



VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP Guidelines

**all 4
YOUth**

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this guideline is to provide information, guidance, tips on organizing and managing **virtual** internships.

It will focus on those aspects of an internship that are particularly important and/or impacted when that internship is conducted fully virtually, that is, the intern is not physically present in their host organization and all activities and interactions are performed remotely.

The guideline will therefore not address all aspects of what makes a quality internship in general. If you would like guidance on internships, you should refer to your local country regulatory framework at minimum, and also reference your internship program against quality criteria frameworks, such as, for example, [SPRINT](#), the European Quality Framework for Internships¹.

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP?

In the last decade, remote work has positioned itself as an upward trend worldwide due to advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), in addition to the demands to reconcile employees' work and personal lives.

As part of this movement, virtual practices emerged as an alternative to traditional professional practices.

A virtual internship is the performance of an internship, which would typically take place on physical premises, completely remotely. This implies, among other things, that the intern performs the activities assigned to them from the place where they are, without the need to travel daily to an office or workplace. Likewise, according to the terms of the internship, and **always in accordance with the local regulatory framework** (where it is more favorable than the [SPRINT](#) Criteria for Quality Internships), the company assigns the necessary equipment and software for their work or agrees with the intern that they use their personal equipment and tools for the execution of their tasks.

In addition to the flexibility granted by not having to travel, the *intern* under this modality enjoys greater autonomy in managing their time because it is a model

¹ The SPRINT Criteria for Quality Internships can be found at: <https://www.sprint-erasmusplus.fr/content/o2-criteria-quality-internships-cen-workshop-agreement-cwa>. The guide for host organisations can be found at: <https://www.sprint-erasmusplus.fr/content/o3-guide-implementation-process-quality-internships-host-organizations>

that focuses on results and expected goals during the period of the internship, rather than attendance and on premises participation.

BENEFITS

Flexibility

Increased freedom in time management for the intern to dedicate to the project or activities assigned, always in accordance with the objectives and results. Likewise, reduction of the expense involved in mobility to the workplace and the time invested in it. Possible compatibility with other school, economic, or recreational activities within the intern's life.

Accessibility

Possibility of expanding vacancies beyond the territorial limits imposed by the location of the workplace, allowing greater dissemination and opportunities for young people who meet the necessary characteristics to join the program. Allows the host organization to hire interns from more diverse talent pools and can facilitate access to internship opportunities of persons with disabilities.

Professional Experience

Same validity as an internship program done on the premises of the host organisation, so it gives participants early professional experience because they continue to study. In the same way, they receive economic support according to the conditions of the internship and the local regulation to be applied.

Abilities for the Future

Development of a series of skills such as time management, teamwork, oral and written communication, creativity, and problem solving, as well as digital skills. Skills that are necessary for better performance and competitiveness in the search for work within the current and future labor market.

CHALLENGES

Flexibility

Reconciling greater flexibility in organizing one's time and meeting the expected timeline and deadlines of expected activities within the host organization may be more challenging in the context of a fully remote internship, as it relies heavily on the intern's own time management and priority setting abilities, without the benefit of informal touchpoints or exchanges when on premises.

The virtual internship structure could, for example, include regular and pre-scheduled short touch points with the intern to give them the opportunity to check if they are on track, to allow them to ask questions, etc., should they need it.

Professional Experience & Abilities for the Future

Interns who participate in virtual internships may not have the same opportunities to understand professional culture or values and the more subtle behavioral work norms. They may feel more isolated or less motivated than a person who already has had some professional work experience.

Adjusting to remote only communication and how to develop an effective and impactful oral communication style could also be more challenging. It is more difficult to notice unspoken cues, reactions or behaviors from a target audience or colleagues during virtual meetings or gatherings.

Likewise building professional relationships without, notably, the opportunities created by physical meetings, could lead interns to feel isolated from their own team. Team members may also feel more disconnected to the intern. Physical meetings also allow for informal exchanges or occasions to build relationships with team members and/or network within the host organization.

It is therefore important that when creating a virtual internship program, care is taken to organize tasks and activities to address such potential challenges.

For example, the intern(s) should be automatically included in all informal events, whether at team, department level or host organization level. If the host organization has several interns in the same period, regular informal virtual get-togethers could be organized to allow them to share experiences, advice, etc. Likewise, virtual events or get-togethers with newly employed young graduates could also foster exchanges supporting the successful integration of interns.

Inviting the intern to a virtual meeting not directly linked to their immediate activities / tasks could also give them opportunities to discover other ways of working, engaging with different employees than those in their immediate professional circle, etc. Making certain they have access to the host organization intranet, internal communication channels from day one, and pointing out the most important sections to focus on first, could also facilitate their understanding of company culture.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

The characteristics of the program content may vary according to each company or market. It is important to adapt the program to specific needs related to virtual ways of work, taking into account the educational system and local regulatory framework.

For example, if the tasks to be performed involve collaborative work or engaging with a variety and/or high number of persons, care should be taken to focus part of the onboarding period on supporting the intern in identifying and establishing the right connections, points of contacts, etc., and fostering informal and formal moments of exchanges.

Likewise, a virtual internship may call for more extended coaching and counselling support for the intern in order to make sure they stay motivated, do not feel isolated, etc.

It is also important to emphasize that even if a virtual internship may imply more flexibility in the way activities are organized (content and time), then if the intern were to come to on premises at defined hours, any activity performed by the intern must be remunerated, under the same conditions as an internship done on premises, in accordance with the practices and legal provisions of the country in which the program is implemented, or in accordance with the SPRINT Quality Criteria for Internships, when local conditions are less favorable for the intern.

In the case that the host organization and the intern agree that the intern will use their own personal material (whether phone, computer, printer, etc.) during the internship, it is important to organize how the intern's technical and material support will be managed, taking into account that any potential expenditures should not be solely supported by the intern.

Lastly, a well-led and successful internship serves both the intern and the host organization. It is therefore important to clearly identify those internships that are most suited to be done fully virtual and those that are not.

Example – Nestlé in México

Population and Requirements

Active students from public or private institutions from 5th semester onwards.

- They must not be collaborating in any Nestlé position or program at the time of application.
- Time availability according to the activity or project assigned
- Comply with the necessary documentation and filters to enter the program

Duration

Depending on the activities or project assigned by the area, a summer program (2 to 3 months) or a semester program are suggested as examples.

Financial Support

Through Fundación Pro-Universitaria "Pro Meritum", facilitate the payment of a monthly scholarship for the activity performed.

Specifications

In Mexico, it is a requirement for access to the program that the intern has a personal computer and internet access, since the decision to provide a computer will be made by the People/Line Manager.

It is recommended that, for this modality of professional internships, projects be selected or developed according to the duration of the internship. It should be remembered that the intern will only be available during this period, so it is important to avoid projects that may remain unfinished.

Participating Areas

Human Resources, Communication, and Marketing.

RECRUITMENT AND CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCESS

***IMPORTANT: Validate the process according to each company or country prior to implementation, mandatory meeting with the market's Legal Team to (1) evaluate viability in the market/country; (2) verify requirements and applicable local regulatory framework; (3) verify that the internship respects the SPRINT Framework if more favorable to local regulatory requirements**

A virtual internship is no different to one done at the workplace, in terms of content, objectives, opportunities and obligations for both the intern and the host organization. The different mode of "delivery" of the internship entails, at minimum, that greater care needs to be taken at all steps, and adjustments of existing processes to ensure that its value is not different were the internship performed on the premises.

Understanding and Activation

- Informative meeting with the *People/ Line Manager* to review internship duration and work plan, and that it is adapted to a fully virtual delivery mode
- Define responsibilities and plan interview process.
- Propose a strategy for the dissemination of the program and the design of the appropriate candidate profile, **defining key competencies needed for a fully virtual work experience.**

Promotion and Attraction

- Broadcast the virtual internship program through promotional channels. **The different steps of the virtual selection process should be clearly outlined.**

Candidate Review

- Review of the applications to the program and submission of a summary to the *People/ Line Manager*.
- Phone contact with candidates and schedule first round of virtual interviews with HR. **The virtual selection process steps should be fully explained. Candidates' technical constraints should be addressed as this cannot be an opt-out reason for candidates.**
- Candidate pre-selection and schedule second round of interviews with *People/ Line Manager*

Evaluation and Selection

- Meeting with the *People/ Line Manager* for evaluation of pre-selected candidates.
- Selection of future team members or colleagues with whom they will interact the most virtually.
- Decision & Offer preparation.

Integration process of the collaborator to the company

- See remote integration process.

PROGRAM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Promotion Channels

1. Social Media Campaign
2. Links with Universities
3. Online Job Offers
4. Collaboration with Partners

Social Media Campaign

Promote in corporate and youth initiative channels; website and social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Consider adapting slightly the campaign message and/or format according to each channel's specific audience or reach.

Links with Universities

Contact the school or university base linkers who you usually collaborate with to design a *mailing* strategy to the students, which includes both invitations to remote sessions to explain the program and the necessary steps to start the process in case they want to participate. Discuss with schools / universities the opportunities to develop joint social media campaigns driven by them.

Online Job Offers

Offer the program on employment platforms and on corporate job boards or career pages.

Collaboration with Partners

Invitation to Private Sector Partners to replicate the program, according to their possibilities and needs at the time. Share the program execution model and offer advice for its implementation.

INTEGRATION PROCESS / REMOTE ONBOARDING

Pre-boarding Activities: People/ Line Manager

Remote Work Strategy

1. Register the intern in the corporate system
2. Define a work mode
3. Orientation
4. Establish objectives and evaluation
5. Design a mentoring plan
6. Prepare the equipment

Registration Process

Review of the intern's registration process with Human Resources pre-start. It is especially important that there is no lag time between the 1st day of the internship and the delivery/set-up of equipment and tools, in the context of a virtual internship.

Define a Work Mode

- Define which tool will be used for communication and activity management, for example *Microsoft Teams*. Make sure that self-training material or resources are readily available to future intern on the tool to be used. Make sure that interns know, from day 1, whom to contact to resolve technical issues.
- Establish a schedule of key activities for the entire internship & pre-schedule those interactions in everyone's respective agendas. For example: weekly or monthly meetings (MOR), scheduling spaces for team meetings, activities such as virtual lunches and coffees, mentoring sessions.

Orientation

- Identify key people (*stakeholders*) with whom the intern should interact during his or her internship.
- Schedule meetings for the intern to meet their *stakeholders*, preferably during the first week of the internship.
- Deliver or manage access to orientation documents. For example: organization chart, brand manual, and operational master plan, among others.

Establish objectives and evaluation

- Establish [SMART objectives/goals](#).

The *People/ Line Manager* will evaluate the intern's performance and delivery of results.

- Generate a plan that lists the activities and expected results at the end of the internship. If this is done prior to the intern's start, make sure this plan is reviewed with them on the 1st day to take into account any necessary training requirements.
- Generate a plan that lists the expected learning objectives of the intern. This should be done in collaboration during the first week, at latest, with the intern.
- Define key evaluation dates for the intern. An evaluation in three moments is recommended: initial, middle, and final. The modality of the evaluation, as well as the material or evidence to be delivered, is at the discretion of the person in charge, but should also correspond to an intern's learning outcome obligations, if they exist.

Mentorship

A mentor is someone who is willing to share information about his or her career to provide guidance, motivation, and emotional support to another person. Having a mentor can make a difference in the speed of the intern's adaptation to their new role, to the area, and to the company. This is a pre-requisite for any virtual internship.

Before joining the company, the *People/Line Manager* will promote among his/her area or team collaborators the role and functions of the mentor, in order to select the candidate who best meets the profile and who will accompany the intern during his/her remote experience.

It is important that this person's role / function guarantees that they can dedicate the necessary time to mentoring a virtual internship where regularity of meetings or touch points are most important for an intern.

Characteristics of a good mentor:

1. Show enthusiasm for becoming a mentor to a new collaborator
2. Be empathetic to the situation of someone new to the organization
3. Know how the processes and work in the company operate
4. Be open to guiding and sharing their experience, skills, and knowledge
5. Believe in challenges and motivate to leave the comfort zone
6. Value active listening and feedback as means of personal and professional development
7. Maintain an attitude of respect and openness to learning

Mentorship stages:

1. Initial Mentoring: First few days into the program
 - a. Introduction with the mentor (*People/ Line Manager* or some member of the team)
 - b. Objective: Introduce the project, review the activity plan, evaluation model, and results delivery with the intern, establish communication channels. Make sure the intern is comfortable with all tools/equipment related to the virtual way of working and organize with them any needed training.

2. Continuous Mentoring
 - a. The mentor designates the frequency of mentoring throughout the program according to its duration (biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, etc.).
 - b. Objective: To verify performance, support the intern in their process and learning curve. It is also important to use these meetings and exchanges to allow the mentor and intern to be able to openly discuss support needs, issues, questions related to virtual delivery mode of the internship. Additionally, the intern should be provided access, if needs be, to same counselling services offered to other employees.

3. Final Mentoring
 - a. Presentation session of the intern's results and feedback with the mentor
 - b. Objective: To gather the intern's experience in the program, give feedback on their performance, and return equipment or any tools provided for the internship.

Assignment of Work Tools

In accordance with the applicable regulatory framework, the activities, functions, and/or project assigned to the intern, the *People/ Line Manager* will decide, previously aligned with the IT and legal areas, which computer and communication equipment will be granted to the intern for the execution of their professional internship, and how it will be delivered to the intern.

It is highly important that you make sure that there are no inconveniences in terms of permissions, privacy, and company data protection.

- A. Once the equipment assignment is confirmed: The *People/ Line Manager* must order the equipment directly from IT. The delivery should ideally be made in person at the offices or it can be sent to the intern's home once they have been selected to enter the program (validate with IT). For equipment protection, a letter of responsibility will be signed in both cases.

The People / Line Manager needs to also organize a certain degree of support for the intern on their 1st day, to allow for any hardware / software installation or connection difficulties to be resolved once the equipment is received. Regular support processes need to also be clearly outlined to the intern on their 1st day.

- B. **Exception:** in the case that the delivery of IT equipment is not possible, due to local context, and in agreement with the intern, it may be necessary that the intern must use their personal equipment for the execution of their internship. In that case, the People / Line Manager should discuss and agree on how the intern should be compensated for any adjustments they may need to make (internet connection, quality of internet connection, mobile or phone subscription, etc.). Likewise, the *People/ Line Manager* must align the tools, programs, and/or platforms that the intern may need, as well as ensure that the company's privacy and data protection permits are not violated.

Supporting Documents

People/Line Manager Best Practices: Refer to your organization HR Department for available documentations and best practices.