

An Open Letter to Employers on Summer 2020 Internship Commitments Amidst the Covid-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis is disrupting society across all sectors, impacting the economy, education, healthcare, transportation and more, and changing the way we work and live in unprecedented ways.

As members of the national community of organizations working to build and diversify the talent pipeline in tech, engineering, and all STEM fields, we are deeply concerned about the impact the COVID-19 crisis will have on the emerging science and technology talent pool and the future of US innovation.

The aspirations and pathways of our nation's emerging technologists and engineers are at risk. Students are experiencing severe disruption of their education as universities have had to abruptly move to online courses and close dormitories. But the disruption isn't relegated to campus, and students have taken to crowdsourcing details of their off-campus experiences, including wide-spread cancellation of internship opportunities. While these have not been independently confirmed, at the time of this writing [the number of reported 2020 summer internship cancellations](#) has more than doubled in less than one week, and many federal and academic research experiences have also been canceled. We understand industry leaders are balancing financial, logistical, and other challenges emerging during this crisis. We implore you to consider your cohorts of interns as key stakeholders in your crisis management and planning. Mass cancellations of internship programs could have an irreversible, long-lasting impact on the science and technology talent pool, causing a loss of diversity and a deficit in talent availability that could affect the science and technology sector for years to come.

Industry internships are critical for skill-building, network development, and employability for *all* students, and play an even larger role for students from underrepresented populations, providing critical professional experiences and income to support their education. The loss of income, skill development, and professional networking opportunities gained during a summer internship could irreparably disrupt and even permanently derail educational journeys for thousands of underrepresented students.

As a community, we are calling on employers across all sectors to consider their 2020 summer interns in COVID-19 contingency planning and make every possible effort to fulfill--in some fashion--the commitments made to these students.

Several organizations are already taking proactive measures to address internship commitments including, but not limited to:

- Cisco is continuing its internship program while making virtual plans.

- Cybersecurity Education, Research and Outreach Center (CEROC) at Tennessee Tech will offer Virtual Internships to replace several on-campus summer positions.
- Dell is offering remote internships, shortened to June and July.
- Discover is continuing its summer internship program with some adjustments in response to the current climate.
- Google is moving to remote internships ([Source](#)).
- IBM will honor summer internship offers, transitioning to the company's first-ever, 100% virtual, digital internship program.
- Snap Inc. is continuing its internship program as planned, but in a work-from-home capacity.

We applaud these industry and academic leaders in supporting emerging talent and encourage others to follow suit as they are able. We've provided some suggested actions below, and pledge to continue our work to catalyze the success of the next generation of tech and engineering talent to the fullest extent possible.

We are calling on organizations that host interns to make and publicly announce a plan for summer 2020 intern commitments as early as possible, as students are anxiously awaiting news. Suggested approaches could include:

- Convert to virtual internships, rather than cancel.
- If virtual implementation of current internships is not feasible, deploy an alternate remote training experience.
- Continue to employ the interns, but loan their time to support COVID-19 related projects.
- Fund and assist with virtual internships for down-stream partners - including nonprofit partners. In this way, you can support both interns and partners.
- Collaborate with industry partners to help connect interns losing their internship to placements in another sector.

If it is not feasible to offer an intern program for Summer 2020, here are some recommendations:

- Commit to provide the internship at a later date or transition to a co-op or project during the semester.
- Provide a letter of endorsement for the students that have been displaced that they can use in seeking future opportunities. We have provided an example [draft](#).
- Offer webinars, mentorship, and other virtual skill-building experiences for displaced interns, to provide skills, visibility, and insight that can help bolster the students' professional experience, or partner with and support organizations that can help.

- Convert the intern salary dollars to scholarships to assist displaced low-income students that rely on internship earnings to cover college and housing expenses.
- Contribute to support students participating in a Distributed Research Experience for Undergraduates (DREU) through the [CRA Committee on Widening Participation](#).

We know these are trying times and appreciate the commitment to our collective effort to build an industry that is reflective of the diversity of our nation, and inclusive of innovators from all walks of life.

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