



Best Practices for Hosting a Virtual Intern

Virtual jobs and internships are becoming more common and in some cases necessary. As your company transitions your intern program to a remote working situation, you and your leadership team may have concerns or even doubts about the effectiveness and logistics surrounding remote student work. Here are a few suggestions on how to successfully host and support virtual internships as you venture into this new business practice:

Define Learning Objectives Prior to registering their internship for course credit, students must identify learning goals to be completed during their experiential experience. Supervisors should work with the intern at the beginning of the assignment to develop a plan ensuring the established goals are met. Check in regularly throughout the internship to monitor progress and ensure the intern is on track to meet their learning objectives.

Implement Comprehensive Onboarding In addition to any of your typical onboarding practices such as reviewing policies and procedures, conducting an overview of organizational structure, and covering emergency procedures, the intern's supervisor should also make a point to introduce the new employee to everyone on the team and get an understanding of the different roles they serve. E-introductions to other team members, colleagues and industry professionals are a great way to expand the internship experience and make them feel welcome. Students value structure when it comes to onboarding, so try to ensure everyone gets the same experience and level of support throughout various departments. Even things like a virtual building tour and structural overview of company roles and responsibilities really help students feel like they are a part of the company and understand how everything fits together.

Match Interns with Mentors Mentorships can be a valuable tool to incorporate not only during orientation, but during the length of the experience. This mentor can be a "safe place" for the intern to ask questions and get direction on items they may feel uncomfortable speaking directly to their supervisor about. They are a great person to explain company culture and facilitate interactions with other colleagues as well. The intern should still be spending a significant amount of time interacting with their supervisor on project-specific tasks and hard skill development, but the mentor can help supplement the time demand on managing the intern's questions and soft skill development. Interns who have mentors are more likely to form lasting relationships with not only their team, but also the company and have an overall more positive experience.

Communicate Consistently It is important for you both supervisors and interns to identify their own personal styles and preferred form of communication from the very beginning. If face-to-face meetings are not an option, discuss if you prefer video meetings, chats, emails, etc. Clear communication and defined learning goals are key to a successful working relationship. A good practice is to schedule a regular meeting at the same time each day to discuss updates and let the student know how they should reach out to you if they need support at any other time.

Provide Timely Feedback. Supervisors should review intern deliverables and provide timely feedback on a regular basis. Especially during the first few weeks, intern supervisors should schedule daily feedback meetings to engage in direct mentorship with the student regarding their progress towards learning outcomes and areas of professional development. The supervisor should ask supportive questions during these meetings such as "What support do you need from me? What are you working

on today? What questions do you have?" This will provide the intern the chance to ask clarifying questions, as this might be their first professional work environment, and is likely their first virtually-based position. Once you and the student feel comfortable, you can consider moving to every other day check-ins or schedule meetings "as-needed," but it is still suggested to make contact at least once weekly. You can also ask your team members to check in on the intern or add projects to their workload if everyone is communicating timelines and expectations transparently. Video conferencing or telephone calls should be utilized for these meetings, not email or messaging.

Set Schedule Expectations Although a key feature of remote internships is the flexibility of the work schedule, supervisors and interns should agree upon a definitive time allotment per week and per day for internship activities. In some situations, you may find the student is in need of additional training whereas in other situations you may find the student is capable of and/or needing more challenging tasks. Be flexible if the opportunity arises. Flexibility can allow the student to have some autonomy for things like hours they work and the types of projects they work on.

Shift caps (defining the amount of accrued time allotted for any given task) are strongly recommended to avoid unreasonable work demands on the student and to help mitigate any conflict with reported internship hours. If a defined work schedule and/or shift cap is not established, disputes may result as to how long tasks took the student to perform. This will also allow you both the opportunity to evaluate the students skill set and appropriateness of tasks.

Integrate the Intern In addition to facilitating a remote or virtual internship, site supervisors should make a good faith effort to integrate the intern into the organization's work culture. After initial onboarding orientation, this may include client interactions and virtual attendance at select team meetings, use of company tools and resources, and any other forms of access to other staff members.

It is also very beneficial to students to have as many networking opportunities as possible. This can be done by allowing the intern to attend any meetings you may be involved in whether it is pertinent to their task or not. In addition, providing them the opportunity to meet with other colleagues in the industry will help them with their professional development. This can be as simple as an introduction to allow them the opportunity to do an informational interview. Any opportunity you can provide can be beneficial to the student.

Reimburse Expenses Students engaged in virtual internships should not incur any personal expenses as a result of the internships "remote" status. Any such costs, including the purchase of software and hardware for the purposes of the internship, should be covered by the internship host site, or alternative arrangements should be provided to the student prior to starting the internship.

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