

Title: **Dakota Seeds internships help SD businesses grow workforce**
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Dakota Seeds internships help SD businesses grow workforce

SOUTH DAKOTA — An experienced and skilled workforce is a critical element in ensuring the success of new, start-up businesses. Bridging the gap between workforce supply and industry demand has for years, been an ongoing challenge. The 2020 Vision: The South Dakota Science and Technology (S&T) plan addresses this need through a unique strategic initiative; the Dakota Seeds Program, which assists South Dakota businesses in funding internships to build, nurture and retain the state's young talent following college graduation.

Established in 2008 as a partnership between the South Dakota Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (SD EPSCoR) and the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED), the Dakota Seeds Program was designed to create a pipeline to provide South Dakota companies of well-qualified, full-time employees. In addition, it provides internship-based work experiences for university and technical college students in South Dakota. Dakota Seeds provides 50 percent of an intern's wages, up to a maximum of \$2,000 per intern. Internships must relate to a high need from Pg 10

BUSINESS NEWS

ing in the early work that provided the solid foundation for SBS to succeed and thrive."

Since its beginnings, SBS CyberSecurity has grown to employ over 75 employees, is among Inc. Magazine's list of fastest growing companies in the United States, has acquired Little Rock, Ark.-based Blu3 Technologies and is a preferred provider by many U.S. banks and their associations. Today, SBS CyberSecurity provides cybersecurity consulting, IT audit services, network security and education services to over 1,300 organizations across the United States and abroad, including financial institutions ranging in asset size from \$12 million to over \$20 billion.

"The Dakota Seeds Program is a great tool to help entrepreneurs starting technology-based companies in South Dakota. It helps them finance hiring of interns who often become key fulltime employees for the company," said Mel Ustad, director of Commercialization for the GOED.

One of the strategic initiatives of the S&T plan and the Dakota Seeds program is to encourage IT-based companies to open their

STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) industry sector such as value-added agriculture/agribusiness, energy and environment, materials and advanced manufacturing, human health and nutrition, and information technology/cyber security/information assurance. The internship program enhances educational experiences and provides workforce development for growing companies.

SBS CyberSecurity, LLC (SBS), formerly Secure Banking Solutions, in Madison, is one of 52 start-up companies in the state that has participated in the Dakota Seeds Program. Formed in 2004 by Dr. Kevin Streff and five other partners, SBS had a mission to help South Dakota banks with anticipated security and compliance issues.

"In the beginning, students and interns helped SBS to conduct research and create tools," said Streff. "Much of what SBS needed to do had no immediate financial return, such as conducting research, so Dakota Seeds helped to bridge the gap. The Dakota Seeds students played a vital role in assist-

BUSINESS NEWS Pg 19

doors in South Dakota and to create jobs for the state's skilled IT workforce. This, in turn, helps retain larger numbers of STEM graduates in the state. Since the program's inception, more than 285 science and technology businesses in South Dakota have participated in the program, providing paid internships and hands-on experiences to over 1,392 South Dakota students. Currently, 23 percent of Dakota Seeds' internships have been in IT-related fields.

Streff said the Dakota Seeds Program assisted SBS in hiring uniquely qualified interns in the company's early days, including students with Masters of Science degrees in Information Assurance and Computer Security, Bachelors of Science in Computer and Network Security, and Bachelors of Science in Cyber Operations.

Dakota Seeds grants are funded by SD EPSCoR and administered by the GOED, which assist in the internship wages. Businesses or students that are interested in learning more about the Dakota Seeds program can visit <http://www.dakotaseeds.com>.