

Broncos Lead Employer Survey Findings

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Broncos Lead Employer Survey Findings: Executive Summary

Background

Broncos Lead, funded by Western Michigan University's Empowering Futures Gift, connects WMU students with paid internships at community organizations and businesses by providing payroll reimbursement, coordination, and onboarding support. The Evaluation Lab surveyed employers participating in the spring 2026 semester. Representatives from 20 of the 26 Broncos Lead employers (77%) completed the survey.

Key Findings

1. **Employers believe Broncos Lead has high strategic value.** They highlighted four benefits:

    - **Increasing Organizational Capacity:** Helping organizations overcome staff limitations to expand community reach and complete projects and operations.
    - **Connecting with Student Talent:** Providing access to skilled, motivated students who bring new perspectives, process efficiencies, and technology support.
    - **Increasing Feasibility of Paid Internships:** Providing "budget-neutral" staffing through full payroll reimbursement, enabling internships that employers could not otherwise afford to offer.
    - **Sharing in Student Education:** Giving employers opportunities to shape students' career trajectories through hands-on experience.

2. **Employers described pain points related to program administration.** Two areas emerged as especially problematic:

    - **Communication Gaps:** Communication with host organizations received the lowest satisfaction ratings, including three employers who were *mostly dissatisfied* or *completely dissatisfied*.
    - **Reimbursement Bottlenecks:** Employers expressed frustration due to delays in reimbursement. Payroll reimbursement received the fewest *completely satisfied* ratings (9 out of 20).

3. **Employers see Broncos Lead as a long-term employee pipeline.** Ninety percent of employers said they would hire at least one Broncos Lead intern full-time if budget and organizational needs allowed. Three-fourths expressed a strong desire to hire multiple interns. Twenty percent have already hired former Broncos Lead interns into official full- or part-time positions.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

To create a more streamlined experience for employers, the program should consider the following changes:

- **Centralize Employer Resources:** Provide a single digital location where employers can access all necessary forms, clear application deadlines, program expectations, and instructional materials.
- **Streamline Financial Pipelines:** Establish and follow clear reimbursement schedules and provide proactive updates on payment status.
- **Enhance Recruitment Transparency:** Clarify Handshake processes and application timelines and strengthen applicant screening protocols to ensure interns possess appropriate skills and fit the organizational culture.

Overall, employers view Broncos Lead as a valuable organizational resource despite some administrative challenges. As one employer put it, “Communication issues notwithstanding, Broncos Lead is a huge asset to our organization, and we are grateful for our ongoing partnership.”

Broncos Lead Spring 2026 Employer Survey

Background

Broncos Lead is funded by WMU's Empowering Futures Gift. The program connects Western Michigan University students with paid internship opportunities at community organizations and businesses. Broncos Lead supports participating organizations and interns through internship coordination, payroll reimbursement, onboarding, and intern professional development. Through these partnerships, students gain practical workplace experience while organizations receive additional support for projects and day-to-day operations.

During spring 2026, Broncos Lead partnered with the Empowering Futures evaluation team and the Evaluation Lab to gather feedback from the Broncos Lead point person at each organization that hosted a Broncos Lead student intern. The survey focused on employers' experiences with the interns and the program, including program benefits, satisfaction with the internship process, intern hireability, likelihood of recommending Broncos Lead, and suggestions for improvement. (The complete instrument is in Appendix A.)

In April 2026, the Evaluation Lab emailed the designated point person at each of the 26 organizations that hosted a Broncos Lead student intern during the spring semester. The email explained the purpose of the survey and provided a link to the online survey. The lab sent two additional emails and one voicemail to remind recipients to take the survey. The survey was open from April 7 through May 7. Twenty of the 26 employers completed the survey, a 77% response rate.

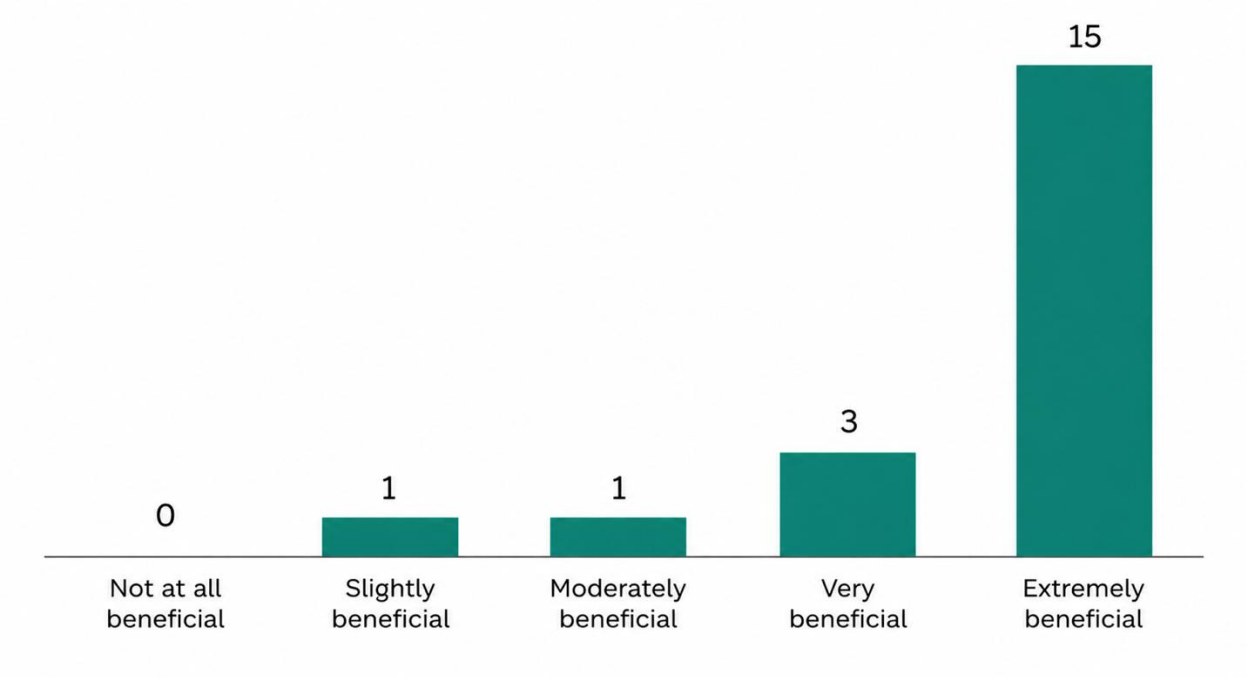
Findings

The survey findings in this section are organized around four aspects of employers' experience with the Broncos Lead program, including their perceptions of the program's benefits, their satisfaction with the program, its impact on their ability to host interns, and its impact on their individual opinions about internships.

Perceived Benefits of Broncos Lead

Respondents were asked to rate the program on a 5-point scale from *not at all beneficial* to *extremely beneficial* for their organization. Overall, 18 of the 20 respondents rated Broncos Lead as *extremely beneficial* (n = 15) or *very beneficial* (n = 3), with one person selecting *moderately beneficial* and one choosing *slightly beneficial*.

Figure 1. Broncos Lead Employers' Rating of the Program's Overall Benefit (*N* = 20)



Most Beneficial Aspects of the Program

Respondents who rated Broncos Lead as *very beneficial* or *extremely beneficial* were asked what they found most beneficial about the program. We discovered four main themes in their responses: (1) increasing organizational capacity, (2) connecting organizations with student talent, (3) sharing in student education, and (4) increasing the feasibility for paid internships.

- **Increasing Organizational Capacity**

  Six respondents said their interns helped their organizations complete projects, expand services, increase reach, or support work that would otherwise receive limited staff attention. For example, one respondent wrote that without Broncos Lead interns, their organization "would not have the capacity to do this work ourselves."

- **Connecting With Student Talent**

  Five respondents reported that their interns brought new ideas and perspectives, current academic knowledge, and useful skills to their organizations. One person wrote that a benefit for their organization was "getting to connect with top student talent to help our organization grow." Another said they appreciated "getting a chance to work with young employees who we may want to hire later." A respondent stated that their business gets "fresh, current methods of operation to streamline processes and increase results." One referenced the interns' technology support: "Their

insight, knowledge, and connection with today's technology have kept me on the cutting edge."

- **Increasing the Feasibility of Paid Internships**

  Two respondents described payroll reimbursement, "budget-neutral" staffing, or the ability to offer a paid internship as a major benefit. One person wrote, "[Broncos Lead] allowed me to provide support I wouldn't be able to offer through a paid internship."

- **Sharing in Student Education**

  Three respondents highlighted Broncos Lead's providing opportunities for students' education and professional growth. Although these responses focused more on benefits to students than direct benefits to the organization, they suggest that some employers value Broncos Lead because it enables their organizations to contribute to student learning, professional development, community connection, and exposure to workplace or industry expectations. One respondent declared, "Experience is the best opportunity to give a student."

What Would Make the Program More Beneficial

The two employers who rated Broncos Lead *slightly beneficial* or *moderately beneficial* were asked what would have made Broncos Lead more beneficial for their organization. One respondent requested clearer reimbursement communication, more thorough paperwork review, and stronger payment follow-through. The other suggested a more hands-on interview process to better assess intern skill level and fit for the organization and role.

Satisfaction with the Broncos Lead Program

Because Broncos Lead uses other methods to assess employers' satisfaction with intern performance, this survey focuses on their satisfaction with the Broncos Lead program and its administration.

Satisfaction with Program Processes

Using a five-point scale from *completely dissatisfied* to *completely satisfied*, respondents rated their satisfaction on the following aspects of the Broncos Lead program processes:

- Onboarding the organization to Broncos Lead
- Onboarding interns to the organization or business
- Intern hiring process
- Payroll reimbursement
- Communication with the organization
- Professional development for interns

As shown in Figure 2, satisfaction was highest for onboarding interns to the organization and onboarding the organization to Broncos Lead. Respondents rated the program's communication with their organization the lowest. Two respondents reported they were *completely dissatisfied*, one said they were *mostly dissatisfied*, and three said they were *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*. Payroll reimbursement had the fewest respondents (*n* = 9) selecting *completely satisfied*.

Figure 2. Employers' Ratings of Their Satisfaction with Aspects of the Broncos Lead Program (*N* = 20)



Respondents who selected any response other than *completely satisfied* on any of the six aspects of Broncos Lead were asked what changes Broncos Lead could make to improve their organization's experience. Thirteen responded and requested clear, consistent, and centralized communication about the internship. These respondents described delayed or unclear reimbursement tracking and processing, uncertainty about when checks or payments would be processed, unclear Handshake deadlines and application windows, delayed job postings, missed communication deadlines, and a desire for stronger applicant screening to ensure intern–employer fit. One respondent wrote, "The single biggest improvement that Broncos Lead could make is to improve the clarity and frequency of communications with employers, particularly with regard to the hiring process." Another suggested, "All of the material that we need as an employer [should be available] in one spot," so organizations can access forms, deadlines, expectations, and process instructions at any time.

Employability of Broncos Lead Interns

As another measure of program satisfaction, the survey asked how many Bronco Lead interns the organizations would want to hire full-time if they had the need and budget. Eighteen of the 20 respondents (90%) indicated they would hire at least one intern, and 15 (75%) would hire multiple interns. Four respondents (20%) reported

that their organization or business had previously hired a Broncos Lead intern for a full-time or part-time role. One person said that they hired two Broncos Lead interns as full-time staff and would be interested in hiring at least three more if they had the budget. Another stated that they hired two interns in a part-time capacity and claimed, "We would have easily hired 8–10 of the interns."

Two respondents indicated that their organization had no current full-time employment needs or would not hire, given their current strategy. However, one of these respondents said they hired Broncos Lead interns for full-time positions in the past.

Overall Satisfaction with Broncos Lead

The survey included an item to gauge net promoter score (NPS), a well-established measure of overall customer or client satisfaction. Respondents rated their likelihood of recommending Broncos Lead to another organization on a 0–10 scale. According to the standard NPS calculation, Broncos Lead received an NPS of 75, which is considered excellent by industry standards. For context, an NPS above 80 is considered "world class." (Details about NPS and interpreting scores are available on Qualtrics' "What is NPS?" page.)

Reasons for Recommending Broncos Lead. Respondents who rated their likelihood of recommending Broncos Lead as 7 or higher were asked why their organization would be likely to recommend the program. The 17 responses to this question centered on three main reasons: (1) to connect organizations to high-quality student talent, (2) to receive financial support for paid internships, and (3) to support student learning.

- **Connecting Organizations to Student Talent**

  Five respondents identified interns' skills, professionalism, independence, eagerness to learn, or their significant contributions as reasons they would recommend the Broncos Lead. One survey respondent stated, "The students are professional and well-equipped to work independently."

- **Financial Support for Paid Internships**

  Five respondents highlighted financial support or access to a paid student intern as reasons for recommending Broncos Lead. For example, a respondent wrote, "For small/growing organizations, the payroll assistance is invaluable." Another said, "We get phenomenal students who do quality work at no cost to us."

- **Fostering Students' Professional Development**

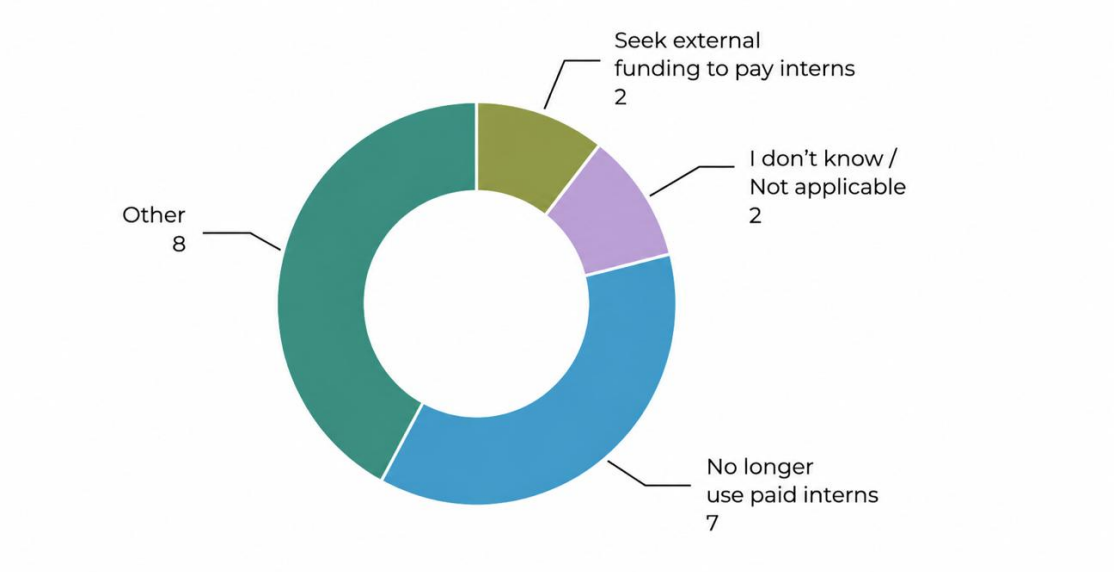
  Four employers described Broncos Lead as an opportunity for their organizations to share in students' education. A respondent wrote, "We appreciate the opportunity to provide field experience to students." Another said, "Broncos Lead frequently allows us to connect with interns who are

interested in our specific specialties and our broader mission. We get the opportunity to train and educate them, which is a critical part of our outreach."

Impact of Broncos Lead on Organizational Capacity to Hire Interns

To assess the extent to which Broncos Lead affects organizations' capacity to hire and pay interns, we asked employers a counterfactual question: "If Broncos Lead ended today, how would it affect your organization's future employment of paid interns?" Seven of 19 respondents (37%) said they would no longer use paid interns if Broncos Lead ended; two respondents (11%) said they would seek external funding to pay interns; and two respondents (11%) selected *I don't know / Not applicable*. Notably, none of the respondents said that their organizations would pay interns from their own budgets.

Figure 3. What Employers Would Do in the Absence of Broncos Lead (*N* = 19)



The eight "other" responses were diverse but overall indicated that if the Broncos Lead ended today, nearly all employers' future employment of paid interns would face significant constraints, forcing them to alternative resource solutions. We identified four types of impacts across these eight responses:

- **Programmatic and Operational Scale Reductions**

  Two respondents indicated that their organizations would continue offering paid internships, but with reduced capacity. One person said their organization would likely be limited to hiring one or two paid interns during the summer. Another reported that they would pay for interns from their organizational budget but hire fewer interns.

- **Budgetary and Human Resource Strain**

  Two respondents predicted budget or staffing strain in the absence of Broncos Lead. One respondent said their organization would pay for interns from its own budget, but that doing so would reduce the number of interns they could hire. Another said their organization would try to shift or seek additional funds, but if funding was unavailable, they would rely on volunteers or current staff.

- **Reliance on Alternatives**

  Three respondents described alternatives to fully paid Broncos Lead internships, including external funding, unpaid internships, partially paid internships, volunteer support, or support from current staff. For example, one respondent said their organization would "first seek external funding but would not have interns at all if we could not secure it."

- **Minimal Impact**

  Two respondents expected little or no immediate change because their internship or staffing model was already shaped by other funding sources or contracted help.

Impact of Broncos Lead on Employers' Opinions About Internships

Respondents were asked whether the Broncos Lead internship changed their opinion of the value of interns. Fourteen of 19 respondents (74%) said *yes*, three respondents (16%) said *no*, and two respondents (11%) selected *I don't know / Not applicable*.

The 12 respondents who described how their opinion changed described four main shifts in how they viewed interns: (1) Interns were more immediately useful than expected, (2) interns contributed to a mutually beneficial relationship, (3) interns were more independent or quicker to learn than expected, and (4) paid internships appeared to improve intern engagement and the applicant pool.

- **Interns were more immediately useful than expected.**

  Four respondents said their interns provided immediate value to the organization. These respondents described interns as assets who helped their organizations do and complete more work and build systems, providing immediate benefit. One respondent wrote that their interns were "a great asset" and helped the organization "do so much more." Another said their organization received "a fresh perspective and positive energy" and learned new things from their intern. Another explained that they previously viewed interns as "more work than immediate benefit" but found that the Broncos Lead interns provided immediate value.

- **Interns contributed to a mutually beneficial relationship.**

  Four respondents described their changed view of interns in terms of mutual benefit. These respondents explained that interns gained professional experience while organizations also benefited from the interns' perspectives, energy, and skills. One respondent wrote, "We pour into them, and they also pour into us."
- **Interns were more independent or quicker to learn than expected.**

  Three respondents described interns as "exceeding expectations," needing less support than expected, and learning quickly. One said they initially thought retraining interns each semester would be time-consuming but instead found interns quick to learn when assignments and routines were clear. Another respondent said their interns did not need "as much hand-holding" as they originally expected. However, one respondent felt that today's interns are "a bit more in need of direction and may have less security in the creative process."
- **Paid internships appeared to improve engagement and applicant quality.**

  One respondent credited their change in opinion to the fact that the internship was paid. They explained that being able to pay interns made the internship more desirable to students, which improved the applicant pool and contributed to better participation and higher-quality work.

Conclusions

Overall, the survey findings indicate that Broncos Lead employers believe the program creates mutual benefit among students, host organizations, and WMU. Employers described the program as a way for their organizations to provide students with meaningful field experience while also receiving support that strengthens organizational capacity, services, and connections with WMU. Three respondents summarized this mutual benefit:

> *The Broncos Lead internship program is a wonderful opportunity for students to learn and work alongside community organizations; being part of their educational journey is deeply rewarding, while also benefiting organizations through increased exposure and meaningful partnership with Western Michigan University.*
>
> *After my first intern, I began to see how this was a win/win for both* [of] *us, and understanding that they were not just there for a job, but for an experience. I want to give them an experience they will cherish!*
>
> *We have always believed that interns are a great benefit to the team, but when we're immersed in our work, we don't always think about how much we learn*

from them. Reflecting on our partnership, we recognize that the learning experience goes both ways.

Highlights

The following highlights summarize the major patterns from the employer survey. These highlights focus on the areas where responses were strongest or most consistent across the survey:

Respondents find that Broncos Lead has high strategic value and benefit for their organizations and businesses.

Ninety percent of respondents rated Broncos Lead as *very beneficial* or *extremely beneficial* to their organization or business. Employers described the main benefits of Broncos Lead as increasing capacity and service provision, connecting with talented students, sharing in students' education and training, and enabling the financial feasibility of paid internships.

Additionally, among the 20 survey respondents, Broncos Lead received a net promoter score of 75, which is excellent according to industry standards.

Broncos Lead is a valued talent pipeline for organizations and businesses.

Ninety percent of respondents indicated they would hire at least one Broncos Lead intern if they had the need and resources. Additionally, 75% said they would hire multiple Broncos Lead interns, and 20% have already hired past Broncos Lead interns directly into full-time or part-time staff positions. One respondent described their Broncos Lead interns as "amazing people." Other respondents commented as follows:

> *We love the interns we work with.*
>
> *The caliber of interns we have gotten through Broncos Lead for our [redacted] position has been outstanding.*
>
> *We have been fortunate enough to work with excellent interns through Broncos Lead … and are greatly satisfied with them.*

Areas for Improvement

Survey respondents identified some areas for improvement. The main suggestions revolved around communication gaps and reimbursement bottlenecks. Respondents asked for clearer communication, more transparent hiring timelines, and smoother reimbursement processes. Despite a few organizations reporting issues and some dissatisfaction, the employer consensus is summarized by the following respondent's conclusion:

> *Communication issues notwithstanding, Broncos Lead is a huge asset to our organization, and we are grateful for our ongoing partnership.*

Limitations

There are two limitations to consider alongside the reported findings.

- Nearly one-quarter of organizations (6 of 26) did not complete the survey. The inclusion of their perspectives could significantly impact the survey findings if their responses differed markedly from those of the current respondents.
- Each organization submitted a single survey through its designated Broncos Lead point person. Although we encouraged these individuals to consult with colleagues at their organization, one person's responses may not fully capture the perspectives of all staff members who worked with the interns or others affected by the internship program.

Recommendations

To enhance the experience for organizations and businesses and reduce inefficiencies and frustrations, Broncos Lead may wish to consider making the following changes based on the employers' feedback:

- **Centralize Employer Resources:** Establish a digital repository or portal where employers can access all necessary forms, clear application deadlines, program expectations, and instructional materials at any time.
- **Streamline Financial Pipelines:** Address delayed tracking and payment uncertainty by delivering clear, predictable reimbursement schedules and proactive processing updates.
- **Enhance Recruitment Transparency:** Clarify procedures related to Handshake and job posting windows, minimize application delays, and enhance the rigor of applicant screening protocols to ensure interns possess baseline skills and fit the organizational culture.

Appendix A: Broncos Lead Employer Survey

The Evaluation Lab at Western Michigan University is collecting feedback from Broncos Lead community partners to understand the program's impact on employers and identify opportunities for improvement. You are receiving this survey as your organization's designated point person. Questions focus on your organization's overall experience with the program rather than individual student interns.

Confidentiality: Results will be reported in aggregate, and identifying information such as intern and employee names will be removed. Because internship sites are unique, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Time commitment: Approximately 15 minutes.

1. Overall, how beneficial has the Broncos Lead internship program been for your organization?
(Not at all beneficial; Slightly beneficial; Moderately beneficial; Very beneficial; Extremely beneficial)

2A. What about Broncos Lead has been the most beneficial for your organization?
(Open-ended)

2B. What would make Broncos Lead more beneficial for your organization?
(Open-ended)

3. Overall, how satisfied are you with the following aspects of the Broncos Lead internship process?
(Completely dissatisfied; Mostly dissatisfied; Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; Mostly satisfied; Completely satisfied)

- Onboarding your organization to Broncos Lead
- Intern hiring process
- Onboarding interns to your organization or business
- Payroll reimbursement
- Broncos Lead's communication with your organization
- Broncos Lead professional development training for interns

4. Based on your responses, it appears that you were not fully satisfied with Broncos Lead. What changes could Broncos Lead make to improve your organization's experience?
(Open-ended)

5. Assuming your organization had the need and budget, how many of these Broncos Lead interns would your organization have wanted to hire for full-time employment?
(Open-ended)

6. How likely would your organization be to recommend the Broncos Lead internship program to another organization like yours?
(0 = Not at all likely; 10 = Extremely likely)

6A. Why would your organization be likely to recommend the Broncos Lead internship program to another organization?
(Open-ended)

6B. Why would your organization be unlikely to recommend the Broncos Lead internship program to another organization?
(Open-ended)

7. In the calendar year 2026, did your organization host any unpaid interns?
(Yes; No; I don't know)

8. If Broncos Lead ended today, how would it affect your organization's future employment of paid interns?

- We would pay for interns from our organizational budget.
- We would seek external funding to pay interns.
- We would no longer use paid interns.
- I don't know / Not applicable.
- Other: *(Open-ended)*

9. Has the Broncos Lead internship program changed your opinion of the value of interns?
(Yes; No; I don't know / Not applicable)

10. Please describe how your opinion has changed.
(Open-ended)

We would like to integrate your survey responses with Broncos Lead program records about your organization's participation.

11. Organization name
(Open-ended)

We thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.