

VOLUNTEERING VERSUS UNPAID EMPLOYMENT/INTERNSHIP

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✓ Services are performed for a non-profit organization for public service, religious or humanitarian objectives. ✓ No expectation of compensation whatsoever (including free housing, gift cards, food, stipend, expense reimbursement, etc.). ✓ The volunteer cannot displace a genuine employee. ✓ Services provided by a volunteer should not be the same services for which he or she was previously paid and/or expects to be hired and paid for in the future. ✓ Services are offered freely and without coercion. ✓ Examples of volunteering include volunteering at a homeless shelter, charitable food pantry, or American Red Cross.	✓ Unpaid internship/employment can be for private sector, for-profit entity or non-profit. ✓ Must related to major field of study. ✓ No compensation is provided, including other types of compensation other than pay (e.g., free housing, gift cards, food, expense reimbursement, stipend, etc.). ✓ Training duties complement, rather than displace, the work of paid employees. ✓ Unpaid employment/internship is tied to formal education program. ✓ Unpaid employment/internship corresponds to academic calendar. ✓ Intern is not entitled to a job at the conclusion of unpaid employment/internship. ✓ Unpaid employment/internship experience is for the benefit of the intern, not the employer.

- According to the Department of Labor, a volunteer is an “individual who performs hours of service...for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered.”
- We recommend you also take a look at the Department of Labor’s test for Unpaid Interns and Students: [DOL Test](#)
- Obtaining employment authorization for unpaid employment/internships is required for students in F-1 status.
- Working without employment authorization is a serious violation to your F-1 student status. ISSS is required to report this type of violation to the government and terminate your SEVIS record/I-20. This means you would have to leave the U.S. immediately. Please speak to ISSS if you are unsure about whether you need employment authorization for a specific role or position.

Disclaimer: Any advice provided to you by ISSS staff and any information on our website, forms, etc. should not be construed as legal advice. Due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, immigration laws, regulations, and eligibility requirements for benefits may change at any time. It is your responsibility to seek professional legal advice if you have case specific concerns.