



Handshake's

Guide to Hosting a Virtual Internship

According to a recent Handshake survey, the majority of employers with intern programs are still evaluating whether to make changes. A very small minority have canceled their programs, or pivoted to remote internships (less than 10% at this point in time).

It's understandable that many employers are looking for guidance. You've come to the right place!

Students have significant concerns around the status of their summer internships and whether they'll be canceled or not.

Insights from the Ivy Research Council show that 89% of students pursuing a 2020 summer internship would prefer a virtual internship over a canceled one.

That's why it's important to let students and candidates know how you're handling internships during this time. If you do choose to host a virtual internship program, here are some helpful considerations and useful checklists to take back to your team.



Pre-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 like Asana 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, and delegate an IT point of contact to help them troubleshoot tech issues on day one.
- Offer a work from home budget** in case interns need to purchase desks, chairs, or headphones to do their best work. You might also want to confirm housing options if your internships cover re-location, or consider having interns remain in place. Provide suggestions on WiFi options if interns are living in new housing areas.
- 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.



Pre-Internship Checklist (...continued):

- 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.



"My team has made my transition to a virtual internship a smooth one.

Even though I miss seeing everyone in the office, the fact that my team syncs every morning to talk about our daily priorities, participates in weekly meetings, and attends our company-wide 'All Hands' once a week, makes me feel connected with everyone during this time more than ever."

—Alejandra Alvarez, Customer Success Intern at Handshake

Internship Considerations:

Your interns are trying to get an idea of what it would be like to work at your company, but they're also there to work on projects and gain valuable experience. This is where your organization becomes invaluable.

- 1 Find creative ways to engage your interns virtually.** Invite interns to join your company-wide all hands or social meetings to get familiar with your culture.

Host virtual breakfasts, lunches, or coffee sessions and allow interns to expense meals once in a while to offer opportunities for them to get to know one another and others in your organization. You can utilize Zoom to host breakout sessions and invite interns to meet regularly with business partners.

Consider and plan creative ways to put your culture on display. At Handshake, our support team will host an open Zoom call periodically where teammates can just join in and say hi, ask questions, and connect through a virtual "water cooler" chat.



- 2 When it comes to mentoring your interns,** ensure your managers have a bi-weekly one-on-one scheduled. Managers will also want to make sure they've scheduled at least two feedback review sessions during their internship, exposing interns to valuable opportunities for learning and growth.

Now more than ever, it's important for managers to stay connected digitally with their interns. Managers can help ensure that they have enough work to keep interns productive and share how the work they're doing now is relevant to business needs and outcomes.

- 3 Many junior or senior year student interns are looking for a full-time offer after the program.** If this is something you can offer, make it very clear from the beginning. After all, it's something interns are actively considering, and partly what they're working so hard towards.

You can also consider conducting surveys throughout your internship program to keep feedback loops open and identify areas of improvement. Leverage this as an opportunity to listen to your interns' thoughts on your culture and their wellbeing.

Post-Internship Takeaways:

How do you continue to engage, mentor, and nurture interns once their internship is over and throughout their early careers?

First, set up some time for interns to present their capstone projects and get feedback from your team before they leave the company. Have your HR team help interns with their resumes, and share tips for promoting their work and skills gained during the internship.

Encourage interns to leave reviews about their internship experience on Handshake and your careers page. Every 8 in 10 students who fill out their interests on Handshake receive a message from a recruiter—be sure to encourage them to add their internship experience to their Handshake profiles as well.

You'll want to make a plan to keep in touch with your interns, and highlight the benefits of staying in touch with their managers as an avenue for guidance and mentorship.

Finally, **how do you measure the success of your virtual internship?** While some employers rely on tracking conversion or placement of rates of their interns, we've seen other employers track who goes on to take a remarkable role elsewhere as a way to gauge the health of their program.

Moving to a digital internship may be new for your intern class and business partners, but by following these tips, you can set up a memorable experience for this incoming class. Learn how to shift your recruiting and internship strategy to an all-digital approach and reach out to our team by requesting a demo.