

**To:** Indiana Employers  
**From:** Ascend Indiana  
**Re:** Alternate Internship Considerations amid COVID-19



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## Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide resources, outline considerations, and share best practices for employers as they consider transitioning in-person summer internships to remote experiences as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Background

As a result of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, many employers across the state have had to make tough decisions regarding their current and upcoming internship programs. With summer internships set to start in the coming weeks, employers are left to decide the fate of their upcoming programs: whether to cancel, delay, or go remote.

As your organization evaluates the evolving situation and your business needs, we hope you consider the following:

## Value and Risk

- What can you offer students given the current circumstances? Can you still provide them with a meaningful experience?
  - Do you have the capacity, infrastructure, and technology to support a remote internship?
- Positive Employer Branding
  - Remote interns will have a lasting positive impression of an organization that showcases leadership during this unprecedented time.
  - This is a time of uncertainty and anxiety for students who are looking for employment. Employers that can honor internship offers and adjust to remote work will likely create strong brand loyalty and gratitude.
- What are the risks of cancelling your summer internship program?
  - If you rely on early talent to fill your full-time hiring pipeline, cancelling summer internships could impact your ability to attract and recruit top tier talent in the upcoming year.

## Latest COVID-19 Datapoints

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. However, of those who chose to participate, the worry about the potential lack of adequate training in addition to the thought that they might not be taken seriously by the employer or their managers looms large.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ivy Research Council's Keynote on "Running a Virtual Internship" as part of their [Coronavirus Response Summit](#)

## Student Concerns with Virtual Internships

Q: If you chose to participate in a virtual internship program, how concerned would you be about the following potential challenges?  
% of students responding somewhat or very concerned

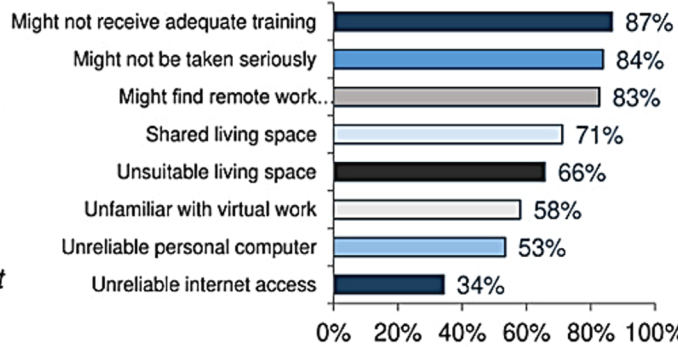


Figure 1: Ivy Research Council

With this idea in mind, it is essential to have an established outline that'll be used by both the employer and the student as you look to embark on an entirely new way of

managing an internship.

It is important to let candidates know how you plan on managing a virtual internship during this time. In doing so, the student will gain a better understanding of what to expect, how to prepare, and their likely outcomes and takeaways upon completion of the internship.

### Virtual Internship Checklist

- **Set expectations early on** with existing staff and incoming interns.
  - How is this going to work holistically?
  - What tools will be needed (e.g., Video conference platforms, messaging apps, productivity trackers)?
  - Set weekly meeting expectations.
- **Consider mailing computers a week before** their start date.
  - This gives the students time to set up their devices.
  - Schedule a session prior to the start date to confirm logistics (e.g., Internet connectivity, app functionality).
  - Delegate an IT point of contact on day 1 to help interns troubleshoot tech issues as they come.
- **Consider a work from home stipend.**
  - In case interns need to purchase a desk, chair, headphones, etc.
- **Create a digital culture** that resembles your office culture.
  - Allow interns enough time to get to know the company.
  - Host fun virtual events (e.g., virtual coffee/lunch, virtual game nights, etc.).
  - Consider giving interns a gift bag or company swag to bring their virtual experience to life.
- **Consider how training takes place.**
  - Think about virtual training sessions facilitated by HR.
    - Examples: Video sharing 101, video conference etiquette, scheduling meetings while remote, etc.
- **Train your managers, too.**

- The overall experience of the interns relies on the manager's willingness to invest in them<sup>2</sup> - make sure questions are answered and expectations are clear before the internship begins.
- **Offer professional development opportunities** that prepare students for the next step in their career.
  - Set up some time for interns to present their capstone projects and get feedback from your team before they leave the company.
  - Plan a virtual resume workshop or mock interview day.
  - Share tips on promoting work and skills gained during the internship.
  - Stay connected after they leave, and encourage the power of professional networking.

### Other Considerations

A successful summer internship program is what you make of it regardless of the circumstances. Internship opportunities leave a lasting impact on students' professional development and prepare them as they enter the workforce post-graduation. As a manager or supervisor, consider having a 1-on-1 with the student early on in the experience to work out some potential differences when taking on projects or assignments, followed by regular check-ins.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, interns should receive regular feedback and supervision on their assigned projects. This can be done through a log of their projects, which can be submitted to their managers on a weekly basis as a way to track their progress.

Finally, as a resource, the Ivy Research Council's Keynote on "Running a Virtual Internship" as part of their Coronavirus Response Summit greatly details their findings as well as ways to implement a successful virtual internship during this pandemic. The Keynote can be found [here](#).

### Alternative Options

In some instances, a transition to a remote experience may not be possible. In an open letter to their partners, [AnitaB.org](#), an organization on a mission to help woman in tech succeed, noted the following additional options worth considering :<sup>4</sup>

- Commit to providing the internship at a later date or transition the experience to a co-op or project during the semester.
- Offer webinars, mentorship, and other virtual skill-building experiences for displaced interns, to provide skills, visibility, and insight that can help bolster students' professional experience, or partner with and support organizations that can help.
- Provide a letter of endorsement for the students that have been displaced that they can use in seeking future opportunities. An example can be found [here](#).
- Convert the intern salary dollars to scholarships to assist displaced low-income students who rely on internship earnings to cover college and housing expenses.
- Should you need to cancel your summer internship program, please consider connecting displaced interns with Ascend. Our team can help them connect with open opportunities in the summer/fall. Our connection form can be found [here](#).

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive list of virtual internship considerations, check out Handshake's report [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Yale University Office of Career Strategy [COVID-19 Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> A full list of alternative options can be found at AnitaB.org's [open letter](#) to partners.

## Final Thoughts

Transitioning your summer internship program to a virtual experience during these troubling times as opposed to canceling will provide a significant draw to your brand, help create a natural talent pipeline into your organization, and continue to allow increased capacity for additional productivity and special projects. Keeping your internship program will create meaningful impact for both the intern and your organization.

If you have any questions, concerns, or feedback regarding the implementation of a virtual summer internship within your organization, please reach out to the Ascend team at [info@ascendindiana.com](mailto:info@ascendindiana.com).

## Additional Resources

- [Ivy Research Council: Coronavirus Response Summit](#)
- [Handshake: Creative Ways to Make your Virtual Internship a Success](#)
- [Forbes: Summer Internship Programs Are Going Virtual—Is Yours?](#)
- [HRDIVE: Coronavirus brings cloud of uncertainty over summer internships](#)
- [The Hechinger Report What's lost, gained with online internships](#)
- [Indiana INTERN.net Survey Results: The Impact of COVID-19 on Summer 2020 Internships](#)