



VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS & WORKING REMOTELY

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS



COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS AND REMOTE WORK

1 WHAT IS A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP?

A virtual internship is like an in-person internship, except that it's done entirely online. The intern gains valuable experience while working remotely, rather than being physically present within a "typical" office setting.

2 WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS?

Virtual internships are powerful vehicles of career exploration for students and are a strategy for attracting and retaining top talent. Virtual internships allow interns to work from whichever locations are most convenient to them, and work hours are often more flexible. This flexibility is one of the reasons why virtual internships support greater accessibility to meaningful professional experiences for students. This can also be very beneficial to employers when the need for flexible work arrangements arise.

3 HOW DO INTERNS COMMUNICATE WITH EMPLOYERS IN A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP?

In a virtual internship setting, interns primarily communicate with an employer through email, phone and video calls, and your organization's internal instant messaging application such as Slack, Webex, or Google Hangout Chat, among others.

4 HOW CAN I STRUCTURE A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITY?

Below, you will find guidance on how to develop a virtual internship experience.



TIPS & GUIDANCE ON STRUCTURING A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

MAKE SURE THE INTERNSHIP'S DURATION IS LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE AN IMPACT:

Ideally, virtual internships are a *minimum of 6 weeks long* and have *at least 10 hours of work per week*. This helps ensure that interns walk away with an immersive and robust experiential learning opportunity but also allows them the chance to contribute to your organization in a bigger way. Of course, this is something you would arrange with a student depending on the nature of the work and project.

DON'T SKIP THE INTERVIEW:

Virtual internships should include an interview as part of the hiring process. Ideally, the interview is conducted via video but if not, a phone interview will suffice.

OFFER ORIENTATION AND ONBOARDING:

Just like in-person internships, virtual internships should include an orientation program and/or onboarding process to introduce the intern to the organization and any staff they would regularly interact with. *Examples of ways to onboard a virtual intern might include:*

-  **Providing organizational materials.** Email interns a portfolio of information including an internal overview of the organization and the department or team they'll be working with; a summary of HR policies; and an organizational chart.
-  **Providing an onboarding meeting.** Invite interns to a video conference call with the team. This can be followed by an opportunity for questions and answers.
-  **Encouraging independent exploration.** Ask interns to independently explore the organization's website, identify names of staff they believe will be important to their work, and have them capture any questions they may have. A review of their findings could be done through a video or phone call.

SET GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS:

At the start of the internship, outline your expectations and goals for the work experience and offer the intern the opportunity to share their goals and professional aspirations.

KEEP THE INTERNSHIP PROJECT-BASED:

Given that virtual internships are entirely remote, it is important that employers develop meaningful, pre-outlined projects that a student can actively complete over the course of the virtual internship.

ONGOING COMMUNICATION IS VITAL:

It's imperative to clearly set expectations around communication before an intern's first day on the job. *These can include:*

- 📞 Clarifying your preferred modes of communication with your intern, whether that would be email, phone, or instant messenger. Let the intern know what technology platforms are used and grant them any access they might need.
- 🕒 Ideally, employers and interns should have the opportunity to check-in weekly. This ensures the chance for the employer to review the intern's progress and provide constructive feedback, and for the intern to ask questions.
- 📄 Consider having interns submit a regularly-scheduled report that informs their supervisor on things such as challenges or problems encountered, progress toward project objectives, and any questions they may have.
- 📅 It is helpful for the student if you set expectations around response times. For example, you may align with your intern that each of you will respond within 24 hours or by the next business day.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS AND MENTORING:

Although interns can pursue their own networking, you might consider facilitating informational meetings with other staff within the organization on their behalf. A virtual brown bag lunch, for example, is a casual setting for interns to strike up conversations with other co-workers.

COMMIT TO ALWAYS-ON FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT:

Regular feedback and support is pivotal in any internship but it's even more relevant for virtual internships because of the absence of in-person connections. Virtual interns need ongoing support and feedback so that they can continually improve. This may be in the form of peer-based feedback, manager evaluations, or online self-assessments that identify areas for improvement.



VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS: TWO-WEEK SAMPLE OUTLINE

Here are the elements of the first two weeks that will help to get the virtual internship off to a good start and provide structure for going forward. If you have questions on how to set-up a virtual internship, you can always connect with one of the Hub's Internship Coordinators.

WEEK 1 EXAMPLE

Introductory meeting

This is the meeting where you outline communication preferences and reach an agreement on modes of communication and frequency, as well as provide a rough overview of the internship.

Introduction to relevant staff members

Schedule an introduction to relevant staff members and share more perspectives on the work the intern will be engaging in.

Project meeting

Provide a detailed outline of the first project and the relevant subtasks for that week, as well as internship learning goals and what successful outcomes look like.

Intern-focused work time

Given the project work is new and less familiar to the intern, it is helpful to outline specific subtasks that will fill the independent work and project time and discuss estimated time for each task. Encourage the intern to reach out if they have any questions or thoughts.

End-of-week check-in

Schedule a check-in to assess the status of their projects and to review the progress from the week. Discuss the estimated time for each project and if these times need to be adjusted and if expectations are accurate. Review if the intern has all the materials and resources they need to do their work. Preview the upcoming week and answer any final questions to help the intern prepare for week two.

WEEK 2 EXAMPLE

Intern focused work time

Continue to outline subtasks for the intern's independent work and projects and estimated time needed for completion. Encourage the intern to reach out if they have any questions or thoughts.

Supervisor check-in

Schedule a brief mid-week check-in with your intern to triage any questions, concerns, or challenges they may be facing.

Potential networking opportunity

Consider engaging colleagues and host a virtual brown bag lunch with informal presentations and Q&A, or creating other opportunities for the intern to connect with co-workers. If possible, brief your intern on who'll be attending and help them brainstorm insightful questions they could ask.

End-of-week check-in

Review project progress from the week and answer any questions the intern may have. At this point, it's critical to provide constructive feedback that will help course-correct or redirect their work. Close out the meeting with a preview of the what's coming down the pipeline for next week in terms of subtasks and other emerging projects.

QUESTIONS?

If you would like recommendations on how to structure your virtual internship or support on how to transition an in-person internship to a virtual format, an LSA Opportunity Hub Internship Coordinator is more than happy to assist you. Feel free to contact the Hub at lsa-opphub@umich.edu and request an appointment.