
UNIVERSITY RECRUITING DURING COVID-19

HOW 100 TALENT ACQUISITION PROFESSIONALS ARE NAVIGATING THE
CHALLENGES OF RECRUITING & HIRING DURING COVID-19



REPORT BY
RIPPLEMATCH

There's no playbook for navigating university recruiting during a pandemic.

The fallout from COVID-19 has affected countless industries, and that includes university recruitment. Everything from on-campus events to internship programs have been disrupted, and talent acquisition teams are grappling with how best to move forward in these challenging times.

Because there's no precedent for proceeding during these times, RippleMatch decided to bring the university recruiting community together by hosting a series of small group discussions that focused on recruiting during COVID-19. These 'Community Chats' provided a space for recruitment professionals to share the challenges they are facing and hear how other teams are navigating this current reality.

After hearing from approximately 100 university recruiting professionals, we have a sense of the biggest challenges facing this community and the next steps that are being taken to best support candidates, new hires, incoming interns, and current employees. To guide talent teams during this tough time, we've compiled these findings in one place. Below are the key topics you can expect to read about in our report:

INTERNSHIPS

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- Next steps for internship programs
- Communication to prospective interns
- Virtual internships
- Canceling or adapting internship programs

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- Best practices for welcoming new grads & interns

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INTERNSHIPS

After hearing from over 100 recruitment professionals, one thing is clear: Companies are committed to doing what's best for their interns. Throughout RippleMatch's small group discussions, we heard from so many recruiters that a top priority is to create a worthwhile experience for interns if the program can continue on. And if the internship program unfortunately has to be cut, recruiters are focused on supporting those students in the next stage of their career.

In this section, we'll share the top factors that are influencing decisions, common timelines, best practices surrounding communication, and a framework for adapting an internship to a virtual setting.

MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS

While some teams have made a decision regarding their programs, many teams are still weighing the pros and cons. However, many teams plan to make a final decision by mid-April, beginning of May, or at least 30 days before the program start date. Among recruiters, the options listed below are the decisions being weighed as next steps.

**COMMON
CONSENSUS**

*Top decisions
at a glance*

Creating a remote internship program

For many recruiters, adapting the internship to a remote program seems to be the most popular choice. For those who have made this decision or are leaning toward this choice, the biggest hurdle is now creating a program that is feasible for both managers and interns to participate in.

**MOST
COMMON**

Condensing the internship

Some employers are considering pushing back the start date of their internship programs to buy more time, either to proceed with an in-person internship or successfully plan for a virtual one. Some employers are also considering moving to shorter work days for interns, creating a program that is more conducive to projects and lightens the load on managers.

**SOMEWHAT
COMMON**

Canceling the internship program

Some internship programs – such as those situated in R&D, manufacturing, or lab work – cannot be easily translated to a remote setting. Additionally, some companies don't feel they have the resources or bandwidth to provide a worthwhile remote experience. Aside from communication, these companies are most concerned with maintaining healthy relationships with their would-have-been interns and setting them up for opportunities post-graduation.

**NOT SO
COMMON**

Starting remote and transitioning to in-person

One option considered by several employers is to start the internship off as a remote program and then transition to an in-person program if the situation with COVID-19 improves. However, many recruiters are hesitant to pursue this option given the challenging logistics surrounding relocation and uncertainty surrounding timelines.

**VERY
UNCOMMON**

INTERNSHIPS

COMMUNICATING UNCERTAINTY

With timelines and final decisions unclear, many interns are reaching out with concerns about the status of their programs. Most companies are meeting these concerns head-on with a proactive communication strategy made up of formal and informal messaging.

Start from the top

Many teams have started off their communication to interns with a formal email from leadership. This message often includes information on the company's broader response to COVID-19, as well as the reinstated commitment to their employees and interns. This message also acknowledges the uncertainty, and assures interns that more updates are to come.

Set a date for the next formal update

While many companies are still weighing their options, several employers have communicated to interns when they can expect to hear another formalized update. Setting a date can help reduce the number of questions coming from interns, and can buy time as you analyze your options.

Keep in mind that the date you set doesn't have to be the same as when you make your final decision about your program. The date for a formal update may be another chance for you to share with interns what the latest updates are before putting a final decision into place.

COMMON DATES FOR PROGRAM DECISIONS OR FORMAL UPDATES



MID-APRIL

EARLY MAY

30 DAYS
BEFORE
PROGRAM
START DATE

Establish frequent, informal communication

Following a formal message from senior leaders, a common next step is setting up channels that are more informal for communication. These channels allow interns to receive more frequent updates or have the opportunity to ask questions.

Common communication channels include:

- A private Slack channel or messaging group specifically for interns
- A LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram group moderated by the recruitment team
- Regular emails between the recruiter or hiring manager & intern
- A video call with moderated Q&A
- Established 'office hours' to field questions
- A weekly intern newsletter with updates or tips for navigating these challenging times

When tackling this stage of communications with interns, recruiters stressed the importance of empathy, patience, and personalization. Many students are facing a complete upheaval of their lives as they adjust to online classes and moving out of campus housing, making thoughtful and prompt interaction an important part of your communication strategy with interns.

INTERNSHIPS

GOING VIRTUAL

Throughout our conversations with recruiters, remote internships emerged as one of the most common alternatives to in-person programs. However, a top concern was how to create a worthwhile experience for interns and managers alike during a virtual program. Below, we've identified the best practices and ideas we heard throughout these small group discussions.

Assess projects & workload

A successful remote internship doesn't mean translating all real-life activities and assignments to an online environment. To provide an experience that both interns can benefit from and managers can handle, it's important to take a look at typical projects or tasks interns might work on and determine if (and how) they should be altered. This might include:

- Determining larger projects interns can work on, rather than day-to-day assignments
- Creating case studies or innovation challenges for interns to participate in to offset any reduction in work
- Shortening the intern workday if re-scoped projects can't fill an entire 8-hour day
- Re-evaluating how project & internship success is measured

Support managers

Managers are a key part of a successful intern experience – so many recruitment teams flagged that manager support is an essential part of creating a great virtual program. These are some of the suggestions we heard from our discussions with talent teams:

- Get buy-in from managers early on by discussing if they are comfortable managing remote interns
- Provide resources on managing and communicating with remote teams
- Assign interns an additional buddy or mentor that can answer questions or help troubleshoot problems on a regular basis
- Create frameworks managers can follow to assess intern performance

Build community and offer learning & development

A major concern from many recruitment teams is how to build community and offer worthwhile learning programs in a remote setting. The good news is that transferring many of your existing initiatives to a virtual setting may not be as hard as you think. First, take stock of all of the programs and community-building activities you offer already. From there, you can determine if they are easy to transfer online, or if you need to find a creative virtual activity to replace it. Below, we've included some community building and L&D activities that can be moved to a virtual setting (and some new, creative ideas!)

COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Organize weekly intern lunches over Zoom
- Use a Slack plug-in like 'Donut' to automatically pair interns each week for a virtual coffee
- Host a virtual game or trivia night using services like goGame, Kahoot, board game apps, or game consoles
- Host a virtual pizza night by providing interns with coupons for DoorDash and sharing a Zoom link
- Schedule small intern groups to have lunch with team members outside of their core team

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

- Host virtual lunch & learns with executives and company leaders
- Allow interns to sit in on virtual team meetings of departments they are interested in learning more about
- Host a virtual speaker series
- Host virtual workshops for resume-building, networking, public speaking, or other skills
- Plan a 'speed networking' for interns by asking employees across departments to participate and share career advice

INTERNSHIPS

CANCELLATIONS OR MAJOR ADAPTATIONS

In our conversations with around 100 university recruitment professionals, only two had shared that their programs were unable to continue this year. Outright cancellations of internship programs were not as common as adapting programs to a virtual environment or pushing back the start date by a few weeks. However, many companies are still deciding the best way to move forward, and several organizations were considering cancellations or major adaptations to their program. Here are the key takeaways and common scenarios:

Reducing the internship to a 4-6 week program in lieu of canceling

For the programs that require in-person activity, canceling may seem like the only option. However, some companies are adapting to the changing guidelines by replacing a fully-formed internship with an extremely shortened program. The benefits to providing a 4-6 week intensive program is that interns can still put the program on their resume and gain valuable work experience, rather than missing out on the opportunity entirely.

KEY COMPONENTS OF A SHORTENED PROGRAM

- Focused project or activity for the program duration
- Provide meaningful networking opportunities with leadership and other team members
- Communicate clearly about how to pursue full-time roles after the shortened program

Canceling the internship program

While most companies haven't decided to pull the plug on their programs, it's possible this will become a more common option as the situation unfolds. For those who unfortunately have to cancel their program this year, these are the suggestions we heard for handling:

TIPS FOR CANCELING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

- Communicate this news as soon as possible
- Connect interns to companies that are still hiring/hosting interns
- For rising juniors, offer to defer their internship slot to next year
- Communicate to interns they will have priority when applying for full-time roles, and engage with them throughout the summer leading up to fall recruiting
- Consider offering a small stipend or gift card to ease potential financial burdens

Adjusting internship traditions

Maybe you aren't canceling or shortening your program, but circumstances won't allow for certain traditions to be held as usual. Here are some tips for navigating some common challenges heard during our discussions:

THE PROBLEM

The big intern kickoff event at the beginning of the program can no longer happen.

THE SOLUTION

If your exciting intern event just won't transfer well to an online setting, you don't need to cancel it completely. Instead, consider postponing it to the end of the summer and plan an exciting in-person event for the culmination of the program.

THE PROBLEM

It won't be feasible for offer letters to go out on the last day.

THE SOLUTION

If alterations to your program won't allow for last-day offers, let interns know they will be prioritized for final-round interviews come fall, or send out offer letters after you've given their summer work more review.

THE PROBLEM

Location-specific activities are a big draw for interns to return.

THE SOLUTION

Consider an end-of-internship celebration in the city for the end of the summer or the fall. Additionally, you could fly out interns who received return offers to show them the city, the office, and let them meet the team before their decision deadline.

ONBOARDING NEW HIRES VIRTUALLY

Whether you're set to welcome new full-time hires or new interns, the thought of virtually onboarding hundreds of people can be daunting. We heard this concern from many recruiters who want to ensure their employees and interns get off on the right foot even in a remote setting. From our conversations, we've identified the most common tactics to contribute to a positive experience.

PREPARATION IS KEY

In-person onboarding is already a heavily-involved process – but remote onboarding requires another level of planning so nothing falls through the cracks. In addition to your normal onboarding processes, consider these extra details when drawing up your next steps.

Get in touch with IT & legal now

External departments are likely already a part of your onboarding process – but it's important to give these departments enough notice to deal with additional complications or requirements for onboarding. Find out how soon you should ship out necessary hardware to hires or interns, and be sure you're abreast of any tax implications or complications regarding employment verification for those who will be working in different states.

Compile a thoughtful welcome packet

If there was ever a time to have all of your values, company resources, employee testimonials, and culture tenets in one place, it's now. Compile all of your materials into a welcome packet that you can distribute to new hires or interns prior to their first day. You can compile all of the assets through dynamic tools like Notion, Google Drive, or DropBox. You should also strongly consider creating additional materials on how your company has adapted to remote work, including your policies and best practices. As a final touch, consider recording video messages of senior team members welcoming new employees into the company during this unprecedented time.

Ask for volunteer onboarding buddies

Prior to new employees or interns starting, ask employees across departments to volunteer as onboarding buddies that can act as a supplemental support system for newbies just starting out. Define what these buddies will be responsible for (30-min chat once a week, a Slack message every few days, etc.) and how long they will be expected to serve as a buddy. From your list of volunteers, you might consider assigning buddies based on similarities such as interests or alma maters, or randomize the pairings.

Don't forget the little things

With everything going on, it can be easy for facets of company life to be overlooked. Be sure to include information on things like employee resource groups, book clubs, monthly happy hours, or ongoing charitable initiatives in your welcome packets specifically for new hires so they feel fully aware of all the little things that make up your company culture.

NEW HIRE CHECKLIST

Top ideas for onboarding new employees & interns

TECH

- COMPUTER
- SECURITY ACCESS / VPN
- EMAIL, SLACK, ZOOM LOGINS

WELCOME INFO

- REMOTE WORK POLICIES
- MISSION & VALUES
- CULTURE TENETS
- COMPANY HISTORY
- LIST OF ERGS
- FIRST DAY ITINERARY

2-WEEK EVENT SCHEDULE

- VIRTUAL COFFEE WITH BUDDY
- VIRTUAL LUNCHES W/ COHORT
- NEW HIRE VIRTUAL HAPPY HOUR
- VIRTUAL EXEC LUNCH & LEARN

WFH CARE PACKAGE

- COMPANY SWEATSHIRT
- COMPANY COFFEE MUG
- COMPANY COASTER
- FOOD DELIVERY GIFT CARD

VIRTUAL EVENTS & CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

If you're still finishing up your hiring – or planning for fall – virtual events and candidate experience are likely top of mind. Many recruiters brought up their concerns on how best to create an engaging online experience in lieu of in-person events and interviews. Below, we've compiled top tips and innovative ideas for nailing the remote recruiting process.

EVENTS THAT ADD VALUE

When it came to events, the biggest takeaway from our conversations with recruiters was this: To stand out, online events need to provide additional value to really engage student attendees. What might work for an in-person career fair or info session won't translate as well to a video call. So what events should you plan for the rest of spring or to have in your arsenal for fall?

VIRTUAL EVENT	MARKETING	TECHNOLOGY
<p>Large-scale events</p> <p>Large digital events can help expand your employer brand in an innovative way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Participate in virtual career fairs hosted by partner schools ·Panel: Industry challenges & outlooks ·Panel: Young executives and their career progression ·Lecture: Crafting your professional brand for a career in X ·Lecture: Best practices for navigating virtual interviews 	<p>Utilize platforms like RippleMatch, your partnerships with national & local organizations, and career centers to build an attendee list.</p>	<p>Use webinar technology like Zoom, ON24, or WebEx, or live streaming tools like Twitch, Facebook, and Instagram. Utilize free event technology like Eventbrite to track RSVPs and remind attendees of the upcoming event.</p>
<p>Medium-sized events</p> <p>Make your events more personal and host Q&As and recent grad panels for smaller crowds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Q&A with a recruiter: How to get a job at X ·Intern Testimonial ·Info session and Q&A: Tips for nailing a technical assessment 	<p>Ask alumni at your company to get in touch with their professors to schedule a "Zoom-in" to class, or partner with local campus organizations to host an online event.</p>	<p>Video-conferencing technology like Zoom or Google Hangouts should get the job done. Google Calendar can help track attendance for smaller events, or track RSVPs through Eventbrite.</p>
<p>Small groups or one-on-one sessions</p> <p>Small groups or one-on-one sessions can help you connect with high-potential candidates in a meaningful way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Resume reviews ·LinkedIn optimization ·Mock interviews ·Recruiter office hours 	<p>Source good-fit candidates through channels like RippleMatch or LinkedIn and invite them to sign up for your sessions. Alternatively, ask professors or highly-targeted campus organizations to advertise your available time slots.</p>	<p>Zoom, Google Hangouts, or WebEx will work for these chats – Google or Outlook calendar should suffice for scheduling.</p>

VIRTUAL EVENTS & CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

PERSONALIZED HIRING PROCESSES WITHOUT IN-PERSON CONTACT

Even in times like this, candidate experience is still an important part of winning over competitive candidates. But creating an experience where you can properly assess a candidate's fit for a role while they also get to know your company and culture is a challenge in a virtual setting. Here's how top companies are going the extra mile to create a standout candidate experience:

Set up candidates for success

Many recruiters shared that they are acting as a liaison through the hiring process, answering candidate questions and helping them through an uncertain time. A part of this approach is ensuring that candidates have the resources they need to do their very best during the interview process. Some companies are helping candidates succeed by providing them with tips for virtual interviews prior to the big day, and also laying out exactly what the process will look like. As most entry-level candidates have spent their time preparing for in-person interviews, the idea of doing final round interviews via video call can be intimidating. Employers interested in implementing this strategy can accomplish this by sending a pre-written email to candidates with tips for interviewing, as well as variable information like who they will be speaking to and any additional information about the role or job function.

Compile recruitment marketing materials

When candidates can't visit your office or meet the team in-person, it makes it more difficult to showcase what makes your company a great place to work. Just as you might have beefed up your onboarding materials, now is the time to compile as many relevant recruitment marketing materials as you can. Don't expect candidates to search through your Glassdoor page, social media, and company blog to find the most relevant information. Compile your best resources (like employee testimonials, information about your city, unique initiatives) and share in a well-organized email prior to any final-round interviews.

Create personal connections

Just because you can't meet candidates in person doesn't mean you can't help them feel a personal connection to your company. As a way to help entry-level candidates learn more about opportunities and company life, offer to connect them with current employees who joined the company within the past several years. This can be especially impactful if those employees graduated from the same university as the candidate or once held the same role as the candidate is interviewing for. Ask for volunteers ahead of time so you can have a rotating set of company advocates who are willing to share their experiences with candidates when asked.

KEY TAKEAWAYS & LOOKING FORWARD

Throughout our conversations with recruiters, we heard a wide range of challenges and strategies for navigating university recruiting during this challenging time. Below, we've identified the three most prominent themes to come out of these discussions as well as a look at what comes next.

1

Companies are extremely committed to their interns and entry-level employees.

COVID-19 is forcing companies to make tough decisions surrounding internship programs and start dates for their entry-level employees. However, our conversations revealed just how committed companies are to doing right by these early-career candidates. Whether it's adapting to a remote internship, restructuring the program, or prioritizing these candidates for full-time roles when adaptations are not possible, it's clear how important interns and entry-level hires are to a company's long-term talent strategy.

2

Social distancing guidelines don't have to inhibit a positive candidate experience and community-building.

Two major concerns brought up throughout our discussions focused on candidate experience and a sense of community. With in-person meetings no longer feasible, many talent teams worry that personal connection will suffer. However, the wealth of ideas brought up throughout our discussions regarding candidate experience and community-building shows that there is real potential for interns, employees, and prospective candidates to be more connected than ever before.

3

Recruitment events will become even more innovative as employers seek to stand out in a virtual setting.

From spring events to fall planning, discussions on events were focused on innovation and providing value to candidates. Many recruiters shared that their fall strategy would include virtual events (if not move all events entirely virtual) and engaging students was a key concern. Virtual events with a focus on career development will become more and more common, as will employee panels and testimonials.

LOOKING FORWARD

Much of RippleMatch's Community Chats focused on navigating challenges and finding solutions in the present. But topics like how to build a strong early-career talent pipeline, how to provide a positive candidate experience, and how to build community *all through virtual means* will remain prevalent as we discuss the future of work beyond COVID-19. As the university recruitment community grapples with these challenges, coming together to discuss the best path forward is more important than ever.

RippleMatch wants to extend a sincere 'Thank You' to all who participated in our Community Chats on University Recruiting During COVID-19. We hope to see all of you – as well as plenty of new faces – in any of our upcoming chats on a range of topics regarding early-career talent acquisition. Stay healthy and safe during these times.



About RippleMatch

RippleMatch uses artificial intelligence to connect companies to the most promising entry-level candidates across the country.

Using machine learning across millions of interactions combined with rich employer and candidate profiles, RippleMatch provides candidates with an unbeatable candidate experience and ensures companies are getting matched with the best candidates possible. Whether an employer is trying to engage more first generation college students, improve the racial or gender diversity of their team, or expand nationally, RippleMatch removes geographic barriers and pinpoints a company's ideal candidates, connecting entry-level candidates with amazing job opportunities in the process.

Learn more about RippleMatch by visiting our website [here](#).