

Remote Internship: “How To”

What is a Remote Internship?

It is important to keep in mind a commonly accepted definition of “internship”: a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent. (NACE, 2020)

A *remote* internship is an internship that allows the intern to work remotely, as in: anywhere other than the office.

Remote Internship Basic Structure

There are essentials that must be in place in order for a remote internship program to be successful. The following items must be developed prior to bringing an intern on board, to work remotely:

1. Develop the work plan (use our **Internship Toolkit!**) and projects the intern will work on (just like an onsite internship). Include what technology the intern will need access to, such as WiFi, laptop, cell phone and any other necessary tools. Also determine which, if any, of these tools the organization will provide. If organization is providing equipment, consult with IT department on next steps.
2. Determine what tools and platforms will be used for collaboration, review and delivery of work such as a shared network folder, Google Docs, DropBox, etc. **Bonus:** ask your intern if they know of any project management or communications tools to use; they are part of a digital-native generation, and this can be your first opportunity to collaborate!
3. Set clear, realistic deadlines for delivery of assigned projects. Structure is very important in all internship programs, and particularly so when working in different locations.
4. Create an ongoing schedule of regular communication such as Microsoft Teams meetings, regular email communication and a bi-weekly in-person meeting (if possible and appropriate). This also includes ensuring there is a scheduled video conference (or in-person meeting if allowable) for internship evaluations. Regular communication and feedback is *critical* to the success of a remote internship and to ensuring that the intern feels part of the team.
5. Identify a supervisor, or point person, for each department that is working with a remote intern. This will be the staff person that can answer general questions, provide support, help communicate any organizational news to the intern and ensure their overall engagement in the internship.
6. HR, senior leadership and any other point people should work together to identify solutions for any privacy concerns or other organizational proprietary issues such as access to the network or internal programs, such as CRM, etc.
7. Work with HR to create a remote onboarding and orientation for remote interns.
8. Departmental point-person is responsible for creating a departmental orientation for remote interns.
9. Determine compensation for the intern. The general rule of thumb is to pay them what you would pay an onsite intern.
10. Be creative in developing opportunities for professional development and social interaction such as monthly webinars, remote coffee connections with other employees (outside of their department), access to LinkedIn Learning, etc.
11. Get the intern’s feedback about the experience at the midpoint and end of the internship using survey tools and video meetings. Also, do regular check-ins about how they feel about the experience.



Other Best Practices

The following is a list of ideas and practices from employers experienced with remote internships:

1. A communication schedule which includes seeing each intern through video or in-person meetings.
2. Ensure department supervisors are prepared and able to manage someone remotely. This is critical!
3. Provide laptops with access to necessary files and programs so the intern has quality tools.
4. Schedule social activities that are in-person, if possible. This could be themed meetings (e.g. bring your favorite mug or hat) sporting events, etc. This will encourage connection, and therefore encourage teamwork in doing the work of the organization. Remote social event ideas include remote “Lunch and Learns”, tours of local organizations (i.e. museums), speaker series, sober happy hours, talent show/game show, etc.
5. Determine what the transportation needs are for the intern to attend in-person meetings or events (if in-person meetings are possible). If there are costs associated with traveling to meetings and events, decide who will cover travel expenses. It is common for the employer to cover parking costs and mileage for travel. Consider paying for a bus pass or gas card.
6. As with any internship, *very clearly identify* what your goals and objectives are for the internship.

Project Ideas for Remote Interns

1. Any research-based projects
2. Data clean-up
3. Content creation such as website copy (or clean up), blogs, press releases, etc.
4. Event planning and event research—remote events need to be planned also!
5. Call campaign
6. Lead generation
7. Member or customer outreach
8. Research different remote outreach tools or processes, such as developing a chat, creating an online library or using other technologies outside traditional methods (e.g. email)

Other Ideas for Consideration

1. Condense summer internship program to 4-6 weeks with a part-time schedule (20-25 hours per week). This allows the organization to lightly enter into remote internships and allow the intern to keep any part-time jobs they may need.
2. Consider a more project-based approach (sometimes referred to as “micro internships”). A project-based internship would mean the intern was assigned a specific project(s). Once the project was completed, the experience would be over. The student would be paid a stipend typically based on the estimated hours of work required to complete the project.
3. Allow remote internships to be optional for individual departments to participate.
4. Identify both in-person (if an option) and remote professional development opportunities for interns
5. Require some in-person and in-office meetings (if possible).
6. Require that all participating departments submit an intern work plan (template will be provided) and tentative communications schedule to HR in advance of internship.
7. Hold a “Lessons Learned” meeting at the end of the internship experience, including all departments that participated in the remote and/or project-based internship experience, and incorporate into next internship experience. Continue to improve your processes!

Framework adapted from Greater Cleveland Partnership



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