

Tips/Resources for Employers Offering Virtual/Remote Internships to Youth



WHAT IS CONNECTING ACTIVITIES?

Connecting Activities (CA) is a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) initiative that leverages a statewide infrastructure to support "college and career readiness" for all students. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/cde/>; www.massconnecting.org

MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER BEFORE! The nation and state is experiencing critical levels of youth unemployment; 50% of the nation's college graduates are un/underemployed. The 'skills gap' continues to expand due to our youth not being equipped with the necessary skill sets and knowledge for success in today's industry sectors – employers are in need of skilled workers!



“So What Is a Virtual Internship?”

A virtual internship is a work-based learning experience in which the youth is not necessarily physically present at the worksite of a business or organization. Connecting Activities defines a virtual internship as any work experience that provides several or all of the features of a traditional internship, but with an alternative physical location, alternative supervisor or mentor relationships, or alternative choices of work projects and tasks.

“How can our internship models be adapted?”

Virtual internships can be based on a semi-independent project, an online collaboration on projects and tasks with a mentor, an entrepreneurial venture, or other possible projects and tasks.

Considerations to hosting a virtual internship:

- Internships remain a great way to **attract young people to your business/industry/organization** and helping to **prepare our future, local workforce**
- Make the hour/time commitment shorter than normal, IF POSSIBLE.
- Think of **feasible projects that you can use pre-existing online content for** - maybe from your website or from journals, catalogs, parts order forms, etc (varies across the sectors..be creative!).
- **Set realistic goals!** Aim for tasks/projects that will ultimately help your company, but understand limitations and plan to work around certain obstacles
- Try to **utilize the convenient access to technology** (aka your smartphone at least) and incorporate videos/live streaming, etc into instruction/training for interns

- IF possible, consider making the internship feature a **project that can be done entirely in an online system**.
- IF your company/organization relies on research/data-collection, etc, try to mimic a research project - maybe **incorporating access to online studies and field tests**. Make sure it can be linked to the work done at your company. Maybe you want to learn more about something, but don't have time to scour the internet or other resources, and this is something an intern can do remotely.

Remote Internship examples - companies who are recruiting remote interns (job descriptions examples):

<https://www.internships.com/virtual>

Basic Info about virtual internships:

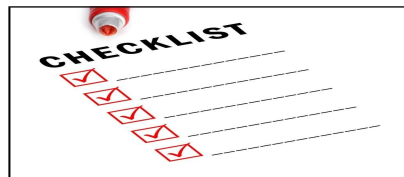
<https://www.fastweb.com/career-planning/articles/all-about-virtual-internships>



Below are tips and links from others who have hosted virtual internships!

Source:

<https://learn.joinhandshake.com/employers/creative-ways-to-make-your-virtual-internship-a-success/>



Virtual Internship Checklist

Before launching your digital internship program, you'll need to consider how you will assign tasks to interns, how you'll track their progress, how interns will be able to collaborate with each other and with your team, and so on. Keep everything organized in a project management tool to not only make your life easier, but help keep interns on track, too. If you require interns to log hours, it may be a smart idea to get a productivity tracker or timesheet software to do this.

- **Set expectations across the org and with your interns** about how the program is going to work, what tools they'll need, how often they're expected to attend virtual meetings and engage with the team, and more.
- **Prepare interns at least 4-8 weeks before they start** to gather all of their onboarding materials, including building a strong community early on through outreach, and getting them familiar with your company and culture.

- **Think about the tools they'll need to be successful**, including a video conferencing platform, messaging app, and productivity tracker. Many aspects of a digital internship will revolve around software made to manage remote teams.
- **Consider mailing your interns their computer a week before** their start date to give them some time to set up their devices. Then schedule a session prior to their start date to confirm their internet works. Delegate an IT point of contact to help them troubleshoot tech issues on day one.
- **Create the same culture you have in the office digitally**. Embracing your culture can be difficult when everyone is working remotely, but there are indeed ways to get your culture across to interns virtually. Allow interns enough time to get familiar with your company and culture before starting and share information with them on how they can engage with your employee resource groups (ERGs) virtually.
- **Consider how you'll train interns**. We've seen some employers run multi-week training programs facilitated by HR, including a training on how to make the implicit explicit. Here at Handshake, for example, we require employees to turn on their camera during calls. Possible trainings include "Video Sharing 101" and "How to Separate your Living and Workspaces".
- **Train your managers, too**. To maintain consistency in their schedule, train managers to encourage their interns to block time for lunch, breaks, workouts, and virtual social activities throughout the day.
- **A successful virtual internship requires hiring manager buy-in**. Consider hosting a kickoff with all of your hiring managers where you share a handbook or framework for success. Make sure new managers have intern training and those who've managed interns in the past are brought up to speed on virtual engagement best practices. Keep in mind that some interns have little-to no professional experience outside of school and may require a bit of guidance through mentorship.
- **Prepare interns for a virtual onboarding**. To ensure interns have what they need to start, don't overlook any fundamental equipment, including workspaces and tech, HR paperwork like I-9s, and company swag or a gift bag to really bring your culture to life. Encourage their manager to mail them a handwritten note for an added touch.
- **Connect interns with peers before they start**. Aside from their managers, these "onboarding buddies" can help answer any questions interns might have and don't feel comfortable addressing with others, while welcoming them into your organization."

Source:

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/remote-virtual-internships-covid19-hr.aspx>

What can my company do to support virtual internships?



“Some of the things Abbott [company] has done to support remote interns:

- Created a special app for interns to interact with one another through messages, videos and photos. "We're asking all of them to post 30-second videos introducing themselves, which we hope will spur engaging interactions, along with [hosting] virtual scavenger hunts and trivia contests," Kehr said.
- Assigned interns to "peer buddy" groups along with a coach. Separately, students are paired with a mentor to help them navigate the program.
- Increased engagement with senior leadership via live video discussions to bolster networking opportunities. This level of interaction hasn't existed previously and is now possible because there are no location limitations, Kehr said.

Interns are also receiving dedicated personal and career development programming on topics like motivation, reputation building, resilience and innovation, results-driven job assignments, and post-internship professional development.

servicenow

HR technology company ServiceNow is also determined to provide a substantial and valuable internship experience. "This is our first year testing virtual internships, and it has been exciting," said Shane Driggers, vice president of talent acquisition at the company.

ServiceNow accepted 360 interns for its 12-week programs, representing 25 percent growth compared to last summer. The majority—about 70 percent—work in product and technology roles. "Things we think about are how to spur engagement, how to create relevancy and focus on professional development," Driggers said. "We created groups with internal communication tools like [Slack](#), hosted social hours and mixers where interns can get together and socialize in a virtual setting, and developed a whole suite of virtual activities that have been deliberate and intentional in terms of how to make the experience meaningful for interns and hiring managers doing this for the first time virtually."

Managers were trained on how to help interns adjust to remote work and each intern was assigned a mentor who they can lean on for advice and go to with ideas, Driggers said.

He added that in-person social interaction is the biggest loss for the interns but that engagement and productivity among interns were trending positive so far this year, according to pulse surveys.

Caroline Parkinson, a student at the University of Michigan and a corporate communications intern at ServiceNow, said she misses the face-to-face interaction but doesn't think the lack of it has negatively impacted her internship. "My team has reached out often to have real conversations to check in with me on not only work-related things, but how I'm doing personally and how I'm

dealing with everything," she said. "Some of the natural office barriers have been removed by going virtual, and I've been able to engage with interns from outside my team that I may not have had the chance to before."

Brooks said communication and engagement—using Zoom or FaceTime—was accomplished fairly easily. The harder part was workforce planning and, specifically, "connecting the dots between the supply of incoming talent that would be virtual versus in person with the work that needed to be done in person or could be done virtually. It meant that front-line leaders had to think quickly and deliberately about the scope of work they would hand their interns, how that handoff would happen and what the checkpoints would be. If you're more accustomed to waiting for interns to show up and then assigning them activities, you will be too late."

Managing Virtual Internship Programs

The following are a few basic tips for running successful remote internship programs.

- **Set clear expectations.** A successful internship will have articulated learning goals and outcomes, Paré said. The remote environment requires that those be much more strongly articulated up front. "Interns need to have complete clarity about the projects they will be taking on, what their objectives are and what success looks like," Tambay said. "Cover not only project tasks, deliverables and deadlines, but also introduce relevant stakeholders and tools."
- **Invite frequent communication.** "The importance of frequent communication with teams and managers can never be overstated, especially since in-person meetings aren't possible right now," Tambay said. "Managers and teammates alike should provide interns with constructive and motivational feedback on their work. This will help interns stay motivated, achieve their goals and feel that they are not operating in a vacuum."
- **Encourage relationship building.** Make interns feel like they are an important part of the team and help them bond with colleagues through team-building activities. "Acknowledge the uniqueness and vulnerability of interning remotely and overemphasize that you're available as a resource for them," Tambay said. "Above all else, help your interns get through these strange times by forging a real connection with them."
- **Assign mentors.** A good mentor is essential for helping interns grow their knowledge and skills set, especially when working remotely. Paré said she's worried that interns without mentors will have to do a lot of proactive outreach on their own, "a tall order to ask for in a remote environment where they don't understand the culture."
- **Perfect onboarding.** This is a great opportunity to evaluate and identify the gaps in your remote onboarding process and improve it. For example, it's essential that interns have the resources to work remotely. "From day one, I was given the technology and services I needed, so I never felt like I lost productivity working from home," Parkinson said. "Any company that wants to adjust to a virtual internship needs to lean in to making sure their interns have the tools they need to succeed."