

# OPERATING ON FREE LABOR

A STUDY OF UNPAID  
INTERNSHIPS IN NYC COUNCIL

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# Executive Summary

Internships have become a necessity for students across the country. They provide young people a pathway to job prospects, valuable connections, and higher salaries. Many studies show that an internship experience enhances marketability in the job search, with 76 percent of employers expressing preference for hiring applicants with internships on their resume.<sup>i</sup> However, internships in the public sector are frequently unpaid. Financial constraints often prevent many young people with low- and moderate-incomes from participating in unpaid internship opportunities. Young people from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to be able to take on the financial constraints of an unpaid position.

Pay Our Interns (POI) is the non-profit leading the fight for an increase in the amount of paid internships across all work sectors. They are committed to reducing the gap between education and work experience through research, advocacy, and storytelling. In 2017, POI published a Congressional Report titled Experience Doesn't Pay the Bills that revealed the Members of Congress who pay and do not pay their interns. Within a year of publishing the report, POI worked with various offices to increase the number of paid internships in Congress. By the beginning of June 2018, POI had successfully worked with a bipartisan group of Senators to help solidify \$5 million in internship funding for interns in the Senate. A few weeks after this successful partnership with the Senate, the team worked with bipartisan legislators in the House and secured \$8.8 Million for internship funding. Since then, POI has convinced Congress to allocate \$48 million for lawmakers to pay their interns and inspired unpaid interns across the country to advocate for the creation of paid internships in their own communities.<sup>ii</sup>

Inspired by POI, NYU Wagner Capstone team researched the effects of unpaid internships in the New York City Council. The New York City Council does not have a standard practice of paying its interns. The research team contacted all 51 Council Member offices, conducted expert interviews, and administered a survey to current and former City Council interns. Based on this data, the team was able to:

## **1) Determine the extent to which the New York City Council pays their interns**

The research team found that 89 percent (40 offices) of Council Members do not pay their interns, and 11 percent (5 offices) claim to pay their interns.<sup>1</sup> However, no office was able to provide evidence to support the amounts paid or the number of interns that were paid. The

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<sup>1</sup> The research team was unable to obtain information from 6 of the 51 Council Members' offices. The team limited its analysis to the 45 offices who provided information about payment for their interns.

research team also found that the City Council internship process lacks transparency with only 10 percent of Council Members (6 offices) providing information about internships on their websites.

**2) Determine the extent to which unpaid internships create a financial burden for the interns**

The survey of former City Council interns revealed the absence of paid internships often creates financial and emotional hardships for interns. More than half (57 percent) of the former interns surveyed said that they have turned down an internship because it was unpaid. Likely due to the significant cost of living in New York City, 72 percent of formerly unpaid interns reported that they had to obtain another source of income during the time of their internship. Even interns who received payment for their internship experienced hardship with over half of respondents who were paid reporting that their compensation was not sufficient to cover their expenses and the cost of living in New York City.

**3) Determine the extent to which unpaid internships affect the composition of the Council's staff**

The lack of paid internships disproportionately affects under-represented communities, often limiting the diversity of Council Members' offices. Over two-thirds of the former interns reported that students of color may have particular difficulty affording unpaid internships. Another two-thirds of respondents (61 percent) said that New York City Council interns did not reflect the diversity of New York City in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Many former interns noted that if the New York City Council were to pay its interns, the interns would be a better reflection of the city and attract more talented and diverse individuals.

**Based on these findings we make the following three recommendations:**

**I. Make Internship Postings Clear and Transparent**

Internship postings should be easy to find on the City Council Members' website with clear instructions on how to apply, compensation information, and required application materials.

**II. Standardize the New York City Council Internship Process**

Students should have a central and general place to apply to internships to increase the pool of prospective interns, rather than relying on insular networks to identify new interns.

**III. Prioritize a Council-Wide Paid Internship Program**

The New York City Council should allocate funding for a council-wide paid internship program in their budget, ensuring all offices have adequate and equal funding to pay their interns.

## Background

Internships are becoming an increasingly integral part of the school-to-work transition, as they play a key part in the recruitment strategy for employers. While employment isn't guaranteed at the end of an internship, many employers use internships to train and evaluate future employees. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' Class of 2019 Survey, 58 percent of graduating seniors who received a job offer had at least one internship prior.<sup>iii</sup> Internships serve as a meaningful opportunity for young people to grow their networks with professionals in the fields they are interested in. Fostering those professional connections are a major advantage and can be useful for anything from career advice to job recommendations.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, more than three-quarters of college students complete at least one internship before graduation.<sup>iv</sup> Internships are becoming more common, if not necessary, as the job market continues to get more competitive. However, not all students have equal access to internships. A study on paid internships by the Economic Policy Institute perfectly captures this divide: "in our current system, there is a two-tiered structure of students: on the first tier are students from high income families with the financial resources to pursue their studies, graduate, and leave college relatively debt free. On the second tier are students from disproportionately low- and moderate-income households who become saddled with debt and must work long hours to fund their education, compromising their ability to graduate."<sup>v</sup> As a result, first tier students can afford to forgo wages to pursue unpaid work, while second tier students are highly dependent on financial aid, scholarships, and employment, and often cannot afford unpaid internships, especially internship opportunities that require temporary relocation.

Even when students from low-income backgrounds do decide to take on an unpaid internship opportunity, unpaid internships still contribute to their economic insecurity after graduation. As *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describes, "tuition hikes, textbook costs, student-loan rates, and credit-card marketing generate considerable public outrage, but graduates saddled with debt may also have unpaid or low-paying internships to blame."<sup>vi</sup> The pressure to complete an internship before graduation puts many low-income students into a corner: they can either take

a paying job during the summer to earn money and not go further into debt, or they can take out additional loans to finance a summer internship.

Unpaid internships prevent many first-generation college students, students from underrepresented backgrounds, and any student who doesn't come from wealth from accessing beneficial work experience. The culture of unpaid internships continues to perpetuate oppressive cycles that bar low income and historically marginalized people from achieving the same level of access as their dominant culture counterparts.

## **The New York City Council**

The New York City Council is a legislative body that consists of 51 Members, with each Member representing geographically determined districts throughout the city. Within the Council, Council Members elect one Member to serve as the Speaker of the Council, which is regarded as the second most powerful position within the city, behind the Mayor. The New York City Council is divided into two main offices: Council Members' offices and the Central Office. The Central Office encompasses an array of different offices that focus on the analytical, budget, and legal work to process legislation. Some of the different units within the Central Office are the Divisions for Legislative Affairs, Office of General Counsel, Office of the Speaker, Committees & Sub Committees, and Caucus Offices. As of 2020, there are 48 Democrats and three Republicans elected in the New York City Council. In 2021, 35 out of the 51 Members will not be eligible to run for office again due to term limits, meaning there will be 35 new Council Members in the 2021 election cycle. The composition of the City Council is likely to change further due to other candidates running against remaining incumbents.<sup>vii</sup>

The budget of the City Council for Fiscal Year 2021 is \$55.9 million with about \$41.9 million going towards staff pay and benefits.<sup>viii</sup> In 2018, the Speaker of the Council, Corey Johnson pushed a \$17 million increase to the Council's budget — a 27 percent increase and the largest in at least a decade — to help pay for more staff.<sup>ix</sup> However, no part of the budget has been earmarked for paid internships.

# Methodology

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of unpaid internships within the New York City Council. Specifically, the research team determined: 1) the extent to which the New York City Council pays their interns; 2) the extent to which unpaid internships create a financial burden for the interns; and 3) the extent to which unpaid internships affect the composition of the Council's staff. The research team also collected information about the steps that could be taken to enable the Council to pay their interns. This study is based on two primary sources of data; the collection of data from Council Members' offices and a survey of former interns. The research team also supplemented the analysis by conducting an extensive literature review and conducting interviews with officials to identify potential steps that might be taken to enable internships to be paid.

## Data Collection from Council Member Offices

To determine the extent to which New York City Council Members pay their interns, the research team searched Council Members' websites, called Council Member's offices, emailed Chiefs of Staff and intern coordinators, and visited offices in person. Using these methods, the research team attempted to establish for each Council Member's office: the application process for interns; whether interns were paid; and, if so, the amounts paid to the interns. The research team was able to obtain information for 45 of the 51 New York City Council Members. They were unable to obtain information for 6 Council Members who were unresponsive. This review focuses on internships with City Council Members' offices; we did not evaluate the internship programs of the City Council Caucuses or Central Offices.

In order to obtain information from the Council Members' offices, the research team first reviewed the Members' websites for internship information. This method did not prove widely effective as most Council Members do not have information on their websites detailing if current internship positions are available or whether or not they are compensated. Next, the research team used a script to call all of the City Council offices inquiring about student internship opportunities, and if any of them were paid. During this stage and the ones to follow, the research team explained that they were NYU graduate students interested in City Council internships. In some instances, the team was directed to follow up via email with Chiefs of Staff and intern coordinators. If these methods did not provide the requested information, the team then attempted to collect the information in person. Four Council Members provided information during an in-person visit to the office, after multiple calls and emails went unanswered.

## **Survey of Former Interns**

To determine the extent to which unpaid internships create a financial burden for interns and the extent to which unpaid internships affect the composition of the Council's staff, the research team conducted a survey of current and former New York City Council interns. The survey was completed by 28 former and current New York City Council interns. Of these 28 respondents, 57% of respondents (n=16) reported that their internship was not compensated while 43% (n=12) reported being compensated. Of the 12 respondents who reported being compensated, 5 reported being paid by an external source, such as a university scholarship or stipend. The remaining 7 respondents were paid by the Council; however almost all of these interns were paid by the Council's Central Office.<sup>2</sup> Only one of the respondents received a paid internship from an individual Council Member's office.

These 28 respondents were from a variety of different schools and universities including Baruch College, City College of New York, Columbia, Fordham University, John Jay College, New York University, Pace University and the Pratt Institute. Twelve of the survey respondents self-identified as male and 16 self-identified as female. All respondents reported being under the age of 30 at the time of the internship. Almost half of the respondents, 46 percent, identified as white or Caucasian (n=13), and 54 percent identified as people of color (Black/ African American, LatinX or Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern or North African, or two or more races).

To promote the survey, the research team created a flyer (Exhibit 1 in the Appendix) and used social media including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The research team also used their networks at NYU including NYU Wagner career services and NYU Wagner alumni pages. In an effort to diversify respondents, the research team reached out to career services at colleges and universities throughout New York City. The survey was conducted between January 2020 and March 2020.

## **Literature Review**

The research team conducted a literature review on the effects of unpaid internships in the United States. Unfortunately, there is limited research into the payment of interns in the public sector. There are few examples of local, state, or federal governmental entities that pay their interns in the U.S; however, the team reviewed all available literature on the few entities that

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<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, the New York City Council is divided into two main offices: Council Members' offices and the Central Office. The Central Office encompasses an array of different offices that focuses on the analytical, budget, and legal work to process legislation. The primary focus of our report is on Council Members' offices.

have developed programs to pay their interns, including the U.S. Congress and the New York City Mayor's Office.

The literature review also revealed important cost of living information in New York City, the internship to job offer pipeline, and the barriers that come along with unpaid internships for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Expert Interviews

To understand how City Council offices could begin to pay their interns, the research team spoke to two New York City Council senior staffers including a Chief of Staff and a Deputy Chief of Staff. The research team also spoke to a former Council intern and a New York City Mayor's internship program coordinator. These conversations triangulated and reinforced the sentiments expressed in the former intern survey. They also increased the team's understanding of the decision-making process for the New York City Council and helped inform the recommendations for this report. These interviews were conducted between October 2019 and February 2020.

## Limitations

The qualitative research methods used in this review—including surveys and expert interviews—provided the research team flexibility to explore questions in greater detail. While the research team took opportunities to ask probing questions, there was a limitation in terms of the sample size of respondents.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the survey was based on a judgmental sample of former interns. The research team cannot guarantee that the opinions expressed are representative of all former interns. Although the research team attempted to obtain responses from a diverse group of interns for a more holistic representation, there was a significant non-response rate. The team was also unable to determine if the non-response rate limited the diversity of the interns surveyed, potentially biasing the results. Lastly, within the findings, the research team had two groups of respondents: Caucus Office interns and Council Member office interns. For this report, the research team will only be focusing on interns that worked in Council Members' offices.

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<sup>3</sup> Although the team undertook this research study at the request of its client, Pay Our Interns, one member of the research team subsequently declared their intent to run for City Council. This team member did not have any contact with the office of the incumbent Council Member in his district, and the team member recused himself from conducting any of the analysis involving this Council Member's office.

# Key Findings

## Most interns working for Council Members go unpaid.

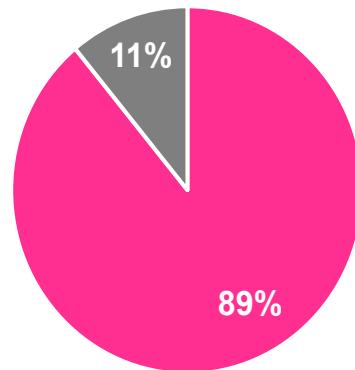
For young people seeking careers in public service, an internship with a Council Member's office is a critical stepping-stone to gaining valuable work experience and connections in New York City politics. However, very few internships with Council Members are paid. Notably, 89 percent (40 offices) of Council Members do not pay the interns who work in their offices.<sup>4</sup> **Exhibit 2** shows a listing of all Council Members that do not pay their interns.

Only 5 offices (11 percent) reported that they paid their interns. This office includes the Speaker of the New York City Council, Corey Johnson. Each of these offices claimed to pay their interns \$15 per hour; however, no office was able to provide evidence to support the amounts paid or the number of interns that were paid. A listing of all Council Members offices that claim to pay their interns are shown in **Exhibit 3**.

*[If internships were paid,] it would be more competitive, the offices would receive a higher pool of candidates to select, and the interns will have an opportunity to continue going to school while earning income interning.*

*Former paid intern*

**Exhibit 1: Percentage of Paid and Unpaid Internships within the NYC Council**



■ Unpaid ■ Paid

Among the 40 offices (89 percent) that do not pay their interns, several hundred of their interns are likely going unpaid each year. Typically, a Council Member's office will have two interns in the office for each semester of the academic year—two for the Fall semester and two for the Spring semester. Assuming each office has at least 4 interns, an estimated 204 interns are going unpaid in the City Council every academic year.

<sup>4</sup> As noted earlier, we were unable to obtain information from 6 of the 51 Council Members' offices. We limited our analysis to the 45 offices who provided information about payment of their interns.

## Exhibit 2: Council Members That Reported No to Paying Their Interns

| <i>Council Members</i> | <i>District</i> | <i>Council Members</i> | <i>District</i> | <i>Council Members</i> | <i>District</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Margaret Chin          | 1               | Paul Vallone           | 19              | Brad Lander            | 39              |
| Carlina Rivera         | 2               | Peter Koo              | 20              | Mathieu Eugene         | 40              |
| Keith Powers           | 4               | Francisco Moya         | 21              | Alicka Ampry-Samuel    | 41              |
| Ben Kallos             | 5               | Costa Constantinides   | 22              | Inez Barron            | 42              |
| Helen Rosenthal        | 6               | Barry Grodenchik       | 23              | Justin Brannan         | 43              |
| Mark D. Levine         | 7               | Rory Lancman           | 24              | Kalman Yeger           | 44              |
| Diana Ayala            | 8               | Danny Dromm            | 25              | Farah Louis            | 45              |
| Bill Perkins           | 9               | Jimmy Van Bramer       | 26              | Alan Maisel            | 46              |
| Andy King              | 12              | Daneek Miller          | 27              | Mark Treyger           | 47              |
| Mark Gjonaj            | 13              | Karen Koslowitz        | 29              | Chaim Deutsch          | 48              |
| Fernando Cabrera       | 14              | Donovan Richards       | 31              | Debi Rose              | 49              |
| Ritchie Torres         | 15              | Eric Ulrich            | 32              | Joseph Borelli         | 51              |
| Vanessa Gibson         | 16              | Antonio Reynoso        | 34              |                        |                 |
| Rafael Salamanca       | 17              | Laurie Cumbo           | 35              |                        |                 |

## Exhibit 3: Council Members That Reported Yes to Paying Their Interns

| <i>Council Members</i> | <i>District</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Stephen Levin          | 33              |
| Corey Johnson          | 3               |
| Andrew Cohen           | 11              |
| Robert Holden          | 30              |
| Carlos Menchaca        | 38              |

## The City Council's internship process

**lacks transparency.** Only 10 percent of Council

Members' offices (6 offices) provide information about internships on their websites. This lack of transparency is a disservice to young people who are interested in politics, and lack the connections or guidance needed to seek an internship in the City Council. Many may even be dissuaded from pursuing an internship altogether after not seeing any information about an internship opportunity on a Council Member's website.

Many offices are not transparent about whether internships are paid even when contacted directly by phone or email. Most offices refused to answer questions about intern compensation over the phone. Many of the City Council offices directed prospective interns to email their Chief of Staff or the office's intern coordinator. However, when these additional inquiries were made, many offices still refused to answer basic questions about the internship process, such as whether the internships are paid; for four Council Members, only during an in-person visit to the office—after multiple calls and emails went unanswered—did the office provide basic information about the internship. Even after extensive attempts, 6 offices were still completely unresponsive. **Exhibit 4** shows the 6 offices that were unresponsive.<sup>5</sup>

Not only does this lack of transparency potentially dissuade interested candidates and disproportionately affect people who can only take on paid internship opportunities, but it perpetuates the practice of relying on insular networks to identify and recruit interns in the City Council - a practice that was cited as common by our expert interviewees. It makes internship opportunities only accessible for interns who may have direct connection to the Council Member or staff that work in the City Council.

“

*There's no intern guidance, no steps to follow to recruit interns, no general place that someone can apply to be an intern- it's every man for themselves.*

”

*Senior City Council Staffer*

**Exhibit 4: Council Members that were Unresponsive**

| Council Members  | District |
|------------------|----------|
| Ydanis Rodríguez | 10       |
| Rubén Díaz Sr.   | 18       |
| Adrienne Adams   | 28       |
| Robert Cornegy   | 36       |
| Rafael Espinal   | 37       |
| Steven Matteo    | 50       |

<sup>5</sup> Rafael Espinal resigned from his City Council position early January 2020

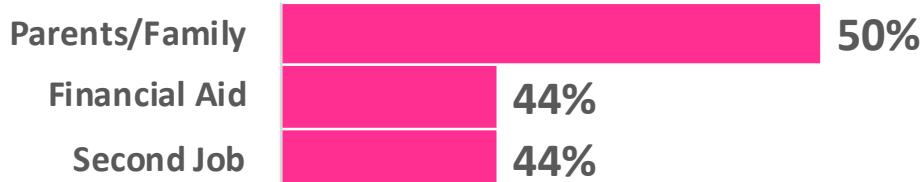
*“ Since the internship was unpaid, students had to either be financially supported by family members or working multiple paid jobs. There was little to no people of color in my internship likely due to this.*

*Former paid/unpaid intern*

**The absence of paid internships often creates financial and emotional hardships for interns.** Many interns decline internships because they are unpaid. More than half--57 percent--of the former interns surveyed said that they have turned down an internship because it was unpaid. Unpaid internships often force students to make tough decisions between gaining the experience they want and taking on a significant financial burden. According to the City University of New York, the 9-month average cost for a student living at home is \$9,921; a student living away from home would have costs of \$22,445.<sup>x</sup>

Likely due to the significant cost of living in New York City, almost three-quarters--72 percent--of formerly unpaid interns reported that they had to obtain another source of income during the time of their internship. As shown in **Exhibit 4**,<sup>6</sup> 50 percent of respondents said that at least one source of their income was their parents, 44 percent said they had a second job, and 44 percent said they had financial aid (loans or scholarship) to help support their unpaid internship. Of the former interns whose internships were unpaid, 63 percent of students attended private schools and 38 percent attended public schools. This may point to a correlation between students from private schools and unpaid internships, but further research is necessary to understand the relationship between public versus private schools and the ability for students to take on unpaid internships.

#### **Exhibit 4: Sources of Income for Unpaid NYC Council Intern Survey Respondents**



<sup>6</sup> In the survey, respondents were allowed to select multiple sources of income, which is why it does not add up to 100%.

## **Even those who receive payment for their internships can experience hardship.**

In addition to the burdens of unpaid internships, many paid internships pose hardships as well. Over half of respondents who were paid reported that their compensation was not sufficient to cover their expenses and the cost of living in New York City. With New York City being one of the most expensive cities to live in within the country, even compensated labor is often not enough to make ends meet. Offering paid internships is a small—but necessary—step for ensuring that interns are not unduly burdened by the substantial cost of living in New York City.

**The lack of paid internships disproportionately affects under-represented communities, often limiting the diversity of Council Members' offices.** Internships help students gain valuable experience; those who take on internships often have a leg up when it comes to obtaining paid positions in their chosen profession. In fact, almost half (43 percent) of the former interns surveyed reported that their internships were instrumental in obtaining their first job after graduation. As one intern noted, it was a “great learning experience and jump started my career.” However, many students from underrepresented communities are unable to participate in unpaid internships. This potentially results in a lack of diversity in Council Members’ offices.

“

*Low income communities of color are often disadvantaged in securing internships compared to wealthy white counterparts who enjoy financial and housing stability external from internship experience.*

”

*Former paid/unpaid intern*

Over two-thirds of the former interns reported that students of color may have particular difficulty affording unpaid internships. Many former interns also noted that if the New York City Council were to pay its interns, the interns would be a better reflection of the city, attracting more talented and diverse individuals.

Statistics confirm that earning disparities between high- and low-wage, full-time workers in New York City have been drastically increasing since the 1980’s. The number of white families in the high-income group more than doubled between 1980 and 2015, and their share of total income more than tripled. Income levels

for families of color, however, are the same today as they were in 1990.<sup>xi</sup> These sentiments were echoed by several respondents, with one noting, “Unfortunately most students of color in the City come from working/middle class families that do not have the finances to support the student and therefore, money will always be a thing to have to consider.”

Notably, over two-thirds of respondents (61 percent) said that New York City Council interns did not reflect the diversity of New York City in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. As one former intern noted, “There were little to no people of color in my internship class.” This respondent reported that this was likely due to the mandatory hour requirements, which made it difficult for interns who must work multiple jobs to support their internship. Another respondent noted that paid internships could result in better intern candidates and more diverse Council offices.

*“There were little to no people of color in my internship class.”*

*Former paid/unpaid intern*

### **Although the New York City Council does not have a program to pay its interns, elected officials have developed a paid Mayoral Internship Program in the City.**

In 2018, the New York City Mayor’s Office changed its internship policy and established a standardized and paid internship program. The program is open to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students and has a uniform online application process and timeline. The internship program consists of three major components: the student work assignment within a Mayoral unit, government engagement through bi-weekly speaker series with leaders in local government, and participation in a service project.<sup>xii</sup> **Exhibit 5** shows how much interns are compensated in the Mayor’s Office Internship Program based on their education levels.

#### **Exhibit 5: Student Salary, Mayor’s Office Internship Program**

| Student Type          | Hourly Wage      |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| High School           | \$15 per hour    |
| Undergraduate College | \$15.75 per hour |
| Graduate Student      | \$17 per hour    |

The Mayor’s Office Internship Program can serve as a strong model to further paid internships in the City Council. Using the Mayor’s Office salary system and assuming each Member hires 2 part-time interns that work a maximum of 20 hours per week, for a maximum of 30 weeks for the school year (15 weeks each semester), the research team developed a rough estimated budget of \$19,000 per Council Member’s office. As shown in **Exhibit 6**, the cost of paying interns at all 51 Council Member offices could add up to a total of **\$963,900** for the first year. Currently,

Council Members that do pay their interns, use their own budget to subsidize internships in their offices. Having a specific internship budget allocated for internship payments removes the burden on Council Member offices to fund internships and gives them more leeway to use those additional funds on offices necessities and staff salaries.

### **Exhibit 6: Intern Budget Breakdown per Council**

| <i>Annual Internship Salary for 2 Interns</i>          |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Number of Interns for Academic Year                    | 2                |
| Undergraduate Student Hourly Wage                      | \$15.75          |
| Maximum Hours  | 20               |
| Maximum Weeks  | 30               |
| <b>Intern Salary Budget Per Council Member</b>         | <b>\$18,900</b>  |
| <b>Intern Salary Budget for 51 NYC Council Members</b> | <b>\$963,900</b> |

The City Council could allot a budget that mirrors a program similar to the Mayor's Office internship program and go even further and provide professional and career development for young people in New York City. The Mayor's Internship program is a baseline example of a system that is working and can help guide Council Member offices on how to establish an application process and structured program in local government.

*“Unfortunately, most students of color in the City come from working/middle class families that do not have the finances to support the student, and therefore, money will always be a thing to consider.”*

*Former unpaid intern*

# Conclusion & Recommendations

*I think [paid internships] would drastically increase the quality of candidates applying to these internships. Not only would it be more competitive to obtain but also it would allow individuals of more diverse backgrounds to apply.*

*Former paid/unpaid intern*

The data gathered from this report demonstrates that there is a clear need for interns to be paid at the City Council. Internships need not to be viewed as a luxury, but rather as a pipeline for students to enter the labor force. By identifying champions to advocate for paid internships within the City Council, the pool of applicants will expand and diversify in terms of socio-economic backgrounds and race and ethnicity.

Currently, Council Members' offices offer very few paid intern opportunities and many interns have to supplement their income with a second job, parental

support, or financial aid. This lack of compensation creates barriers and inequity, as students from low income to working-class families will be less likely to undertake an unpaid position.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that paid internships not only increase the diversity of interns but will create more investment among interns. As a result of being financially supported, interns will be more likely to increase the quality of work they provide to Council Members' offices and their communities. Internships will be more competitive, and Council Members will have a wider net of applicants to select from.

Based on our findings, we recommend that the New York City Council:

## Make Internship Postings Clear and Transparent

The City Council should have a clear and transparent application process for all interns applying to Council Members' offices. Applications should be easy to find on the City Council's website, and every Council Member should clearly describe the application process for an internship at their office. For example, each Council Member should describe what materials are required and the method for submitting those materials to the office. Compensation information should be clearly stated, and prospective interns should be able to easily determine whether a position is paid or unpaid from the website posting.

## **Standardize the New York City Council internship Process**

Currently, there is no general place a student can apply to be an intern. To be considered for an internship, interns often have to email the Chief of Staff their resume and wait to hear back. This opaque process leads to the continued reliance of insular and embedded networks that lead to internships only for those that have connections with the Members' office. The Mayor's Office internship program has standardized its internship program, where interested students can go to the internship website, select the offices they are interested in working for, and submit all necessary materials in one place. This process has made the internship program more accessible for students. As a result, intern candidates tend to be more competitive and the Mayor's Offices have more access to high quality students. The New York City Council should mirror the Mayor's internship program model and standardize its internship process.

## **Prioritize a Council-Wide Paid Internship Program**

City Council leadership establishes the budget for the City Council. Leadership prioritizes the needs and concerns expressed by Council Members and Council Members prioritize the needs and concerns expressed by their constituents. Support for paid internships needs to be built at a grassroots level and at the Member level so that leadership is motivated to prioritize a financial set aside for a paid internship program. Support can be built by [1] mobilizing interest groups, constituents, and other advocacy groups like Pay Our Interns, [2] identifying and focusing advocacy efforts with current Council Members who will remain in office for further terms, [3] identifying champions within City Council who would be willing to author and/or support legislation calling for a paid internship program. The ultimate goal should be to build support to ensure that the Speaker prioritizes a paid internship program in the budget negotiations for the upcoming fiscal year.

It is necessary that those elected to legislate provide equal access for students to engage in public service opportunities. For many students of non-traditional backgrounds, internships provide tools and resources to develop the professional connections they would otherwise lack access to. The City Council should advocate for equality and diversity, and by paying interns it will create opportunities for students to prepare for future job opportunities, without having to sacrifice financial stability. In instituting a paid internship program, the New York City Council will be the largest municipal legislature to create a more equitable career and professional development program.

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# Appendix

Exhibit 1: Intern Survey Outreach Flyer



The image shows a pink flyer with a white border. At the top left, there's a graphic of a white envelope containing a black smartphone. To the right of the envelope is a graphic of a white pencil lying on a pink surface. In the top right corner, there's a graphic of a grey laptop screen with a dark keyboard. The main title 'CALLING ALL CURRENT & FORMER NYC COUNCIL INTERNS' is centered in large, bold, white capital letters. Below the title, a horizontal line separates it from the subtitle 'TAKE OUR 5-10 MIN SURVEY & TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE'. Another horizontal line is at the bottom of the page. At the bottom left, there's a logo for NYU Wagner, featuring a stylized orange flame icon next to the text 'NYU WAGNER'. At the bottom right, there's a logo for 'PAY OUR INTERNS', featuring two red arrows pointing upwards inside a red square, followed by the text 'PAY OUR' in green and 'INTERNS' in red.

**CALLING ALL  
CURRENT & FORMER  
NYC COUNCIL  
INTERNS**

**TAKE OUR 5-10 MIN SURVEY & TELL  
US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE**

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We are a NYU Wagner Capstone team partnering with Pay Our Interns. Pay Our Interns is a nonprofit organization that pushes for more paid internships in the public, private, & non-profit sector.

 **NYU WAGNER**

 **PAY OUR  
INTERNS**

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup>Kathryn Anne Edwards. "Paving the Way through Internships: A Proposal to Expand Educational and Economic Opportunities for Low-Income College Students." *Economic Policy Institute*, 2010, [www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/PavingWay\\_PaidInternships\\_Demos.pdf](http://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/PavingWay_PaidInternships_Demos.pdf).

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<sup>viii</sup> "Budget Explorer." NYC Council, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, [budget.council.nyc/](http://budget.council.nyc/).

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<sup>x</sup> "Student Budgets." *The City University of New York*, [www.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/student-budgets/](http://www.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/student-budgets/).

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<sup>xii</sup> "Mayor's Office Internship Program." *NYC Internship Program*, NYC Office of the Mayor, <https://a002-oom03.nyc.gov/nycmointernship/faq.html>