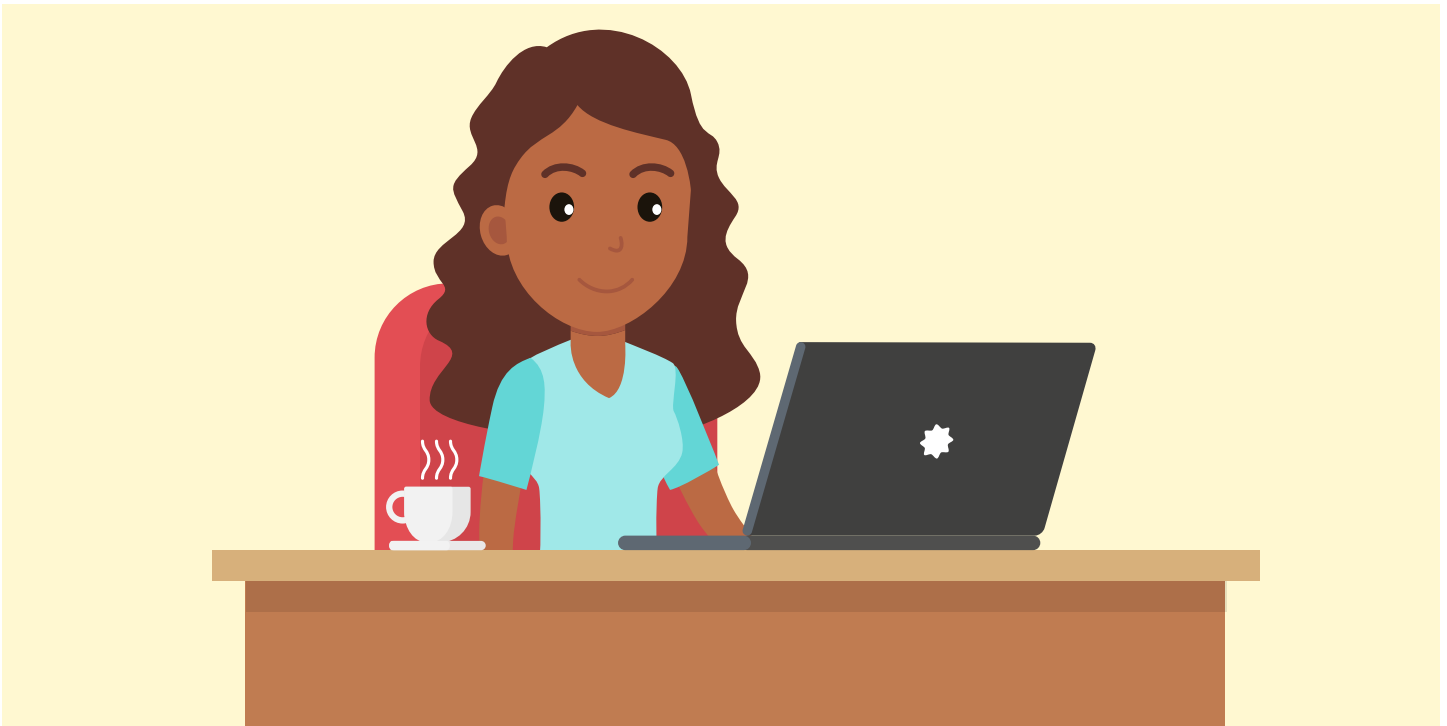




THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

JOHN GLENN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Virtual Internships: A Guide for Employers

Internships are an important part of a student's time in college, allowing them to apply what they are learning in the classroom in a real-world setting. Internships allow students to develop skills, understand the professional world and make critical connections for future career success.

The John Glenn College of Public Affairs greatly values internships, offering structured programs for students at every level: high school, undergrad and graduate in Columbus and Washington, DC. Part of what makes these programs so successful are the internship hosts, meaning student success in internships starts with a well-organized, intentional program.

As we all work to navigate the challenges created by COVID-19, the Glenn College remains committed to supporting students' professional development through high-quality internship placement. We hope internship partners will consider offering virtual internships through these difficult times. We believe that students still need and desire career development, but employers need support as well. We also know many organizations proudly mentor the next generation of staff in their organization; we hope you will find ways to continue to do this important work despite the current challenges presented by COVID-19.



1. Clear objectives

Just as you would with an in-person experience, clearly define for yourself, team, and intern what the primary objectives are of having this intern join your team. What will be the primary tasks and duties, and what professional development opportunities can you build into the internship? This can look like a detailed internship description, but should be understood by all parties (direct supervisor, human resources, team, intern, and if applicable, university contact).

2. Well-planned onboarding and training plan

It's nerve-racking for a young professional to start a new job in-person, but the virtual environment can bring a whole new set of concerns. Remember this will likely be your intern's first virtual professional experience, and possibly their first internship. A highly organized and comprehensive onboarding process can lay the foundation for a successful internship, virtual or in-person, and begin to shape the intern's professionalism. Consider the following:

- **Spread onboarding out over a few days to a week:** do not cram everything into the first day. Think about the order of meetings and how to balance them. Make an onboarding schedule for the first week, and share it with all involved. This [LinkedIn resource](#) offers a sample onboarding schedule.
- **HR paperwork/policies:** schedule meeting with appropriate contacts. Does your intern need specific software or IT privileges to be successful? Will your organization be sending the intern a laptop, hotspot or other equipment to conduct the functions of their role? Do they need access to certain drives or other IT resources? Be sure to organize this with your HR/IT departments ahead of their first day, and set-up meetings with the appropriate parties to set-up their machine, email, etc. Make a list of HR/IT needs and help the intern work through them before they begin.
- **Communication method:** in this virtual world, online communication tools are more important than ever. Be sure to set-up accounts for the platform(s) your organization uses to communicate and meet, along with instructions and expectations. If you have an etiquette guide, be sure to provide that to the intern as well.
- **Pre-work:** while you do not want to overload the student before their first day, send a recommended list of readings/websites/social media for them to review ahead of their first day. This can help them acclimate to your organization before they set foot in the (virtual) door.
- **Trainings:** does your intern need special trainings to be successful? Build trainings into their onboarding schedule and provide clear deadlines by which they should be completed.
- **Community building** - Every organization is different, but think about how to 'introduce' your intern to other colleagues and teams. How can you move the classic first day walk around the office, filled with handshakes and greetings, online? You may set-up coffee dates with leads on other teams, or other staff that will delegate responsibilities to your intern.
- **Other interns?** Consider doing some onboarding activities together and building in introductions. If possible, find ways for them to collaborate.

3. Define Supervisory Structure

- Make the supervisory structure clear- the intern should have a direct supervisor that manages their day to day work, and possibly an HR contact.
- Plan to build in an introductory work plan meeting to clarify expectations and performance management structure- how will their performance be tracked? If you do mid-point and final reviews, share more about this process.

4. Communication

- It is recommended that you have a touchpoint built into every day that your intern is working, as well as at least one designated meeting weekly to check-in to go over tasks, expectations and provide any necessary feedback. It's important to make the communication structure clear at the beginning, including what form of communication you prefer in the workplace (see Etiquette)
- Consider having a structured weekly agenda template to keep the intern (and you!) organized. You might add reflective pieces such as "What was difficult this week?" and "What are you most proud of?" This allows the intern an opportunity to reflect and communicate, while providing you with greater insight for how the internship is going for them.
- Within the first two weeks, develop a clear work plan. Go over what is expected, but also how the intern will know they are meeting expectations. How can they expect to receive feedback, and how frequently? What skills should they have gained by the end of their internship? If they have questions, do you prefer they message you, look at your calendar first or wait until your weekly check-in?



- Etiquette: every organization has different expectations for communication etiquette- clarify what the expectations are of your workplace. This can include emailing, texting, calling, etc. Make sure to clearly outline these communication practices with your intern.
- Consider holding office hours- is there a time (perhaps the first or last hour of the day) when they can always reach out, should they need it?
- Context: it will be difficult for the intern to understand the full context of your office, especially without the hallway conversations or in-person interactions. Instead of simply assigning tasks, take a moment to explain how this task fits into your bigger picture, or how it connects to the mission of the organization.
- Most supervisors appreciate interns who take initiative and are proactive. While you should encourage this, be sure to help the intern understand what this would look like on your team and in a virtual environment.
- Make an effort to ensure the intern understands the different teams and consider setting up lunches or coffees virtually with other units in your organization. Debrief with them and help them follow-up if they want to network further.
- Whenever possible, find collaborative projects for your intern: this will allow them to feel more connected.
- When appropriate, invite your intern to meetings. Provide context ahead and follow-up after.

6. Professional development and mentorship

- Consider assigning a mentor, or 'buddy' within the organization who can answer questions, provide support and meet the intern with some frequency. This is someone who does not supervise their work, but can provide an added layer of support and mentorship.
- Ask the student what their short and long-term goals are, and try to find opportunities within the work plan to meet some of those goals.
- If your organization offers trainings that are appropriate, enroll your intern.
- Set up virtual coffees with others in the organization and mentor your student through the networking process.
- Set up a panel or meeting with the CEO or high-level leaders in your organization.
- Offer resume review, mock interviewing and other professional guidance near the end of the internship.

5. Community-building

- While you can't take a virtual intern to lunch, invite them to a team happy hour or ask them to join the office kickball team, you can still build community. Consider having a welcome coffee or lunch virtually during the first two weeks for the intern(s). If appropriate, arrange an office happy hour.
- If your organization has multiple interns, consider an intern trivia night or instituting an intern book club.

The Glenn College will continue to provide structure for student internships by offering an internship course for credit (for those that choose that option) and providing students with resources and support, such as mid-term and final evaluation templates for supervisors. We greatly value internship hosts' flexibility during COVID-19. We are listing other resources below in an effort to provide our valued partners further support in their endeavor to host our interns virtually.

Resources for Employers

- [Gamma Iota Sigma- Virtual Internships: A Guide for Employers](#)
- [Gamma Iota Sigma- Delivering a Successful Virtual Internship Experience](#)- presented April 6, 2020
- ELearning Industry- [8 Tips to Develop a Successful Virtual Internship Program](#)
- [Intern Bridge](#)
- Harvard Business School- [Best Practices for Creating a Successful Virtual Internship](#)
- LinkedIn- [7 Steps to Creating a Virtual Employee Onboarding Program](#)
- Partnership for Public Service- [How to supervise interns in a virtual environment: onboarding and orientation](#)
- The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions- University of Wisconsin- Madison- [What to do about internships in light of the COVID-19 pandemic? A short guide to online internships for colleges, students, and employers](#)