



O'NEILL
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Virtual Internships Employer FAQ's

You may be finding the need to transition your intern to a remote working location or have been considering hosting a virtual internship for some time. As you venture into this new working environment, here are a few frequently asked questions we have answered to help clarify some of the uncertainty that you might be experiencing.

How do I decide which projects to have the intern complete?

Prior to the internship, students must identify learning goals to be completed during the course of the internship. Supervisors should work with the intern at the beginning of the internship to develop a plan to ensure that the established goals are met. You should select your intern and the projects based on common goals you both would have. Check in regularly throughout the internship to see if the intern is on track to meet these goals. Consider checking out our “Why Host A Virtual Internship” blog for more project ideas.

Should I do anything specific for onboarding the intern?

In addition to any of your typical onboarding practices such as reviewing policies and procedures, overview of organizational structure, emergency procedures, etc., in order for the intern to get oriented and affiliated with the team a virtual team meeting should be conducted for introductions and briefings on different roles team members have within the first few days. This will provide the intern a chance to ask clarifying questions, as this might be their first professional work environment, and is likely their first virtually-based position. You should also consider pairing the intern up with a mentor, someone within the company who knows the ropes, but isn't too high up that the intern will be intimidated going to for support.

What is the best way to communicate with an intern virtually?

Supervisors should review intern deliverables and provide timely feedback to students on a regular basis. Supervisors are encouraged to schedule daily feedback meetings or check-ins to engage in direct mentorship with the student regarding their progress towards learning outcomes professional development. This will provide the intern a chance to ask clarifying questions about expectations and any particular details they might need more information on. Once you and the student feel it is appropriate to lengthen time between these touch points, it is still suggested to make contact once weekly to ensure proper communication and effective outcomes for both of your goals. Video conferencing or telephone calls should be utilized for these meetings, not email or messaging.

Daily feedback should be provided consistently in some form. This includes an update on expected work activities, outcomes from prior project submissions, and other relevant information pertaining to the organization and industry. A good practice is to schedule a regular meeting at the same time each day to discuss these updates.

What is a typical work schedule for a virtual intern?

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. 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 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 student's skill set and appropriateness of tasks. In some situations, you may find the student is in need of additional training yet in other experiences you may find the student is capable of and/or needing more challenging tasks.

How do I provide a virtual intern the experience of a work culture?

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 or orientation, this may include client exposure, attendance at team meetings, use of company tools and resources, and any other forms of access to other staff members.

It is also beneficial for students to have as many networking opportunities as possible. This can be done not only by allowing them to attend any meetings you may be involved in, whether it is pertinent to their tasks or not. Remember this is an opportunity for them to learn about company culture, roles, team work, etc. 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 support you can provide to facilitate these interactions can be beneficial to the student.

What are my financial obligations for hosting a virtual intern?

Students engaged in virtual internships should not incur any personal expenses as a result of the internship's "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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