Please note: because funding for this program is limited, awards will be made on a first-come, first-served basis, and you may receive fewer than two interns if funding is fully committed by the time we receive your offer letters for additional interns.

## **8. How long can an intern stay at my organization?**

An intern will be subsidized for one session of work in one calendar year. An intern may stay on after the conclusion of a session, but will not continue to be subsidized by program staff. Interns cannot work for the same company during two different sessions.

## **9. What are the eligibility requirements for prospective interns?**

Students will be required to meet the following eligibility requirements:

- 1) Must be currently enrolled (or can provide documentation of a graduation date on or after May 2021)
- 2) Must attend, or have attended:
  - a) A college or university in Rhode Island
  - b) A college or university outside of Rhode Island, only if the student is a Rhode Island resident and is able to present proof of residency
- 3) Must meet one of the following:
  - a) Students must have completed or will complete at least their freshman year of college (24 credits) the semester before the internship.
  - b) If a student attends a community college (or 2-year associate program), the student must have completed at least 24 credits.
  - c) Graduate students must be currently enrolled in a master's degree program.
- 4) Any replacement intern must be approved by program staff. Certain individuals are not eligible to participate in the program:
  - a) Law School students, Ph. D. candidates, or students who have been previously enrolled or matriculated in a Ph.D. program, are not eligible to participate in the program.
  - b) Full or part-time employees, both those who have received compensation as well as volunteers, are not eligible to participate in this program at their current employers.
  - c) Any full-time employee or existing intern that has been on payroll for greater than 12 weeks at a Host Company or has been continuously working at the Host Employer since their last participating session.

## **10. Is there a deadline for submitting signed offer letters to program staff?**

All signed offer letters must be received by program staff no later than **January 7, 2022**.

## **11. What is the process for reviewing student candidates?**

- Host Companies who have been approved through the online portal will be able to post their internship job description(s) and location (in person, remote or a hybrid) on the Internships Board.

- Host Companies will then be able to view eligible student applicants and their documentation through the portal.
- Host Companies can contact applicants that match their desired qualifications to set up interviews. Once an applicant (or applicants) is chosen, hire them via the portal and program staff will respond to let you know whether or not the student has been approved for the desired position(s).
- Program staff will provide final approval to extend an offer to the selected intern, contingent upon availability of funds. Please note that all onboarding functions, including conducting interviews and offer letter submissions, must be performed by a permanent staff member at the Host Company.
- Recent, current, or prospective interns are prohibited from serving in this capacity with the Host Employer.

## **12. Is there a limit to how many interns a Host Company can interview?**

There is no limit to the number of students Host Companies can interview. However, Host Companies must interview a minimum of 3 applicants for one internship, or 5 if offering two internships, before making their final selection.

## **13. What are a Host Company's contractual obligations?**

- Host Companies will be required to accept the General Terms and Conditions upon qualifying for the program and must also acknowledge the Award Letter with REF and OER that sets forth additional funding requirements.
- There is no explicit or implicit commitment on the part of any Host Company to provide future employment for any intern. By participating in the Internship Program, the Host Company and REF/OER do not form a partnership, employment relationship, joint venture, or principal and agent relationship.
- At no time is any Intern deemed or otherwise considered to be an employee, intern, contractor, subcontractor or agent of REF or OER for any purpose. The terms and conditions of the Internship shall be set by an intern and the Host Company and REF or OER shall have no responsibility, liability or oversight authority whatsoever with respect to Intern or the Internship.
- The Host Company and its agents, employees and Interns may not hold themselves out as REF or OER employees and shall not be deemed an employee of REF or OER for any purpose.

#### **14. The Cleantech Industry is really competitive. I'd like to have my intern sign a non-compete agreement. Is there a policy for non-compete agreements?**

The goal of this program is to increase opportunities for students entering the clean energy workforce and improve their prospects for future employment in the industry. A non-compete agreement goes against the spirit of the program and therefore at no point shall an intern sign a non-compete agreement. Any employer found executing a non-compete agreement with a subsidized intern will result in the inability to receive reimbursement through the Clean Energy Internship Program. A confidentiality agreement is, however, permissible.

#### **15. My intern left mid internship. Can I still hire someone?**

Yes. If a hired intern terminates employment during the internship, program staff may at its discretion allow a Host Company to hire an additional intern to take their place and use up the remaining funding allocated to their previous intern. Program staff will work with the Host Company to identify an intern from the previous pool of applicants available during the program period. Intern availability is not guaranteed. Please be aware that any new intern selected must sign an offer letter and the Host Company would then need to submit a signed offer letter for that individual before program staff could issue a final approval.

#### **16. How much can I pay my intern?**

Host Companies may pay their intern(s) more than the subsidy rate (\$12/hr.); however, program staff will only reimburse up to the full award amount. Host Companies may not pay an intern less than \$12 per hour.

Failure to pay the minimum amount may result in program staff denying a Host Company's reimbursement request. REF/OER will only reimburse a Host Company up to its cap of \$5,760/intern.

#### **17. How does an employer request reimbursement?**

Upon completion of the internship(s), your organization must submit a Reimbursement Certification package which will be emailed to you directly. In order to process your invoice, program staff requires that you submit the following documentation when seeking reimbursement:

1. Backup documentation of payment, proving that each intern was paid during the internship, along with all applicable taxes. Proof of payment must include at least a year-to-date earnings report. Acceptable forms of documentation include paycheck stubs and/or a payroll summary relating to an intern's worked hours over the approved session. REF reserves the right to request additional documentation from Host Employer to ensure compliance.

2. A completed hours tracker showing all hours the intern(s) worked throughout the session. Program staff will provide you with the necessary forms to help you provide this information. If staff is unable to match hours with year-to-date earnings, a delay in payment will occur while we procure this additional information from you.
3. Both formal acceptance letters (one from the companies to their selected intern(s) and one from program staff to the companies).
4. Companies are also required to complete an exit survey - a link will be included in the instructional email each company receives.
5. Completed Reimbursement Certification packages must be submitted to [energy.resources@energy.ri.gov](mailto:energy.resources@energy.ri.gov) or the indicated Program Staff. A timeline will be provided to selected host companies. Program staff reserve the right to deny reimbursement funding for a Host Company's session if a complete reimbursement package is not received by the session's reimbursement package submission deadline.

- Please Note: Program staff will mail a reimbursement check to the Host Company within 45 business days of receipt of the Reimbursement Certification form and all completed supporting documentation. If the Host Company's address changes, they must: 1) Send a notification letter of address change to [ref@commerceri.com](mailto:ref@commerceri.com); AND 2) Upload an updated W-9 form to the application portal and email to [ref@commerceri.com](mailto:ref@commerceri.com). Failure to properly notify program staff in the aforementioned manner may result in a delay in payment of reimbursement or inability to provide a reimbursement payment.

### **18. I'm a small organization and I don't have a payroll system. What should I do?**

If you are a smaller-sized organization and need assistance with your payroll services, please review the resource list below. Please note; without adequate proof of payment of the internship's wages and taxes in the form of paycheck stubs and/or a payroll summary, reimbursement will not be issued to your organization. Program staff will not reimburse a Host Company for the costs of using a payroll service. Below are some examples of payroll services that are acceptable:

- ADP
- Ceridian
- Paychex

**Please do not hesitate to email the program team at [energy.resources@energy.ri.gov](mailto:energy.resources@energy.ri.gov) with any questions not covered in this FAQ. Someone will respond to you as quickly as possible.**