



BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS

Providing university students with positive internship experiences can be beneficial to organizations in areas of productivity, talent acquisition and brand awareness, regardless of the physical work environment. Texas Career Engagement has developed this guide to provide organizations with resources and tips relating to virtual internships.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

For many students, an internship is their first professional work experience. It is essential to keep this in mind when facilitating virtual internships, as students will likely need more guidance compared to a traditional office environment.

In traditional settings, interns usually work near supervisors and can easily ask questions, creating a sense of psychological safety. In virtual settings, interns may be hesitant to ask questions, feeling that their frequent emails or instant messages are an inconvenience to others.

SUPERVISION

Assign two supervisors or mentors (if possible) for each virtual intern. Providing more than one supervisor can ease the intern's fear of imposing. This structure will allow the intern to have access to the support they need while not monopolizing the time of a single full-time worker. It can also provide additional exposure to the organization outside of what the intern might normally have the chance to see.

LEARNING GOALS

In collaboration with supervisors, interns should create four or five learning goals to strive for during their internship. These goals provide a framework to guide the intern's knowledge acquisition and skill development. Provide the intern with this template to help them create SMART goals:

| | |
|--|--|
| GOAL | |
| SPECIFIC What skill do I want to learn or improve? | |
| MEASURABLE How will I know when I have reached my goal? | |
| ATTAINABLE In what ways can I achieve my goal? | |
| RELEVANT How does this align with my long-term career goals? | |
| TIME-BASED What is the deadline to achieve this goal? | |



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TECHNOLOGY

Some areas of technology to consider are:

- **Computer:** If the organization is providing interns with a computer, make sure it arrives before the intern's start date. If interns use a personal computer, consider how this will affect access to company servers and VPNs. Consider which online platform you will use with an intern(s). Make sure to clearly document how you like to be communicated with in early conversations with your intern.
- **Internet:** Check to make sure you intern has internet connectivity and that it will be sufficient for the projects at hand.
- **Email and Log-ins:** Determine how to share access and instructions for email and calendars, file storage systems, VPN log-in and other software needed.
- **Tech Support:** Schedule open hours for interns to contact the support staff.

ONBOARDING

Virtual interns will need a thorough orientation and onboarding experience. Provide them with a detailed schedule before their first day. Below are ideas to enhance the first-day experience:

- Ship company swag items and office supplies (shirts, pens, water bottles, notepads, etc.)
- Provide gift cards for coffee and lunch during training
- Record a welcome video for team introductions
- Incorporate time for organization executives to speak

ENGAGEMENT

Plan activities to engage virtual interns with their peers, team members and other staff members. This will help promote company culture, values and brand. Some methods of engagement include:

- Host virtual coffee chats, lunch-and-learns and happy hours
- Invite interns to staff meetings across various departments
- If you're hosting more than one intern, group them into teams, ask them to connect weekly and come up with a team name and branding. At the end of their internships, their team presentation can showcase their work.
- Create social media groups for interns to join and connect
- Match interns with peers or full-time staff based on affiliation groups

COMMUNICATION

Maintaining communication between the intern and supervisor is vital for successful remote work. Schedule weekly meetings to discuss project progression and answer questions. Select a platform to maintain contact with your intern. Some suggestions are Zoom, Slack, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams. Discuss with the intern the online platform(s) you prefer and the frequency of expected communication.

Texas Career Engagement does not endorse any services or products.

FEEDBACK

Feedback should be regular and consistent especially since you miss the chance to bump into each other at the water cooler. Preschedule video conference meetings once a week with the intern to maintain this practice. These meetings serve as a time to assess progress on learning goals and professional development. Try to respond to all emails from interns even it's just to acknowledge receipt. This can serve as mini feedback and can assist the intern in knowing that they are on track. Set aside meeting time to get to know your intern, discuss a book, movie or article. Share stories of your own early work experiences and how you learned. Be intentional about connecting with your intern to ensure this is a rich learning experience.

ADDITIONAL NOTES OF CONSIDERATION

- Interns benefit from tasks being contextualized. Especially as interns are working virtually, remember to communicate why the work they are doing is important and how it is contributing to the organization's overall mission. This can be motivating for interns, and it can provide valuable insight into organizational culture.
- Enjoy the experience! Interns bring unique perspectives and energy to organizations. Embrace their presence and foster a virtual environment that is beneficial for everyone involved.