

## Downtown Norfolk Council

### INNOVATION

As part of an ongoing effort to attract and retain talented young professionals to Norfolk, Virginia and the region, the LiveNFK program was created for college-aged students. LiveNFK helps recruit and retain the best new talent to Norfolk and the region by connecting interns to the city and one another.

A big impetus to the program, in addition to the overarching goal of attracting and retaining talent, was the fact that Norfolk does not have a lot of large companies with lots of interns that are better able to undertake a program like LiveNFK. The vast majority of companies in Norfolk are small to medium size with as few as one or two interns. We can do so much more collectively than we can individually. LiveNFK was developed to meet those needs.

### OUTCOME

More than 480 corporate interns and summer associates have participated in the LiveNFK program over the past six years, representing more than twenty different companies.

In addition to local companies, the LiveNFK program benefits multiple groups in the area including retail, restaurants, the arts and developers. Downtown Norfolk is bike and pedestrian friendly and with the increased number of housing units coming online, interns deciding to stay in or relocate to the area can reduce their carbon footprint by walking or biking to work. Norfolk is rapidly emerging as an ideal location for private-sector businesses to thrive which increases jobs for individuals coming out of college.

The LiveNFK program has become self-sustaining over the past six years. With interest from the business community growing year after year and survey results that indicate a successful program, LiveNFK will continue to be produced.

A true testament to the success of the program is the fact that one or more companies in Norfolk now incorporate the LiveNFK program into their recruitment efforts. It has become an integral part of their pitch to prospective interns.

2019 survey results indicated:

- 64% of participants were extremely satisfied with the LiveNFK program
- 92.31% of companies were supportive and encouraged participants to attend the LiveNFK events
- 19.23% of participants were extremely likely and 42.31% were very likely to begin their career in Norfolk after participating in the LiveNFK program.

### EXECUTION

Launched in 2014, the LiveNFK program grew out of a need to stop the “brain drain” and increase the “brain gain” in Norfolk and across the region. It started with a small group of individuals realizing the critical nature of this issue. Having heard a speaker say “Even though millennials are only 20% of the population, they are 100% of the future”, they knew something had to be done. The LiveNFK program was created and 2020 marks its seventh year.

Yearly execution:

- Participant survey and wrap-up meeting with corporate representatives
- Internal meeting to review survey and meeting notes
- Planning Committee convenes to discuss upcoming year
- Program is completed with professional development sessions and social events
- Participants meeting is held to present the program
- Program recruitment begins
- LiveNFK kicks off in early June and runs through the end of July

## **REPRESENTATION**

The LiveNFK program is the outcome of a collaborative effort between the Downtown Norfolk Council, the City of Norfolk, Greater Norfolk Corporation and representatives from the business community. Each year, a planning committee is formed to help produce the event, with at least one member being someone that went through the program and accepted a job in Norfolk. The Downtown Norfolk Council spearheads the program by providing the administrative support. The LiveNFK program is open to all Norfolk businesses/companies. A nominal fee is charged per intern to cover the hard costs of the program.

Professional development seminars are often sponsored by companies in the community that participate in the program. In most cases, sponsorship entails providing space for the seminar and breakfast or lunch, depending on the time. Monetary sponsorship has been obtained to off-set the costs of some of the social events over the years.

In addition to support provided by participating companies, members of the community often lend their support by hosting an event (Virginia Stage Company – Arts in the Community).

## **REPLICATION**

With cities across the country facing brain drain, the LiveNFK model can be an effective tool for recruiting and retaining young talent. The key to a successful program is the buy-in from local companies/organizations. By creating a committee of area professionals, the program can be developed to address the needs of interns in all fields of study. This committee can also help with recruiting speakers and securing locations for the seminars/events.

## **COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY**

The LiveNFK program boasts a simple solution...retain young talent. The complexity comes in preparing a program that entices businesses to participate and makes a compelling case to the interns as to why they should start their careers in Norfolk.

The LiveNFK program of activities is put together each year based on survey results from the previous year. The challenge is making sure that seminars and events appeal to the interns and showcase all that Norfolk has to offer.

Feedback from businesses/companies in the area is the key to a successful program. Knowing what companies are looking for in an intern program makes the planning and recruiting process easier.