



INSTITUTE
for PUBLIC
SERVICE

Institute for Public Service

Internship Program

GUIDELINES: SUMMER 2026



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Internships in *Public Service*

IPS Internship Coordinator
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INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Public Service (IPS) at the University of Tennessee serves business, industry and government to improve the lives of Tennesseans. In support of this mission, IPS provides consulting, training and research for local governments across the state. This outreach mission allows IPS to develop opportunities for professionals with a demonstrated interest in a local government career.

Specifically, the IPS internship program exposes graduate students and undergraduate seniors interested in local government careers to work in a city or county for a semester. The purpose is to help students determine whether a career in city or county management is the right fit for them and to help students decide what field within public administration is best for them. The program is open to students in public administration and other majors and exposes them to a variety of fields related to local governments services.

The internship program is also designed to offer graduate students and undergraduate seniors interested in work with local government an opportunity to study, observe and participate in a dynamic internship experience. These experiences are designed to help the intern further develop an understanding of city and county governments in the state of Tennessee. An expectation is that the internship experience will provide students with meaningful and practical experiences to help develop local government leaders.

PURPOSE OF INTERNSHIP

Internships through IPS are not limited to students at the University of Tennessee and are structured specifically for students interested in the wide range of local government careers. Internship placement is executed through two IPS agencies that directly serve local governments: Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) and County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS).

The IPS internship program is specifically designed to:

- Provide an opportunity for students to gain valuable experience and contacts with employers and connect local governments with young professionals emerging from colleges and universities.
- Develop projects of interest to the local government and of benefit to students.
- Strengthen the understanding of public service through participation of several projects and activities.
- Provide an opportunity to further develop insight and judgment in applying professional knowledge.
- Facilitate the opportunity to earn college credit along with the experience and exposure to local governments, associations, and agencies across the state.
- Provide a basis for making a career decision to choose public service as a career path.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERNSHIP GUIDE

This guide is intended to assist the intern in making the IPS internship program a purposeful, educational and well-balanced experience. This guide provides a detailed overview which outlines expectations, requirements, logistics and other pertinent information of the internship program.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Students must apply by submitting the following to the IPS internship coordinator at tomi.rogers@tennessee.edu. Copy valerie.dugan@tennessee.edu on the email.

- Cover letter (should describe the student's professional interests, why the student is interested in a local government career, and the Tennessee city or county desired for the internship).
- Resume (including academic degrees, overall GPA and anticipated graduation date).
- Names and contact information of three references.

SELECTION PROCESS

Students who apply for an IPS internship will participate in a competitive placement process and will be initially screened based on their application. If they are selected to continue through the process, students will participate in an interview process with the city or county supervisor and IPS consultant. Students will be notified if they are or are not selected for the program. Once a student is selected, they are expected to complete the requirements outlined in this guide. Students who are not placed are welcome to reapply. All interested graduate students and undergraduate seniors are welcome to apply.

INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT

IPS consultants are critical to finding and supervising the placement of interns, and have the personal knowledge and relationships necessary to grow a successful internship program with cities and counties in Tennessee. The IPS internship coordinator builds connections with colleges and universities to advertise the IPS internship program through their respective faculty.

This is a statewide program, and, to the extent possible, internships are located convenient to students and host cities or counties. Additionally, interns are assigned to and mentored through IPS offices near their home or campus. While internships are located in Tennessee, applications are accepted from non-Tennessee students, colleges and universities.

ONBOARDING AND BACKGROUND CHECKS

The onboarding HR paperwork is coordinated between the student, IPS consultant and IPS administration. The paperwork must be completed by the student and processed by IPS administration through the university system. All paperwork and the student's background review must be completed before the intern may begin work with IPS. The University of Tennessee requires a background check of all employees, including interns.

BENEFITS

Interns earn pay at a rate of \$14 per hour for the duration of their internship. Interns are limited to work 20 hours per week during the semester they are enrolled in classes. Interns may work up to 40 hours per week, with no overtime pay, during the semester they are not enrolled in classes. Working more than 20 hours is dependent on the needs of the intern, the host government and available funds. Schedules should be adjusted with the placement location (city or county) to avoid overtime. For example, if the intern does a police ride-along for a ten-hour shift, the rest of the intern's work schedule for that week will need to be reduced to accommodate the "extra" hours worked that one day. Pay is distributed via direct deposit.

While there are no health benefits available, interns are covered under liability insurance and workers' compensation. If there is a need for travel specific to the internship and the travel is approved in advance, the intern will be reimbursed for costs incurred. For example, mileage to the in-person presentation is reimbursable. Students are limited to a single internship with IPS.

PROGRAM DURATION AND NOTABLE DATES

Internships start and end with the academic semester and generally last 10-12 weeks. While the exact start date and end date of the internship may vary, the 10-week internship program for summer 2025 will begin approximately May 27, 2025, and end approximately August 1, 2025.

- Internship Orientation (Virtual): **Monday, June 1, 2026**
- Internship Formal Presentations (In-person; Knoxville, TN) : **Tuesday, August 4, 2026**

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

IPS interns report to the identified city or county supervisor. The role of the supervisor is to serve as a leader, providing guidance and direction for the student's internship experience. The supervisor serves in a more day-to-day capacity with the intern and is

responsible for ensuring project work is advancing, time sheets are approved and other work tasks are performed. Questions about the projects, assignments, concerns about policies, human resources issues, office procedures and local city or county operations should be referred to the supervisor.

The role of the IPS consultant is to serve as a mentor, provide technical advice and coordinate training opportunities when applicable. The consultant also works with potential host cities and counties to create internship opportunities, leads the screening and interview process, and supports and assists the interns during the semester. This mentor experience allows the consultant to keep the internship productive for both the student and the host city or county. Any questions and concerns about pay, travel reimbursement and the intern's placement should be referred to the IPS consultant.

Questions regarding the application process or general questions of the overall Internship Program should be referred to the IPS internship coordinator, Tomi Rogers.

If it becomes necessary to be out of the assigned city or county on a scheduled work day, interns should secure written permission in advance from the assigned supervisor. The supervisor will review protocol on how to handle an emergency absence.

Travel with city or county staff members or IPS consultants, to work-related functions or events when invited is expected. The intern must acquire approval to attend and/or travel to such functions and events.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The University of Tennessee has established a formal code of conduct policy and ethical guidelines to govern the behavior of their employees. These standards ensure that quality programs, services and treatment will be rendered to customers served by the university. IPS interns should familiarize themselves with the expectations of the university and adhere to the established policy. A link to the policy can be found at conduct.tennessee.edu.

The intern is at all times a representative of the city or county assigned, the Institute for Public Service and the University of Tennessee. In addition, the intern represents his or her college/university and academic program. Conduct and communications, both verbal and written, should demonstrate professionalism and good judgment. Keep in mind that almost all communication from a public entity is subject to public disclosure.

INTERNSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

For an intern to successfully complete the IPS internship program, the following assignments are required and must be completed near or by the final presentation date. Each subsequent section provides detailed requirements for each assignment.

Assignment	Audience
1. Host City or County-Specific Major Project	For every intern
2a. City Mini-Project (MTAS)	For intern assigned to a city
2b. County Mini-Project (CTAS)	For intern assigned to a county
3. Social Media Highlights	For every intern
4. Written Report and Formal Presentation	For every intern
5. Donor Appreciation	For every intern

1. Host City or County-Specific Major Project

Host agencies and communities work with IPS consultants to develop projects that are of interest to the local government and of benefit to the interns. The city or county supervisor will assign a major project to the intern. The details of the project will vary depending on the location and the needs of the city or county. Questions from the intern about the major project should be directed to the city or county supervisor. The major project is expected to cover the bulk of the intern's time.

While interns should always help out as necessary, as most professional staff do, they should not be generally assigned receptionist or "front-desk" administrative duties.

2a. City Mini-Project (MTAS)

I. Activities

Interns are expected to complete at least four of the following activities during their internship to gain a greater understanding of the local government and how it serves its community.

Please note: If the internship takes place during the summer, several activities may be unavailable for direct experience. However, understanding the functions of the local government entity is the ultimate goal of these placements. IPS is fortunate to have flexibility in coordinating and executing this learning endeavor to best suit the needs of the interns and the local government entity where they are placed.

- Attend a city council meeting
- Attend a beer board meeting
- Attend a planning commission meeting
- Attend a board of zoning appeals meeting
- Attend a park board meeting
- Interview with a candidate
- Ride along with the police department for a shift
- Spend a shift with the fire department
- Job shadow a department head for one day
- Attend a termination hearing
- Attend a press conference
- Attend a staff meeting (e.g. a daily crew meeting of the public works department)

II. Tasks

Tasks are more in-depth than the activities listed above and are in addition to the major project mentioned in Section L.1. The intern will choose one task to accomplish during the internship semester to gain a greater understanding of municipal government outside of their assigned project. Suggested projects by department are listed below.

- Public works: Read the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* section on street signage, then audit 10 city street signs for compliance and submit a report with recommendations to city management.
- Fire: Visit multiple stations and identify the pros/cons of each and submit a written report to the fire chief.
- Finance: Analyze property tax collections for the last three years and make recommendations to city management on ways to improve collection rates.
- Human resources: Audit HR documentation for compliance with record retention requirements and submit a report with recommendations to city management.

- Parks: study park program offerings and identify two gaps in programming for residents.
- Management: Investigate the city's website and make five suggestions for improvement in writing to city management.
- Legislature: Research the Tennessee Code Annotated to find at least 10 state mandates for cities. Then audit the city for compliance and prepare a report for the governing body.
- Planning: Research the last five years of variances the city granted to its zoning ordinance. Determine if a change to the zoning ordinance is warranted and write a recommendation to city management.

2b. County Mini-Project (CTAS)

I. Activities

Interns are expected to complete at least three of the following activities during their internship to gain a greater understanding of the local government and how it serves its community.

Please note: Depending on the county, some activities may be unavailable for direct experience. However, understanding the functions of the local government entity is the ultimate goal of these placements. IPS is fortunate to have flexibility in coordinating and executing this learning endeavor to best suit the needs of the interns and the local government entity where they are placed.

- Attend a commission meeting (occurs monthly)
- Attend a committee meeting (frequency varies)
- Attend a staff meeting for a department (frequency varies)
- Attend an elected officials' meeting (frequency varies)
- Meet with state-level associated groups (frequency varies)
- Attend a regional office meeting (frequency varies)

In the past, county internships were typically assigned to a single office or department. With numerous elected officials, it's important to have the intern assigned to one office to ensure proper oversight on a daily basis. Normally, the intern will have a preferred office/department placement such as planning, emergency management, solid waste, highway department, etc. These specific office placements provide a deeper understanding and experience of operations than general placements in the mayor's office, where they would work with several departments.

If an intern is looking for a general internship, they may find the mayor's office to be the best assignment. This is because the mayor directly oversees various departments and is involved in several boards and committees. Working in the mayor's office can provide the intern with an opportunity to experience multiple areas of government. The intern would work with departments such as finance, library, solid waste, recycling, ambulance, animal shelter and information technology. However, it may be difficult to find finance-only internships due to the department's busy schedule with budget and year-end closeout activities.

II. Tasks

County Study: Each intern should conduct a brief study of the county to which he or she is assigned. The study should include items such as:

- a. Geographic location and size
- b. Population (number of people, their ages, education, occupation, income and general home situations)
- c. General economic situation (places of employment, major sources of income, banks, other lending agencies, etc.)
- d. Communication facilities (telephone, newspaper, radio and television stations)
- e. Educational facilities (public schools, colleges and other)
- f. Health facilities (including medical doctors, hospitals and public health services)
- g. Any other pertinent facts

4. Social Media Highlights

Interns will need to provide at least one post each week for social media coverage on the IPS social media pages (e.g. Facebook, Twitter (X), etc.) For your very first post, you should post an introduction of yourself with a photo and a very brief biographical paragraph. Subsequently, your social media posts can be brief summaries with photos of work life, experiences that interns encounter and other comments that may be of interest to potential employers and future interns.

As an example, a post could be a photo and text which states, "Today, I toured the offices of the mayor of the city of Knoxville while working with IPS. It was interesting to see where decisions are sometimes made!" The post can include any other relevant information. The posts should be interesting and more of a snapshot of what the intern is doing and where.

How to submit posts: Please submit the text and any photos for social media posts to Susan Robertson at susan.robertson@tennessee.edu before the end of each week. This will continue until your internship is complete.

5. Written Report and Formal Presentation

Interns are required to submit a written report and presentation at the end of the internship experience. The written report is due to the IPS internship coordinator at least two days before the day of the formal presentations. Each intern will be given approximately 15 minutes for the formal presentation.

Written Report: The report should be a comprehensive showcase of your internship experience, highlighting the assignments you conquered. The report should also summarize the city or county department that hosted the internship, including what you did and with whom you worked. The accomplishments achieved by the intern and any lessons learned throughout the experience should also be shared.

Formal Presentation: Although most presentations are in the form of an oral discussion accompanied by PowerPoint slides, the use of other educational media/technology (ex. video, photographs, etc.) is also encouraged. The IPS internship coordinator will assist in securing any special equipment for the presentation, if needed. However, the responsibility for the quality of the presentation rests with the intern.

Please see that slides, visuals, etc. are of the quality that one would expect to use in any university presentation. It is strongly recommended that a camera be used when appropriate. Avoid hastily producing the presentation during the last week of the internship. Be creative in the development of the presentation!

Preparation of the report and presentation are within the working scope of the internship and the time required should be within the hours per week available for the intern. Early

preparation for the report will provide benefits later in the writing of the report, and a work log may help with tracking important accomplishments and lessons.

The presentation of the report, much like an interview, is an opportunity to highlight the intern as a professional and to showcase the intern's abilities to plan, organize and present comments on service topics important to that local government or agency.

6. Donor Appreciation

The IPS internship program is funded by the generosity of philanthropic gifts from donors who share an educational and/or career background in public service. To show appreciation to donors for making IPS internships possible, students are expected to complete the following. Your participation in these activities will inspire ongoing donations that will fund the next generation of public service learners and leaders.

Required content from all interns:

- Submit a professional or high-resolution photo. If you do not have a professional photo, we may be able to arrange for one to be scheduled at no cost to you.
- Submit a handwritten thank-you note.
- Submit a typed testimonial summarizing your background, intern project, interest in public service and career aspirations.

Choose one of the following activities:

- Participate in a video recording promoting the internship program and thanking the internship donor(s).
- Participate in a phone/Zoom visit with donor(s).
- Participate in an in-person visit with an internship gift fund donor(s).

Please email the IPS Director of Development Kristen Davis at kristen.davis@tennessee.edu of your selected activity within two weeks of your internship start date.

Full detailed instructions of each activity and next steps, including due dates, will be provided after you have submitted your selection.

Your participation is a vital part of thanking and stewarding IPS donors, as well as demonstrating the impact of supporting students studying public policy, public administration and all disciplines contributing to a rewarding career in public service and local government.

Enjoy your Internship Experience!



Internships benefit local governments through the hard work of interns on projects and activities important to the community. Internships also provide experience and invaluable contacts to young professionals. Together, these benefits help the agencies of the Institute for Public Service to support good business and government in the

“This internship program provides unique opportunities to be a part of making and shaping a better future for our state.”

- Jalen Blue, former intern

state and to bring the resources of the University of Tennessee to help address the needs of Tennessee communities. Use this opportunity to experience as many things as possible and to ask as many questions as possible. Last, but not least, have fun!

FACULTY CONTACTS IN TENNESSEE

Note: While a listing of in-state universities is listed below, out-of-state students are welcome to apply to the internship program.

AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Sue Evans

Chair and Professor
Department of Leadership
PO Box 4636
Clarksville, TN 37044
(931) 221-1437 | evanss@apsu.edu

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Frederick Gordon

Associate Professor & MPA Director
Political Science, International Affairs &
Public Administration
(423) 439-6134 | gordonfd@mail.etsu.edu

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Lisa Langenbach

Internship Director
Political Science Department
lisa.langenbach@mtsu.edu

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Joseph Hafer, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration
(901) 678-3349 | jahafer@memphis.edu

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Rodney E. Stanley

Interim Dean, College of Public Service
Professor, Department of Public Administration
(615) 963-7249 | rstanley1@tnstate.edu

TENNESSEE TECH UNIVERSITY

Dr. Lauren Harding

Assistant Professor
Sociology & Political Science
(931) 372-3817 | lharding@tnitech.edu

Dr. Lori Maxwell

Department Chairperson
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(931) 372-3437 | lmmaxwell@tnitech.edu

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, CHATTANOOGA

Dr. Christopher Acuff

UC Foundation Associate Professor of Public
Administration Department of Political Science
Public Administration and Nonprofit Management
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UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

Dr. Xuhong Su

MPPA Director
Department of Political Science
(865) 974-2261 | xsu11@utk.edu



IPS INTERNSHIP ACTIVITIES AND TASKS ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COMPLETION

2a. City Mini-Project (MTAS)

Date of completion of activities and tasks by Intern: _____

Signature approval by city official or IPS employee: _____

2b. County Mini-Project (CTAS)

Date of completion of activities and tasks by Intern: _____

Signature approval by county official or IPS employee: _____