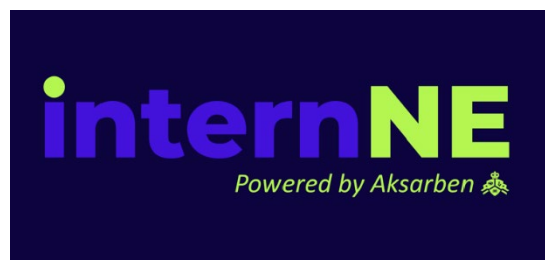


# Qualified Action Plan Intern Nebraska (InternNE) Grant Program

Prepared for  
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**Effective January 1, 2024, through December 31, 2025**



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## **Definition of Terms**

The Department -The Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

The Contractor- The 501c3 organization selected by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development as the private half of a public private partnership to assist in program delivery, marketing, outreach, and administration of the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program. The Aksarben Foundation (Aksarben) was selected in 2023 as the private 501c3 organization partner in administrating the program.

Operational Plan- A detailed operational plan must be submitted by the Contractor (Aksarben Foundation) to the Nebraska Department for annual approval. The operational plan shall describe the details of contractor budget, goals, metrics, financial and programmatic processes, controls, procedures, governance, documentation, and record keeping. The operational plan must be submitted to the Department by close of business on the last business day in May of each year. The operational plan defines in detail the roles of the contractor and process interaction s with the Department in the outreach, marketing, administration, intake, operations, documentation, and recordkeeping requirements of the program.

Internship – The employment of a Student in a professional or technical position for a limited period of time, by a business in Nebraska, in which the Student (a) gains valuable applied work experiences, (b) increases knowledge and develops connections that assist with career decision making, (c) has the opportunity to match with an employer seeking talent to evaluate, develop, and retain, or (d) receives credited or certified training for skilled positions that will help resolve skilled workforce shortages and create talent pipelines for Nebraska industries

Net New Internship – An Internship position that is filled on or after the date of application.

Student - Any person who: (a) is in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a public or private high school; or (b) enrolled full-time in a college, university, or other institution of higher education; or (c) applies for an internship within twelve months following graduation from a public or private high school or a college, university, or other institution of higher education.

Mentor- The mentor serves as a resource by sharing insights and providing guidance about the workplace, careers and education as defined by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) – Full-time workers are those who work 40 hours a week at their sole or principal job.

Underserved Student Population – For the purposes of the InternNE Act, the Department will consider Underserved Student Populations to include Students attending the following:

1. Nebraska schools serving high school seniors where 35% or more of the total students qualify for free or reduced lunch.
2. Nebraska public postsecondary colleges, universities, or institutions of higher education where 35% or more of the total students are Pell Grant recipients.
3. Nebraska private nonprofit, four-year postsecondary colleges, universities, or institutions where 35% or more of the total students are Pell Grant recipients.

H3: High wage, high skill and high demand jobs as defined by the Nebraska Department of Labor. <http://h3.ne.gov/>

STEM- The definition of STEM according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) occupations include computer and mathematics, architecture and engineering, and life and physical science occupations.

## **Section One: Introduction to the InternNE Program**

### **Program Summary**

The purpose of the program is to support Internship opportunities for 11th and 12th grade students in public and private high schools, as well as college and university students, to “retain such students and attract workers to Nebraska.” Previous iterations of the InternNE program have supported approximately 3,400 internships spanning 730 Nebraska businesses, in industries ranging from agriculture to public administration.

InternNE was introduced under LB 386 to the 102<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska State Legislature in January of 2011. LB 386 was part of the Talent and Innovation Initiative, which was aimed at enhancing Nebraska’s economic momentum by focusing on opportunities that would strengthen job creation and education across the state of Nebraska. LB 386, which was operative June 1, 2011, has been codified in the Nebraska Revised Statutes at §§81- 1210.01 to 81-1210.03.

During the 103<sup>rd</sup> Nebraska Legislative Session, LB 476 amended the InternNE program statutes to enhance InternNE by increasing the accessibility and potential impact of the program.

During the 104<sup>th</sup> Nebraska Legislative Session, Governor Pete Ricketts signed into law LB 103, amending the InternNE program statutes to increase the accessibility of internships to students from other states and increase retention of students in the state.

During the 107<sup>th</sup> legislative session, the InternNE program was again amended. LB 1012 was signed into law by Governor Ricketts in 2022. Program changes included the creation of the Intern Cash Fund as the source of program funding and the creation of a public private partnership for program cooperation and facilitation of outreach, programming, and marketing. In 2023, the Department selected the Aksarben Foundation as the contractor and program partner for the InternNE program. The Aksarben Foundation shall serve as the private half of a public-private partnership with the Department of Economic Development.

In partnership with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Aksarben Foundation will collaborate closely with stakeholders in the development of a talent retention/recruitment strategy in the InternNE program. This will include targeted recruitment efforts that heighten student interest in Nebraska-based internships. Aksarben will also develop programming for internship program participants per the operational plan. Aksarben will also work in partnership with the Department and relevant stakeholders to provide programming and other support to ensure the internships meet or exceed student expectations. To help meet the needs of businesses that do not have experience with internships, Aksarben Foundation and its regional coordinators will provide direct support, facilitation, program marketing and outreach, ensuring participation of eligible businesses and offering support in structuring internship experiences.

Application to the program will be available via the Department and The Aksarben Foundation. The organizations will execute program objectives as a collaborative effort. In May of 2023, the program was rebranded as InternNE Powered by Aksarben.

## **Purpose of the Qualified Action Plan**

Neb. Rev. Stat. §81-1210.02, as amended through LB 476 and LB 1012, requires the Department to develop a Qualified Action Plan for the Intern Nebraska (InternNE Powered by Aksarben) program. The Qualified Action Plan must be developed by January 1 of each even numbered year and must be submitted to the Governor for approval. The Plan must set forth the Department's priorities and selection criteria for awarding grants and Internships, as well as strategies for affirmatively marketing Internships to Nebraska Students in high schools, colleges, universities, and other in-state institutions of higher education, with an emphasis on marketing to Underserved Student Populations.

This Qualified Action Plan, which will be in effect January 1, 2024, through December 31, 2025, has been developed by the Department to meet the statutory requirements specified in Neb. Rev. Stat. §81-1210.02.

## **Amendments to the Qualified Action Plan**

The Department reserves the right to make changes to the Qualified Action Plan at the Department's discretion. If the Department determines that it is necessary to amend the Qualified Action Plan, the proposed amendment will be submitted to the Director of the Department for review and approval. If approved by the Director or a designee, the proposed amendment will be made available on the Department's website for a 14-day public review and comment period. At the end of the 14 days, the Department will consider any public input provided, and then the Director or a designee will issue final approval on the amendment. The Department reserves the right to make non-substantive changes to the Qualified Action Plan without conducting a public comment period. The Qualified Action Plan, including any amendments, will be made available on the Department's website at:

<https://opportunity.nebraska.gov>.

## **Allocation of Funds**

The InternNE Powered by Aksarben program statutes authorize the allocation from the Job Training Cash Fund or its subaccounts and the Intern Nebraska Cash Fund for the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program. The Nebraska Legislature provided that fund shall be used to carry out sections 81-1210.01 to 81-1210.03 of the statute. The fund consists of money transferred to the fund by the Legislature and money donated as gifts, bequests, or other contributions from public or private entities. Any money in the fund available for investment shall be invested by the state investment officer pursuant to the Nebraska Capital Expansion Act and the Nebraska State Funds Investment Act.

## **Section Two: Eligibility, Program Process and Selection Criteria**

### **Priorities, Objectives, and Goals of the Program**

- To provide students with valuable internship opportunities to retain such students in the State of Nebraska at institutions of higher education.
- To convert student internships to full-time employment in Nebraska
- To increase and/or maintain the number of internship opportunities in Nebraska.

- To attract workers to Nebraska by assisting qualified Nebraska businesses that are willing to provide eligible paid internships.
- To provide tools for Nebraska businesses to create and leverage internship programs.

## **Program Eligibility**

The InternNE Powered by Aksarben program is a competitive grant program that seeks to connect Students and employers from across the state, providing a unique opportunity for co-investment in the future. Interns gain valuable work experiences that will help them in future careers, while successful Internships help Nebraska businesses develop tomorrow's workforce.

Nebraska businesses and non-profit organizations with physical operations facilities in Nebraska may apply for an InternNE Powered by Aksarben grant to provide Internships to Students. State and Federal Government entities, governmental subdivisions (including counties, cities, villages, school districts, metropolitan utilities districts, or any other subdivision of the state, which receive revenue raised by taxation), and public and private colleges and universities are not eligible to apply for funding from the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program.

For the purpose of the InternNE Powered by Aksarben Program, a student is any person who: (a) is in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a public or private high school or exempt high school, or (b) enrolled in a college, university or other institution of higher education; or (c) is hired and starts an internship within twelve months following graduation from a college, university or other institution of higher education.

## **Amount of Funding Available, Grant Limitations, and Matching Requirements**

Via the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program, the Department may provide grants for internships to reimburse the cost of wages paid to businesses with less than fifty full-time-equivalent employees. The Department may also provide grants for internships to any business to reimburse the costs for any of the following:

- Tuition reimbursement for courses at institutions of higher education;
- Internship housing;
- Transportation expenses relating to internships; *or*
- Internship administrative or recruitment costs.
- A business may apply for no more than two grants for the same student and shall not be awarded more than twenty-five grants total in any twelve-month period.
- A business may allow a student to telecommute if the business is located more than thirty miles from the college, university, or other institution of higher education in which the student is enrolled and if the college, university, or other institution of higher education is in Nebraska.
- The department shall, to the extent possible, assure that the distribution of grants under sections 81-1210.01 to 81-1210.03 provides equitable access to the grants by all geographic areas of the state.
- The department shall, to the extent possible, assure that the grants awarded pursuant to sections 81-1210.01 to 81-1210.03 are for internships which provide valuable learning opportunities for students who will be seeking employment in a professional or technical field.

The maximum grant award per internship is seven thousand five hundred dollars. The Department may award businesses up to \$7,500 per approved Internship in the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program.

Businesses may request grants from the Department of up to \$7,500 per Internship and will be required to provide a match equal to 50% of the grant amount per Internship.

Grants are provided on a reimbursement basis for wages paid to the Intern. The Department may also provide grants for internships to any business to reimburse the costs for any of the following:

- Tuition Reimbursement
- Internship housing
- Transportation expenses relating to internships
- Qualified internship-related administration or recruitment costs

A business may apply for no more than two grants for the same Student. Businesses will be limited to no more than 25 grants in any twelve-month period.

## **Application Timing and Process**

Aksarben and the Department will make application forms and or application portal access available for the purpose of applying for grants under the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program. Outreach, intake, facilitation, and programming will be offered by the Aksarben Foundation as a part of the partnership. Applications will be accepted and reviewed in perpetual cycles, at least four times a year, The Director of the Department or a designee maintains the discretion to award grants at any time.

Eligible applicants must use the application forms and/or complete all required data fields provided by the Aksarben Foundation and/or the Department, submit all required documentation, data, or attachments, and must fully comply with all requirements within the time period specified. Applications that do not include ALL of the documentation or attachments specified, or that contain documents that have not been fully completed, may be returned to the applicant without further review. At its discretion, the Department may request supplemental materials from applicants. If the Department requests supplemental materials, the Department must receive such materials within 15 days of the date of the request, or the application may be returned to the applicant without further review.

Grants will be provided as a reimbursement by the Department to the company; grants will not be provided for costs that were incurred prior to the contract start date.

The Department may develop application/program guidelines to further explain the application process and other conditions of the InternNE Powered by Aksarben program.

## **Minimum Requirements**

1. The business certifies that the internship meets the definition of internship in section 81-1210.01.
2. The business will pay the student at least the state minimum hourly wage for the internship.
3. The internship will be completed within the State of Nebraska.
4. The internship will be completed within a period of no more than twenty-four months.
5. The internship will be for a duration sufficient to allow the student to gain significant valuable work experience and knowledge.

## **Selection Criteria**

Internships are awarded on a competitive basis via a review and selection process to ensure that the program incentivizes high quality opportunities for participants and optimal outcomes for constituents. Applicants that meet minimum program guidelines are not guaranteed an award. Criteria used by the Department and the Aksarben Foundation in evaluating applications include, but are not limited to the following:

1. The Internship provides valuable work experience in a technical or professional career field.
2. The Internship increases the knowledge of the student regarding career decision making.
3. The program may show preference to internships with competitive wages in their occupation/major.
4. The Internship will be completed within the state of Nebraska.
5. The Internship is an H3 (high wage, high skill, high demand) occupation in Nebraska.
6. The Internship will be for a duration sufficient to allow the student to gain significant valuable work experience and knowledge.
7. The Internship has a mentor/supervisor.
8. The Internship will not take the place of permanent, full-time positions within the company.

At the time of application, the Internship must be a Net New Internship. This means the Internship position is filled on or after the date of application.

## **Section Three: Marketing Internships to Nebraska Students**

### **Strategies for Affirmatively Marketing Internships**

The Aksarben Foundation will actively market Internships to all students in Nebraska, including those attending a high school, college, university, or other institution of higher education in Nebraska, to encourage students to pursue Internships. The Aksarben Foundation will create and deliver internship programming for the internship program per the approved operational plan and program guidelines.

The Aksarben Foundation and the Department will prioritize marketing internships to the underserved student population. This will include, but not be limited to, sharing information about the value of Internships and tips for finding and securing an internship (e.g., using InternNE.com). The Aksarben Foundation will promote internships at events such as Nebraska college career fairs and provide materials to counselors and career planning instructors for them to disseminate to students.