

Global Internships Supervisor Guide

The CIEE Global Internships Supervisor Guide highlights some important points to guide the work with CIEE students during their internships. The list is not exhaustive but should provide a basic framework for the supervisor's role and how they should approach their responsibilities.

A successful internship depends on creating an environment where the student feels welcomed, supported, and challenged. As a supervisor, you play an important role in helping the intern develop professionally by providing guidance, setting clear expectations, offering regular feedback, and creating opportunities for meaningful learning. The following best practices can help ensure the internship is both a valuable educational experience for the student and a positive contribution to your organization.

Who is a supervisor?

A supervisor works at the sponsor organization where the student interns. They are responsible for assigning tasks to the student, assisting the student with reflecting on their learning process and introducing them to the host organization.

The supervisor also serves as the primary point of contact for CIEE and completes midterm and final evaluations of the student's performance. A supervisor may oversee more than one intern at a time, provided they can dedicate sufficient time and attention to supporting each student's learning, development, and progress.

Internship Restrictions

- Medical, dental, or counseling internships involving direct patient contact are not allowed. Observing health care professionals, performing administrative tasks in a health care setting, or interning in digital health care is permitted.
- Driving a motorized vehicle (motor scooters, cars, motorcycles, planes, trains, etc.) is not allowed on any CIEE program, and this applies to internships as well.
- Operating heavy machinery or working with dangerous materials (pesticides, toxic chemicals) is also not allowed on any CIEE internship program.
- Students should not offer legal or medical advice to clients during their internships.

The health and safety of students in internships have the utmost priority. In case of additional questions regarding the viability of a potential placement, please contact your local CIEE contact.

Interview the student

Before a student is placed, you will have the opportunity to schedule an interview with the student. These interviews are designed to determine the best match between an internship site

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and a student. During the interview, introduce your organization's mission and activities, your role in the organization, and other colleagues that the student would work with. Describe the intern's tasks and responsibilities and your expectations regarding the internship or the working environment. Ask about the student's experiences and skills. A thorough interview ensures that your expectations match the student's and is a necessary precondition for a successful internship placement.

Introduce your organization

On Day One, provide a brief orientation for the student. Schedule time to introduce colleagues, explain key workplace policies and expectations, and familiarize the student with your organization's mission, activities, and ongoing projects. This broader context helps students understand how their work contributes to organizational goals, increases engagement and motivation, and enables them to navigate the workplace more effectively.

Internship Work Plan

The Internship Work Plan is an important milestone that helps students connect their academic learning with professional practice. Supervisors will need to meet with the student early in the internship to discuss their professional development goals, identify opportunities for growth, and establish meaningful workplace objectives. Together, the student and supervisor should define projects, deliverables, and learning outcomes that align with both the organization's needs and the student's development. Supervisors can support students in creating SMART goals linked to career readiness competencies, identifying resources and strategies for success, and clarifying expectations related to workplace conduct, work hours, communication, and organizational culture. Regular discussions throughout the internship can help students evaluate their progress, receive feedback, and adjust goals as needed. Supervisors should also work with students to establish a communication plan that outlines how project updates, meetings, and performance feedback will be shared during the internship experience.

Midterm Check-in

Approximately halfway through the internship, the supervisor will need to meet with the student for a formal progress discussion. This midterm check-in provides an opportunity to assess the student's growth in professional skills, review progress toward workplace goals and project deliverables, and identify any challenges that may be affecting performance or learning. Supervisors should provide constructive feedback on the student's strengths and areas for continued development, while also discussing whether the goals established in the Internship Work Plan remain appropriate or need adjustment. Together, the supervisor and student should identify two or three specific action items that will help the student successfully achieve their learning objectives and complete their internship projects. Regular reflection and open dialogue during this process help reinforce professional growth, strengthen workplace engagement, and ensure the internship remains a meaningful learning experience.

Communicate regularly, make yourself available

Make sure to keep open lines of communication. Talk to the intern to listen to their feedback and ideas discuss their tasks and projects and evaluate their progress. Be ready to answer the intern's questions and address any concerns. Be empathetic but always communicate openly and honestly to help the student grow. Do not shy away from difficult topics or problems if needed. Make it clear that you are available if the intern has questions or encounters any issues and share any guidelines on how you would like your intern to reach out, in case of questions.

Give clear instructions, formulate expectations

The internship should contribute to both the student's learning and to meeting your organization's needs. The intern's assigned tasks and projects should reflect that and be clearly defined. Always explain the task at hand in detail and specify what the results of the intern's work should be. Describe the format, tools to be used and what will happen with the outcomes afterward. Set a deadline. If the student works on a long-term project, check with them regularly to ensure they are on the right track. Coordinate the assignment of tasks between your colleagues, so the student does not get overwhelmed with conflicting projects. Additionally, please encourage the student's proactivity, creativity, and independence.

Assign varied and challenging tasks

A CIEE internship is designed to be a meaningful learning experience. While interns can provide valuable support with administrative and operational tasks, their responsibilities should also include projects that encourage critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and allow for professional growth. Regularly discuss assignments and projects with the student to ensure they remain engaged and are gaining relevant skills and experience. Whenever appropriate, encourage interns to contribute new ideas and take ownership of projects under your guidance. Providing opportunities for increasing responsibility helps students build confidence, develop professional competencies, and produce tangible accomplishments that can be highlighted in future resumes, portfolios, and job applications.

Provide feedback and encouragement

Check the intern's work and completed tasks or projects and discuss their results. Offer constructive feedback and show appreciation if you are content with the outcomes. To avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding it is better to offer feedback in a face-to-face setting. There is so much that we communicate through verbal cues such as tone and inflection and even more through nonverbal cues like facial expression and body language. Do not hesitate to suggest improvements if needed, and how the intern might be able to achieve better results or achieve them more effectively in the future. The intern should be familiar with your ongoing activities and aware of how their work is contributing. When possible, invite the students to your meetings or keep them updated on the latest developments related to your projects. Share the results of your work if possible.

Make the intern a part of your team

Interns may not be regular employees, but they should be treated as valued members of the team. For many students, an internship is their first professional workplace experience, making it an important opportunity for personal and professional growth. Whenever possible, include interns in team meetings, discussions, and workplace activities so they can better understand how the organization operates and how their work contributes to broader goals. Informal check-ins and conversations that extend beyond day-to-day assignments can also help build meaningful connections, foster a sense of belonging, and create a more positive and supportive internship experience.

Maintain a Professional and Respectful Environment

Supervisors are expected to provide a workplace that is safe, professional, and free from harassment, discrimination, intimidation, or inappropriate conduct. Interns should be treated with the same respect and professionalism afforded to all employees. Any unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, advances, requests for dates or personal relationships, physical contact, or other conduct of a sexual nature are strictly inappropriate and may result in the immediate termination of the internship placement. Supervisors should also help ensure that other employees, clients, and partners interact with interns respectfully and professionally at all times.

Recognize cultural differences

Students may come from cultural, educational, or professional backgrounds that differ from your own, so it is important to approach the internship experience with openness and curiosity. These differences may influence how students communicate, ask questions, respond to feedback, or approach tasks and workplace expectations. By discussing expectations openly and seeking to understand different perspectives, supervisors and students can build a productive working relationship based on mutual respect. Embracing these differences creates valuable opportunities for learning, collaboration, and personal growth for everyone involved.

Complete required administrative tasks

Before the internship starts, make sure to sign the Internship Contract (or Learning Agreement), which establishes the formal agreement between the host organization, CIEE, and the student. As discussed above, supervisors should assist students in developing and refining their Internship Work Plan, including professional goals, learning objectives, and strategies for achieving them. CIEE also requires supervisors to complete midterm and final evaluations of the student's performance. The final evaluation contributes to the student's grade for the internship academic seminar. While evaluations are not routinely shared with students, students may request access to them, in which case CIEE may provide a summarized or edited version as appropriate.

Communicate with CIEE**CIEE Council on International Education Exchange**

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CIEE Global Internships programs are constantly growing and include dozens of partner organizations around the world. It would be therefore greatly appreciated if you kept us up to date on any important personal or organizational changes which might affect the ongoing or future internship placements. Furthermore, please feel free to contact us should any issues arise that you are not able to solve directly with the student.

Worst Case Scenario: Terminating an Internship Early

In rare cases, an internship placement may not be successful despite the best efforts of all parties – the student, supervisor, and CIEE. If a supervisor has concerns about a student's performance, professionalism, conduct, or ability to meet workplace expectations, the student should first be provided with clear and specific feedback about the concerns and the improvements required. Whenever possible, supervisors are expected to give the student a reasonable opportunity to address the identified issues through a documented improvement process.

Supervisors should communicate concerns to CIEE as early as possible rather than waiting until a situation has escalated. Early communication allows CIEE staff to support the student, facilitate conversations between all parties, clarify expectations, help determine an appropriate path forward and, if necessary, communicate any concerns to the student's home university. In many cases, challenges can be resolved through additional coaching, clearer communication, or adjustments to the student's goals and responsibilities.

Except in cases involving serious misconduct, safety concerns, unlawful behavior, or other circumstances requiring immediate action, host organizations should not terminate an internship placement without first: (1) informing the student of the concern, (2) providing a reasonable opportunity for improvement, and (3) consulting with local CIEE staff regarding the proposed course of action. Internship placements should not be ended unilaterally without communication with CIEE.

If a supervisor believes termination is necessary, they should contact CIEE before making a final decision whenever circumstances permit. CIEE will work with the supervisor and student to review the situation, document the concerns, and determine whether additional support, a corrective action plan, reassignment of responsibilities, or termination of the placement is the most appropriate outcome. Timely communication helps ensure a fair process, supports student learning, and minimizes disruptions that may affect the student's academic requirements, program participation, or visa status.

Spread the news in your network

If anyone in your network is looking for interns, feel free to forward our contact information. CIEE currently has 41 internship locations around the world, and we can also contact our CIEE colleagues if your company would like to host our student interns in additional locations internationally.

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