EMPLOYER GUIDE TO VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS

This is a resource guide intended for employers who were planning to engage in traditional face-to-face internships in the summer of 2020. With organizations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with "Stay at Home" orders and strict social distancing guidelines, it is unlikely that many interns will be able to complete their internships on-site as originally planned.

Knowing the importance of internship programs as both a recruitment mechanism for employers and an applied learning opportunity for students, many organizations are already working to develop remote projects and virtual internship experiences. This guide was developed from best practices and recommendations from our workforce development collaborators, including the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the Career Leadership Collective, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and Greater Louisville, Inc., and adapted for employer partners of Bellarmine University.

HOW DO I CONNECT WITH STUDENTS WHEN THEY ARE NOT ON CAMPUS?

Virtualize Job Postings

- Post your jobs/internships on Bellarmine's premier online career management platform, Handshake. All current students and recent alums have an account on Handshake, so it's the best way to connect with active job seekers when not on campus.

- Select "Allow Remote Workers" when posting the position in Handshake. Specify the student school year, GPA requirements, and major categories to receive the most relevant applicants for your position.

- Update the job description to call attention to remote projects and the opportunities to stay connected at your organization while in a virtual environment.

Virtualize Engagement Opportunities

- Attend a virtual networking event or career fair hosted by a partner institution.

- Host a virtual information session for students by creating an event on Handshake.

- Connect virtually with students through Handshake that have "opted in" to make their profiles public to employers.

Virtualize the Interview Process

- Establish your organization's internal process for interviewing virtually. Be transparent with students regarding all established steps in the interview process as well as technology platforms that will be used during the interview, so students can download any necessary software in advance of the interview.

- Communicate regularly with candidates, even to report tentative timelines for hiring and start dates of the internship. It is possible students are interviewing at multiple organizations and in this time of economic uncertainty, will gravitate to opportunities that are transparent and definite. Communicate often in order to retain preferred candidates.

HOW DO I DEVELOP A VIRTUAL/REMOTE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE?

Maintaining Best Practices from Meaningful In-Person Experiences

- Hold a virtual orientation for interns to communicate organizational guidelines and policies, outline work projects and deadlines with students, set methods for timekeeping and establish an individualized communication plan with students.

- Supply interns with real work. Meaningful work assignments help interns see their work as valuable to the organization, building rapport with your organization and staff. Consider the ways interns can showcase their work to their department or to organizational leadership during the internship experience.

- Ensure all members of the organization are aware of the intern's assignments and remote work schedule, so that the intern is included in all pertinent communication and can build connections with current staff.

Supervising a Remote Workspace

- Allocate plenty of time in advance of the internship to develop a unique work plan for student interns. Clearly define work expectations, projects and timelines so students can manage their time effectively.

- Ensure the intern has access and knows how to use all technology platforms required to succeed in the role. Just because the traditional college-age student is a digital native, does not mean they also know how to navigate every technology platform.

- Schedule regular virtual meetings with interns to discuss ongoing projects. Without the opportunity for students to ask questions in-person, supervisors should schedule "check-ins" twice as often as they would in-person interactions to avoid miscommunication.

- Be open to feedback. Ask students about their work environment and their connection to your organization. Work to remove any barriers they might experience. Students will appreciate feeling as though their opinion matters.

Building Work Culture within a Virtual Space

- Because internships, by definition, are temporary experiences, students can easily feel disengaged from the organization, even during in-person experiences. Supervisors will need to plan ahead and communicate effectively throughout the experience to ensure students find a sense of belonging within your organization.

- Establish a meaningful approach to onboarding interns. Ensure the student knows the company culture and policies, has access to technology for success on the job, has clear expectations of their work assignments and responsibilities, and that students are invited to build community with existing team members.

- Send an email to staff introducing the intern and engage the rest of your team when delivering a remote internship experience. Simple gestures, such as allowing interns to sit in on a virtual departmental meeting or assigning a staff/peer mentor, will provide students the opportunity to connect with several staff members throughout their experience.

- Plan for your intern to experience periodic rotations across departments, so you intern can gain new skills, meet new members of the team, and develop a deeper connection with your organization. This helps students see the "bigger picture" of their work and can help organizations see where a prospective employee might work best.

- Develop virtual forms of engagement for staff and students throughout the experience, such as virtual games and other activities, professional development opportunities, panel sessions with current staff/organizational leadership, so students develop a sense of community with current staff and with your organization.

Note: Virtual/remote internship requirements for academic credit will vary with every institution. Universities reserve the right to approve/deny internship experiences for academic credit that do not meet the institution's accrediting bodies and department requirements. Connect with Bellarmine's Career Development Center for a virtual/remote internship program consultation as well as specific requirements for internships for academic credit.