Best Practices & Advice for Virtual Mentors

Get to know your interns

- Share your personal story, (i.e. where you are from, what you studied in college, industry certifications or credentials you’ve earned, how you selected your career path, long-term goals).
- Ice breakers and casual conversations at the beginning or end of your video calls can help you learn more about your intern over the course of the consultancy.
- Maintain professionalism throughout the consultancy. Project mentors should refrain from initiating and/or accepting connection requests with interns on social media platforms other than LinkedIn.

Make the most of weekly check-in meetings with your interns

- Confirm an agreed upon schedule and stick to it!
- Provide coaching on your intern’s technical and soft skills.
- Don’t be afraid of giving timely, constructive feedback, using the Feedback Formula.\(^4\)
- Utilize the Weekly Check-In Guide, and feel free to share a digital version with the intern and their coach, so everyone is on the same page about the interns’ progress.

Allow your interns to attend meetings or virtual events, if possible

- These are great ways for your interns to receive exposure to all parts of your company, to get to know others in the company, and to learn about the various career paths available to them.
- Feel free to assign them a task for these events (i.e. note taking, chat moderation, etc)

Choose one of the following engagement activities for your intern(s), and get it scheduled for some time this summer:

- Have the intern attend or watch a pre-recorded virtual professional development session with you and discuss the experience afterwards
- Include the intern on other virtual team activities, virtual lunch, team building, etc.
- Schedule some “downtime” where the Intern and you can just chat and get to know each other.
- Allow the intern to interview or have a Q & A session with other staff members
- Invite the intern to meet with a “guest speaker”

Reach out to the YouthForce team early and often

- If you have any issues with your interns, reach out to our team or the interns’ coach right away.
  - Your interns’ coach will be CCed on your intro email, so you’ll have their contact info.
- We love to hear about positive things the interns are doing throughout their consultancy. Don’t be afraid to share some good news!
- Please don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions, ideas, and feedback on how to make this experience most impactful. We are here to support you and ensure a successful consultancy for both you and your interns, and we love feedback.

\(^4\) Check out the Feedback Formula in Appendix II. More information provided in Employer Orientation.
Integrate Skill Building Practices
Years of experience has taught us that young people will often have huge skill performance leaps when they intern with a mentor committed to their development. We have isolated key skill-building supervisory practices that unlock skills development.

- **Reveal Targeted Skills** for and within the week’s work during a beginning of the week check-in
- **Establish Performance Evidence** (what does success look like?)
- **Focused Activity Design** (tasks that will involve the targeted skills and reveal performance)
- **Reinforce Expectations**
- **Assessment Using Feedback** (to be evaluated upon receipt of deliverable)
- **Magnify Recognition**
- **Explore Meaning Making**

**A note about feedback:** One of the most critical components to growth is delivering and receiving effective feedback. Feedback that is honest, consistent, evidence based, and action oriented has proven to be a contributing factor to student success. We HIGHLY recommend all mentors familiarize themselves with and utilize MHA Lab’s Feedback Formula.⁶

**Utilize Cooperative Learning/Group Dynamic Strategies**⁷
Cooperative learning and group dynamics are nothing new to the world of education and/or project based learning. Below are some suggestions for how to make the best use of groups during the consultancy:

1.) **Define Roles:** Clearly defined roles will help alleviate any confusion when it comes to task completion. Since you will have no prior knowledge of the interns, you may find the best value in a random assignment of roles at first. You can then gauge the student performance and refine the roles as the project(s) go on.

2.) **Promote teamwork and communication:** Although inherent in “groups” is the understanding that students will be working together, do not be afraid to over communicate the value of teamwork and positive communication. Regardless of the outcome of the project(s), you have an opportunity to build skills in the area of teamwork and accountability that rarely come along for our young people.

3.) **Rotate Positions:** If your project repeats itself weekly, and the students have an opportunity to practice various roles within a group, we encourage you to allow students to try the different positions within the team.

4.) **Provide an Outline for Group Norms/Expectations:** Share with your interns what your organization’s group work and norms look like. Artifacts like meeting agendas can speak to your organization’s values, and give a structure for the way students conduct their group work away from your supervision.

⁶ Check out the Feedback Resource in Appendix II for more details
⁷ Check out the Cooperative Learning Resources in Appendix IV for more details
5. **Be Flexible and Seek Teachable Moments:** Sometimes the most valuable lessons learned are those that you never plan for. Cooperative learning often leads to amazing opportunities for teachable moments. Embrace the challenges and give honest and consistent feedback.

*Set up a consistent weekly schedule*
- See below for a sample weekly schedule you could utilize throughout the consultancy
- Be sure to plan ahead for any adjustments you may need to make for holidays (ie. July 4th)

**Sample Weekly Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Supervisor Action</th>
<th>Intern Action (2-3 hours per day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Facilitate check-in, establish personal connection, discuss weekly work, provide detailed feedback from previous week, answer questions as they arise</td>
<td>Participate in Check-In, ask any outstanding questions, begin work on weekly project(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Reply to intern’s questions/needs</td>
<td>Continue work on project(s), contact supervisor with questions/concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wednesday | Optional: Facilitate check-in  
Reply to intern’s questions/needs                           | Continue work on project(s), contact supervisor with questions/concerns                        |
| Thursday| Reply to intern’s questions/needs                                                 | Continue work on project(s), contact supervisor with questions/concerns                        |
| Friday | Optional: Facilitate check-in  
Reply to intern’s questions/needs                           | Complete assigned weekly tasks, submit deliverables to Supervisor in timely manner, submit any questions/concerns |