



Alex Renaud



Anna Stolt and Christine Landes



Jay Feyler



Hope Carroll

Summer Internship Program

The Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center's internship program provides opportunities for attracting the next generation of municipal employees.

By Janine Pineo

Imagine having time during the summer to build out a database to help with a public road maintenance schedule, set up a rotation of food trucks, create a welcome brochure for new residents or work on the GIS inventory.

You could if you had an intern from the Maine Government Summer Internship Program at the University of Maine's Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center. All of these projects and more were on the docket in four municipalities – Chelsea, Lisbon, Gray and Union – over the summer.

The longtime program began offering municipal internships in 2013, and this year nine municipal and county internships were filled, with the Maine Municipal Association awarding the aforementioned municipalities \$3,000 grants to offset salary costs, training and professional development.

The internships are an eye-opening experience on both sides.

"I had not thought about pursuing a career in municipal government before this internship," said Anna Stolt, Chelsea's intern. "I always felt that I would pursue a career at the federal government level to create a bigger impact. However, this internship completely changed my mind."

Alex Renaud, Lisbon's intern, said, "I definitely didn't know the scope and depth" of municipal work.

"I thoroughly enjoyed working for a small town and learning the ins and outs of its operations," said Hope Carroll, Gray's intern. "I took away the value of transparency, planning and research in order to understand and better connect with the citizens you are communicating with."

Chelsea and Union's town managers agree that having an intern on staff for 12 weeks a year is a win-win for the intern and the town.

"The intern can accomplish so much for a town that struggles to get the 'side projects' completed due to limited staff," said Chelsea's Christine Landes. "As long as the manager has a definite goal for the end of the intern's time, any extra topping on the project is decadent. We have done our job as managers."

Union's Jay Feyler said, "Interns who are working on projects 40 hours a week can accomplish a task that would take me or another employee years to complete. They have no interruptions and are concentrated on one or two projects. The cost to work-accomplished ratio is tremendous and one of the best uses of taxpayer dollars."

A learning experience

Chelsea's intern Stolt found that working in a small town meant meeting people and developing personal connections with them. "I also felt a great sense of community in Chelsea that made me excited to come to work every day," she said.

Stolt, who is from Augusta, graduated in May from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., with a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and a minor in American studies. Her job title for the summer was municipal road surveyor with data entry, although her experience went far beyond.

"I was not taught much about local government in my public education and was shocked at how much I did not know," she said. "I was fortunate enough to learn about a broad spectrum of topics ranging from local elections, town boards versus city councils, budgeting, town reports and meetings, to what a town

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manager really does, how the residents are able to interact with their town government, and so much more.”

The big project for Stolt was an analysis of all public roads that will serve as the framework for the town’s road maintenance projects. She made a list to prioritize each road repair recommendation to help the town choose the order of road projects and followed that up with a written history of all of the town’s recorded road maintenance projects.

Stolt credits Landes, the town manager, with her newly acquired passion for municipal work, as well as Town Clerk Cheryl Mitchell and Deputy Clerk Sandra Devaney. “I had such a wonderful experience in Chelsea that I decided to apply to positions at other municipalities in the Washington, D.C., area,” she said. “I am eager to start a career in municipal government and hope to work in an urban planning/sustainability role in the future.”

Lisbon’s first summer intern is from Waterville and attending McGill University in Montreal, studying urban geography and minoring in economics.

Renaud worked on a variety of projects, starting with the food trucks. His focus on that resulted in a public interest survey for residents and ultimately a weekly schedule for the newly visiting food trucks.

With the town’s economic and community development director as his supervisor, Renaud also updated the business directory on the Discover Lisbon website, finding new businesses and adding logos, phone numbers and street addresses. This led to an update of the town’s internal spreadsheet of local businesses, cross-referenced with the assessor’s list, and a little surprise. “Through this, I was able to identify several businesses in town that were not current on their tax status,” he wrote in his internship summary report.

Another project for Renaud was working to identify abandoned buildings as well as researching the recourse for the municipality. He then surveyed a large portion of the town’s residential neighborhoods to find dilapidated buildings.

Renaud spent a lot of time helping in the town clerk’s office, including a major task of disposal of vital records, sorting them out, referencing them with a retention schedule guide and ultimately disposing of more than 60 boxes of records. He also assisted in writing a grant for the town office and writing an application for new streetlights.

He pointed to the research he did on municipal zoning for the economic development department as one of the most valuable parts of his internship. Renaud credited his supervisor with his unexpected opportu-



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nities. "I had no experience in government," he said, adding he wasn't looking at it as a viable opportunity and now it could be.

Gray's internship for a communications/outreach assistant was right up Carroll's alley. With minors in marketing and new media, the University of Maine communications major from Portland found the multiple projects through her internship worked well for her. "I felt like I was doing something different every day, which I really enjoyed," she said.

In addition to the "Welcome to Gray" brochure she developed for new residents, she also did graphic design work for the town's YouTube channel and Facebook, wrote some of the town manager's press releases and did various research projects to increase Gray's outreach.

"I really wasn't interested in municipal work before, but after this experience I could definitely see myself doing something similar in the future," Carroll said.

Getting results

One thing that Chelsea and Union's town managers say about interns is that more municipalities should have them. They also can't say enough about the interns they have worked with over the years and the value of showing municipal employment to another generation.

"I love municipal government and as a manager if I am not inspiring the next generation to take an interest in it, I am failing at my job," Landes said. "I have encouraged all my interns to be involved somehow in municipal government at some point in their future."

One intern has told her he is likely to volunteer for a board or run for elected office. Another she ended up hiring as town planner. "I knew what she was capable of and I was willing to take her on with limited experience," she said.

And her third intern was a foreign exchange student who was studying engineering. "He decided that he was going to further his education in how the engineering field relates to road issues and applied to a university in Australia to obtain his master's and off he went," she said.

"My very first intern is working in state government for the state of Maine, another is working in Washington D.C.," said Feyler. "One thing I have heard from many interns, ours and other municipalities, is that they are amazed at the number of opportunities in local government. The perception they had before is not the same when they leave and we need to work on this as local government officials."

"Let's grow these individuals to have a passion for government just like mine has grown over the past 25 years," Landes said. 🏔️

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Get involved with the program

By Janine Pineo

The changing job market across Maine has presented some challenges to the Maine Government Summer Internship Program at the University of Maine's Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center.

"We have had fewer applicants, but the quality of the students has stayed strong," said Peggy McKee, who directs the internship program. "The fact that the program has been going for so many years definitely helps. A lot of students hear about it from other students and from their campus career offices."

The numbers show a dip in overall internships since 2019, when 256 students from 76 schools applied and 63 internships were awarded, with 19 going to municipal and county jobs. 2020, 2021 and 2022 saw 42, 34 and 52 internships awarded respectively. In 2023, 139 students from 40 schools applied, with 48 internships awarded; nine went to municipal and county positions.

"Each year there are a few internships requested which we aren't able to fill," McKee said. "Sometimes it's because they are looking for specialized skills which maybe that year we don't have in the applicant pool, the host might have staffing or funding changes after they make the request, or it could be in a location where we don't have applicants."

For example, the program this year received 57 internship requests from supervisors that ended with nine requests ultimately not filled for various reasons.

The affordable housing issue has affected the ability of students in relocating for a 12-week internship, too. McKee said that most students need to work within commuting distance of their home, although some can find relatives or friends to stay with.

"We have had some intern requests from coastal towns which would be terrific experiences, but the primary obstacle is summer housing for the intern," she said. "The best way for municipalities to work with this housing issue is to let us know earlier that they will be requesting an intern in their town. That way we can get the word out during the application process about where internships will be located and hopefully find a student who is close enough to commute."

The program, which added municipal internships in 2013, has adjusted over the past decade as experience has been gained and expectations have changed.

"We've learned that structuring an internship with remote work which is meaningful and also fulfills the educational goals of the program for the intern can be quite difficult," she said. "Some of the most valuable learning opportunities in an internship, as well as mo-

"One good change is that students are starting to be a little bit more aware of municipal government as a career field." - Peggy McKee

tivation, come from interactions with other staff and those just don't happen as easily while working remotely."

Students have higher expectations for the summer internship, McKee said. Municipalities need to define the internship clearly and be able to show what the intern will gain from the experience.

"A student wants to know what they will be working on and how this experience will enrich their career or their learning," McKee said. "One good change is that students are starting to be a little bit more aware of municipal government as a career field."

McKee said the program now provides more professional enrichment. In addition to a day of education on municipal government and the legislative branch of state government, the program has partnered with Maine Career Catalyst, part of Educate Maine, to offer summer activities to all interns that range from career development seminars to networking to outdoor activities.

The application process for municipalities to request an intern is as easy as writing a job description for the position, McKee said. "We look at what a supervisor requests and then match it with a student's skills and interests," she said. "We are also happy to work with a municipality in designing their internship if they can contact us early in the process."

To be considered for an MMA grant, select that option within the intern request form, which gives the center permission to share the forms with MMA. The association then convenes a committee to choose grant recipients based on the quality of the proposed experience, the intended impact of the intern's work on the community and the potential for the internship to provide meaningful exposure to municipal careers.

The deadline for municipalities to request an intern is March 1. Visit <https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/for-students/maine-government-summer-internship-program/> for more information and an application. Interested applicants should contact McKee at 207-581-1644 or margaret.mckee@maine.edu. 