

NACE Virtual Internships Discussion – April 1, 2020

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Highlights

Engaging students: Meeting student expectations

Regardless of whether internships are in person or virtual:

- Students want access to leadership (and connection needs to be authentic).
- Students want to believe that the internship matters to the company/is valued by the organization.
- Students want to be treated like employees.

Housing for interns was a trouble spot in the past—intern expectations did not meet the reality. This is not an issue for virtual internships, but there are several other factors that need consideration and attention:

- Job description: Needs to be accurate and clear.
- High-quality mentor
- Challenging work assignments
- Enough to do

It is likely that virtual internships will be labor intensive for the organization and require more time—not less—to ensure the quality of the interaction and to give the intern a sense of the organization's culture. Organizations need to consider how they will represent their culture in the virtual universe.

Virtual internships: Evidence of success

Micro-internships (project-based): Not intended as a substitute for the traditional 10-week on-site internship, these can be successful and drive value for the intern and the organization. The intern has the opportunity to develop/enhance one or two specific skills; the organization reaps the benefit of the completed project. This can be successful for the intern and the organization.

The U.S. State Department has an extensive program—1,200 virtual interns—that has enjoyed great success. A key benefit is that the interns do not have to adhere to a specific physical location. This can benefit diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals.

Recommendations

- Be open and flexible: Your virtual interns will be in different environments. For example, do not interpret background noise as a lack of professionalism on the part of the intern.

- Hiring managers need to be convinced of the value involved and apart of the on boarding process with virtual internships. Two approaches that can make this work: 1) “We should really do” projects; 2) “I should not be doing” projects.
 - Ask hiring managers what needs to be done that is not getting done (“We should really do”)
 - Ask hiring managers what they are doing that could be handled by an intern (“I should not be doing”).
- It is critical that the intern’s work contributes to the organization and that the student understands that.
- Find a way to enable the intern to work in a team (tech tools/platforms for connection, important)
- Ongoing communication with the interns is critical.
- The intern needs a schedule to adhere to.

Evaluating the intern

- Whether you opt to provide multiple formal reviews during the span of the internship or a single final review at the conclusion, provide the intern with constant feedback. Gen Z expects and values feedback; this is even more important in the virtual universe.
- There are some key attributes that the virtual internship may make it somewhat easier to evaluate: For example, is the intern a self-starter? Does the intern ask thoughtful questions?

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