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## Acquiring talent for IT takes workforce planning

When Marina Que got her degree in international business and Chinese from Concordia College, she never imagined that she'd end up in IT at Hennepin County. But she did. How? "I got an internship," she said.

Now, Que, a workforce development specialist, works with Senior Workforce Development Specialist Keegan Fraley and IT Workforce Readiness Supervisor Sharon

Broscha to continue developing people and ensuring IT has the talent needed for success.

### Internships can be gateway to career

IT has offered internship opportunities for many years, Broscha said, but in 2016, IT decided to revamp the program, focusing it on hands-on experience, professional development, and equity and diversity.

"In 2016, we had 63 intern applications," Broscha said. "By 2020, we had 600."

She continued, "Our metrics were looking great. Our diversity numbers were meeting and sometimes outpacing the general diversity goals of Hennepin County. During those four years, we hired 37 interns into full-time roles. Part of our success was due to the change in how we focused on the program. The program served dual purposes, this wasn't just about the candidate experience but also the experience of our staff who may be new to supervising or who wanted those skills. We see this experience as a bridge to leadership for both parties."

Que added, "Getting 600 a few years later shows the good work we did and the power of word of mouth about the program. We found that many who applied were peers and friends of other interns."

As they celebrated their success, they were also looking out to the future.

We saw the coming wave of retirements," Broscha said. "We knew we had single threaded positions and a gap in knowledge transfer. We knew that automation and industry change were continuing and at a more rapid pace. To be ready, we thought we needed better paths for internal mobility. We have so many talented people who could reskill and retrain."

With the success of the internship program, they decided to see if they could apply the same concepts to the general workforce and increase career development and retention through an internal mobility program.

### Then the pandemic struck.

"We recommended that we pause the internship program and focus on starting to build an internal mobility program so our current staff could benefit from that direct focus," Broscha said. "Leadership was very supportive, so much so that they allowed us to hire Keegan. Marina and I were holding it together with toothpicks and



chewing gum while doing multiple jobs at the same time.”

Now, Que, the former intern, is focused on restarting the internship program in a hybrid work environment while Fraley focuses on internal mobility.

## Hybrid work environment requires a new type of internship experience

The future of work has begun, and with most IT employees remote or hybrid, the internship had to change.

“We are designing a new experience for interns,” Que said. “We want our program to better fit the remote and hybrid space we’ll be in. First, we needed to learn what mattered to interns. We did stay interviews with previous interns to better understand their experiences and what was important to them.”

### Six key elements came up repeatedly:

1. Work that is meaningful and provides value to both interns and their teams
2. Supervisors who are dedicated, available and invested in intern success
3. Consistent, intentional relationship building and collaboration between interns and the work team
4. Clear expectations and thorough onboarding
5. Development of new and existing skills through a growth mindset
6. Opportunity for interns to develop as well-rounded professionals by learning together

Using these elements, the workforce development team developed a framework and interviewed for 13 open internships for this summer