

# Guide to Virtual Internships: Employer Edition



COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING  
ENGINEERING CAREER RESOURCE CENTER  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# THE BASICS

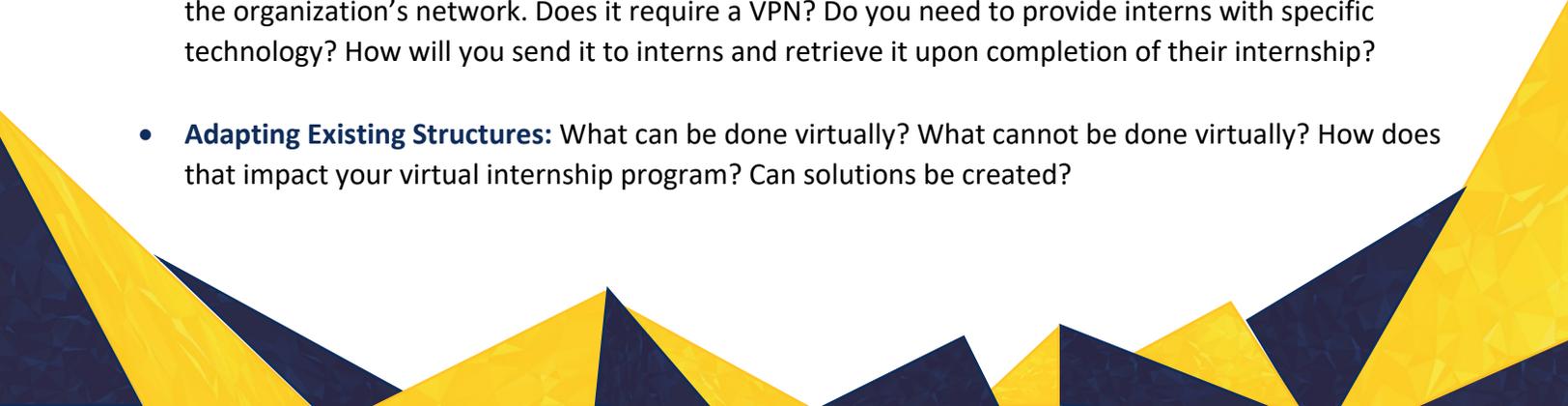
## What is a virtual internship?

A virtual internship enables students to work on projects and gain professional work experience without physically working at a company's office. Common elements of in person internships such as onboarding and community building programs are also components of a successful virtual internship program.

## What are the benefits of a virtual internship program?

- **More Diverse Pool of Candidates:** Students often find moving to an internship site expensive and may limit their search to a local area because they cannot afford to commute or move for the summer. By removing this cost from the internship program, a larger pool of talented students will be able to take advantage of your opportunities.
- **Reduced Costs:** Employers have the potential to reduce the costs of their internship programs by removing the costs of travel, food, and housing for their internships.
- **Project Focused:** Employers are encouraged to be intentional about the preparation of the projects they'd like their interns to work on so they can be as productive as possible during their virtual internships.
- **Extended Work Availability:** Virtual internships allow students the opportunity to work from anywhere at any time. By working virtually, students are not limited to working for 8-12 weeks of the summer and potentially leaving their work before it's been completed. Students could extend their internships into the academic year and continue to work on their projects.
- **Better Assessment of Students for Full-Time Work:** Virtual internships can provide a more accurate representation of the student's ability to work independently as well as their individual productivity. By having the ability to extend virtual internships into the academic year, employers will be able to observe the student's work abilities longer and get a better understanding of the student's capabilities.

## What are some of the challenges of a virtual internship program?

- **Showcasing Your Organization's Culture:** Distilling your culture into a virtual environment can be difficult. You want to think about what activities, environments, and messages demonstrate your culture and adapt them for a virtual environment.
  - **Transitioning to New Technology:** Plan out how you'll connect your virtual interns to their teams and the organization's network. Does it require a VPN? Do you need to provide interns with specific technology? How will you send it to interns and retrieve it upon completion of their internship?
  - **Adapting Existing Structures:** What can be done virtually? What cannot be done virtually? How does that impact your virtual internship program? Can solutions be created?
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# NAVIGATING VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS

## How can I share virtual opportunities with students?

The best way to connect with College of Engineering students for internship opportunities is to post the opportunity in [Engineering Careers](#). You can [sign up for a new account](#) or [sign in to an existing account](#). If you have additional questions, please email [ecrc-ocr@umich.edu](mailto:ecrc-ocr@umich.edu).

- **Virtual Internship Postings**

The virtual internship posting should state that it is a virtual internship. Since virtual internships are a relatively new concept for students, you'll want to include how your company defines a virtual internship.

**Example:** In our virtual internships, we provide students with the ability to work flexibly anywhere in the world while fully engaging with our collaborative culture. Our organization is proud to support work-life balance by enabling our interns and employees to set their own schedules in conjunction with their team's requirements. We have created a virtual onboarding process to ensure that our interns start off on the right foot and feel connected to their teams from day one. We also facilitate connections amongst our teams through virtual coffee chats, game nights, and other team building activities. Come explore our virtual internship program!

## How can I communicate workplace culture to students in a virtual internship?

- **Schedule Company Activities Virtually:** Building connections amongst your interns and employees is going to look differently in an entirely virtual environment, but connections with people in the organization are essential to a successful internship experience. Some popular ideas are: virtual game nights, virtual coffee chats, get to know you video chats, professional development webinars, picture contests, virtual scavenger hunts, cooking challenges, creating an intern cookbook...etc.
- **Set Virtual Workplace Standards:** You want your interns to feel supported and empowered to do the best work possible. The easiest way for this to occur is to communicate your expectations for what a virtual internship experience looks like. Should interns be checking in every day? Should they be working specific hours? Are there specific deadlines for each of their projects? What's the best way to communicate a question or problem to their manager? What should they do when they have down time?
- **Establish Structured Mentorship:** Mentorship can be facilitated in a variety of ways. You might create a mentorship program where students are mentored by someone other than their direct supervisor. You might require supervisors to talk with students about their progress and career interests throughout the internship. The key is to provide clear expectations for the mentor and the mentee. Often mentorship programs flounder because there aren't clear expectations and neither party prioritizes the program because there aren't clear standards to be met.

## How can I effectively transition interns to new technology?

- **Company Specific Programs and Technology:** Preparing documentation and training opportunities early in the internship onboarding process will help with the transition. Be as detailed as possible and incorporate screenshots whenever possible so students can more easily follow your instructions.
- **Virtual Meeting Platforms:** Students are likely familiar with at least one virtual meeting platform, but may not have used your company's preferred platform before. Encourage your interns to become comfortable using your virtual meeting platform and its functionalities. You could create virtual meeting challenges as part of your onboarding process.

**Example:** Schedule meetings with at least 3 of your fellow interns using 3 different platform functionalities.

## Essentials of Virtual Internship Programs

- **Feedback:** Interns can only become better if they know what their strengths and weaknesses are in the context of your field. This is particularly true for virtual internships where students are working independently and are not able to gauge their success from informal interactions. We recommend scheduling regular check in meetings with interns to provide feedback on their approach, quality of work, communication, and professionalism throughout their virtual internship.
- **Meaningful Work:** Virtual internships eliminate some of the features of in person internships that can significantly shape an intern's experience with the company. Consequently, an intern's overall impression of the employer will be significantly informed by the projects they're assigned. To ensure an optimal experience, it's important that intern projects are prepared and organized in advance and that expectations for downtime between projects are clearly communicated to interns.
- **Community:** Virtual internships can be isolating for students without connections to the larger intern community. Creating a virtual internship community can be implemented through informal slack channels, having intern panels, virtual scavenger hunts, weekly photo challenges, etc. Whatever approach you take, you want to ensure that while working independently, students are able to connect with their fellow interns and learn from one another.

## What are some of the common tools used in virtual work environments?

**Virtual Meetings:** [Zoom](#), [Webex](#), [BlueJeans](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Skype](#), [Microsoft Teams](#)

**Communication:** [Slack](#), IMs, [Group Me](#), [Remote Work Dictionary](#)

**Productivity:** [Trello](#), [Taskboard](#)